



CURRENT ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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by

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INTRODUCTION

For all the pride that we have in our respective nationalities, and in the countries in which we believe we are rooted today, the fact remains that the true center of our world lies in the Middle East. That is the focal point of our spiritual being, that is where our energies are sourced, that is where all global conflicts appear to merge, and that is where all solutions will ultimately be found.

None of this should be surprising. With more than five thousand years of recorded history and civilization, this Middle East is where it started for all of us. This is where humans teamed together in thought and enterprise, giving birth to the very fundamentals of our existence today. This is where the great river civilizations first started. This is then where the three great revealed religions of the world were born and developed.

It is odd that, with such a positive contribution to thought and history, this should also be where the greatest disagreements and injustices of humanity should be found. How does it happen that the cementing center of our existence, the very binding force of our belief, should have turned into such a disastrous pot of simmering and bubbling tensions and conflict? How and why have men and women of conscience and goodwill metamorphosed into agents of death and destruction? How does a land that should bring us all together, turn into an arena that divides us so totally? How does a land of learning and tolerance become one that epitomizes only injustice and suffering?

This cradle of civilization has witnessed a chequered history with a number of milestones, each one of which has had global importance.

First came the initial human migration into this land, drawn by its fertile soil and climate. It was home to several original wild varieties of edible agricultural crops, wheat, barley, and peas, among others. It was then referred to for years as the Fertile Crescent, and it was in that capacity, that it became the land with the first great concentrations of human settlements and towns.

Then came the birth of the three revealed religions as man strove to define his relationship with God, and with fellow man. A long string of holy men and prophets all proclaimed the message of God on earth, and then went through great suffering and oppression to spread this message despite toil and travail. It is, in many ways, the land which best exemplifies survival and faith. The Middle East is thus inextricably linked with the three revealed religions, and the societies that they generated. Judaism emerged first, in an attempt to move the local populations towards belief and morality. Then, from its bosom emerged

Christianity, in a renaissance of truth, and a rectification of the confusion that was perceived to have turned people away from the spirit of the divine message into its mundane and temporal letter. Finally, came Islam, as part of the same continuum, with its belief in both Judaism and Christianity as the same single divine message, separated unfortunately into divided rites and procedures. One message with three adepts, each one convinced that he alone was the chosen interpreter and holder of the truth.

While each of the three revealed religions brought the message of love and tolerance and respect for fellow man, much energy was nevertheless dispensed in inter-religion wars and conflicts. The consequent turmoil saw Jews against Christians, Christians against Jews, Christians against Muslims, Muslims against Christians, Muslims against Jews, and each one of the three against its own dissidents. It has been one long crusade after another for more than two thousand years already. Part of this is of course due to the manner in which religion has been used to divide rather than to unite. It is difficult to identify exactly how this started, but the Crusades certainly played an important part. They had little to do with religion initially, and more to do with an effort to create unity in a fragmented Europe by conjuring up an external enemy.

The liberation of Jerusalem was no more than an excuse, which then justified some of the greatest excesses committed by a nascent European society. The first to suffer were the Jews, who were lavishly slaughtered in the name of God, in revenge for what the Christian soldiers considered the betrayal and hence the responsibility for the crucifixion of Christ. From there, it was a small step to take the fight to the Muslims, even though the latter had always seen the Christians and the Jews alike as “People of the Book”, and thus as part of the same family of believers.

The initial wars of religion were thus between the Christians and the Jews. They started in the Crusades, then graduated into the Inquisition in Spain, then into the Pogroms in Eastern Europe, and finally into the horrors of the Holocaust in Germany and beyond. How a people with a common Judeo-Christian heritage could have committed such crimes against their own, remains one of the most surprising aspects of Western European intolerance.

Where the Jews were seen as traitors by the medieval European Christians, the Muslims were perceived by them as spiritual upstarts and charlatans. The Europeans conveniently ignored the fact that the Muslim civilization of the time was far more advanced than theirs, in thought and in learning, and that it was the contributions of the Arabs to science, and medicine, and astronomy, and geography, and mathematics, and the Arabic translations and transmission of the

original texts of Greek philosophers and thinkers, that had opened the door to Europe's own history and civilization after its Dark Ages.

Interspersed in this turbulence and turmoil of wars of religion have been some periods of apparent unity. One such period came during the Ottoman Empire, which lasted a full 700 years from the 14th to the 20th Centuries, and spanned three continents at its zenith. It was the center of interaction between the peoples of much of the "known" worlds for these centuries. In fact, it was responsible for the "discovery" of America, for it was the lock-hold that this Empire held on the trade routes between Europe and the East that led to the effort of Christopher Columbus to short-circuit the dangerous land-locked journey through Ottoman lands by undertaking his west-bound journey around the world to the spices and silks of the East. But no empires last for ever, and the Ottoman Empire was no exception. Pulled asunder by external coalitions and internal divisions, it began a long and slow death, before totally disappearing from the world stage after World War I.

The vacuum left by this slow demise of the Ottoman Empire then gave rise to the forces of possessive envy on the part of colonialist powers. Britain, France, and Russia, all played a major part in the resulting land-grab in the Middle East. This was executed in most cases through outright military conquests, and in some isolated cases through secret agreements in which these lands were partitioned among themselves. All this was part of a "great game" being played out on a table with maps, with no concern for peoples and property. In the process, countries that prided themselves on having discovered the principles of human rights had no qualms whatsoever in jettisoning the human rights of the peoples that they had conquered, and in denying them their fundamental freedoms. The consequences of that most unfortunate period of Middle East history continue to this day, and those who bear the responsibility for this situation do not even acknowledge or blush at their contribution to these later miseries.

The final milestone of Middle East history starts with the discovery of oil, and its convenience as a source of energy in the production and consumption patterns of life in developed economies. Suddenly, control of the region gained enormous strategic importance. New countries were artificially created, new alliances were negotiated, new dynasties were installed, new forts were established. Oil was king, and its rule had to be secured at all costs. Its price was externally fixed from the outside, and for long, was kept cheaper than the price of water.

Despite the importance of each of these milestones, the fact remains that the focal point of our interest and commitment arises from the Holy Land aspect of this region, and not so much from the ancillary and more mundane aspects of geopolitics or oil or land.

With the centrality of belief that is represented in the Middle East, it seems such a pity that human frailty and such petty interests should have pulled this holy land down to such a low level. This incarnation of the highest levels of belief, of miracles, of the burning bush, of encounters with God, has been confounded with a commitment to no more than earthly clay.

That fundamental intolerance and intellectual arrogance has then been responsible for the situation in which the Middle East finds itself to this day. Its different incarnations came clothed in the armour of imperialism, of colonialism, of self-appointed mandates over others, of outright occupations, all examples of a self-centered and complete disrespect of the other far older and far more advanced civilizations. Small wonder then that the Middle East should be host to so many of our problems today. It has been after all, at the receiving end of a battering ram for so long now.

Another element of complete surprise lies in the manner in which the inter-relationships between the three religions has changed over time. As explained above, the fundamental tensions were between Christianity on the one hand, and Judaism and Islam on the other. There were little or no antipathies between Judaism and Islam itself, and Muslims and Jews lived in relative harmony with each other.

This was true throughout the Muslim conquest of Spain, with no problems whatsoever between Muslims and Jews, or even with Christians for that matter. That was because of the basic Muslim belief in Judaism and Christianity as essential parts of the same divine message, of the Torah and the Bible as holy texts, and of all Christians and Jews as "People of the Book". It was only after the Christian reconquest of Spain that the Christian elimination of the Jews really started, and the oppressed Jews were either converted forcibly to Christianity, or had to seek refuge in the Muslim lands of North Africa.

So how did the traditional enemies of Christianity and Judaism then come together in a new alliance to the detriment of the Muslims of the Middle East of today?

We are still too close to the history of contemporary times to draft a final opinion on this question, but the prevailing sentiment is that the answer lies in the newly discovered relationship that has emerged between Judaism and Zionism, or rather the superimposition of "land" on "belief". The average Muslim respects Judaism as part of his own belief system, and as an integral part of the same divine message. He cannot understand how this belief can be suddenly concretised in a physical take-over of a land peacefully occupied and tilled by others for two thousand years or more. He can understand even less, how a people with whom his relations have been so harmonious over centuries, should be so inured to the consequential

sufferings caused to an entire population converted overnight into homeless refugees.

All Muslims understand and respect Judaism. None of them understands Zionism, and none believes that Judaism and Zionism are two faces of the same faith. It is reassuring to them that there is a significant section of Jews who believe the same, and who stand just as firmly opposed to Zionism.

The fact of this fundamental difference does not imply that Muslims are right and that Zionists are wrong, but merely that the absence of understanding on this issue renders the prospects of peace highly unlikely in the near future in the Jerusalem and Israel-Palestine contexts.

From that focal disagreement, problems then radiate outwards in ever expanding concentric circles into the larger Middle East, and well as beyond.

The entire post-World War multilateral system is aimed at ensuring peace and security in our contemporary world. That is the mantra of the United Nations, and of its Security Council. And yet, in many ways, this is World War III already in the Middle East. Conflict has gone on for more than sixty years, and may well go on for another sixty years or more. It has caused untold misery and suffering, untold death and destruction, untold physical and mental costs, untold injustice and frustration, and with no end in sight. Hence the need for cooler heads and less trenchant opinions, and for a re-examination of assumptions and consequences.

Linked to the overt hostility in the region, is a host of other serious dangers. The effects of global warming on arid lands is one such danger. The slow exhaustion of fossil fuels due to flagrant over-consumption is another. The impending shortages of water supplies is yet another. And above all, the consequences of prolonged frustrations and the perceptions of continuing injustices with no recourse are emerging as the last straw.

The situation is fraught with danger and disaster. Some of that has already reared its head, even on Western soils. That was only to be expected in a globalising and globalised world, in which borders are no longer a barrier against external hostile infiltration. We are all in it together now. The quicker we sit down to address these problems jointly, the better the chances of preventing further cleavages.

The real question is then whether this can be done. Since failure is not an option, the question further boils down to how the return to sanity is to be managed.

Much of that may ultimately depend on our abandoning short term policy gains in the interest of long term principles. Many of these have established themselves over time. Respect for sovereignty and

private property is one such principle. Tolerance for the opinions of others is another. A common search for justice and equity is yet another.

All this might require a better knowledge of history and international law, and a more honest appraisal of our own shortcomings. Will we have the courage to face the gaps between our own principles and our own practices? Will we return to the spiritual underpinnings that have identified the Middle East as the common heritage of mankind, and not the exclusive ownership of any single community? Can we step back from the precipice in a land that is holy to all of us?

The reply is to be found in our own conscience. That is where history will judge us all.

DEFINITIONS AND LIMITS

Introduction

For centuries, cartographers, historians, politicians and scholars have divided and pre-arranged the world into several geographical regions and sub-regions, on the basis of their common denominators.

Based on geographical, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, the United Nations has thus divided the world into different regions; Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and Others. Even though the United Nations does not denote the Middle East as one of its "official" regions, the term has been adopted in its bureaucracy for routine activities.

In actual fact, the Middle East is a recent term that denotes a purely Eurocentric perspective, representing specific political and economic aspirations. Its definition can only be rational according to a Western point of view, as it vaguely depicts countries located on the southeast of the European continent.

The reason that the people of this region do not refute the ambiguous occidental perception *vis-à-vis* the Middle East lies in the lack of political unity and mistrust among the countries of this region.

This region is primarily populated by Arabs and Muslims, and several other smaller minorities. In some cases, North Africa is sometimes considered as part of the Middle East. The term "Middle East" and its geographic position vary according to its cultural, political, economic and linguistic background.

For instance, in French, the term "Middle East" is ambiguous, because there are two terms with different connotations that both describe approximately the same countries: *Proche-Orient* (Near East) and the *Moyen-Orient* (Middle East). The amalgam is classically perceptible in the media, politics and in business.

Despite the importance of its religious influence, its geopolitical location, and its vital world energy reserve, officially, the Middle East lacks a clear geographic definition. It is thus important to analyze and study the geographical definitions and limits of the Middle East, a region located on the crossroads of three continents: Africa, Asia and Europe, which occupies the major global and geopolitical strategic position that it does. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which became a vital communication and maritime transportation link for Europeans and an important route to India, increased the significant role of this region. The Middle East has indeed an exceptionally complex political and religious environment as it produces 35% of the world's oil and holds more than 60% of its reserves. It is thus a vital

energy backbone of the planet.

One could presume that since the term "Middle East" exists, there should be other regions on each side. Geographically speaking it could be reasonable to imagine that the Middle East is located between the Near East and the Far East. Westerners mainly associate the latter, with countries of Eastern Asia, particularly China, Japan, Mongolia, North and South Korea and the former with countries of the Levant (Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Israel, and Palestine), Turkey, and in some cases North Africa.

The borders of the Middle East are confusing and intricate to define because they are flexible, and imprecise. To make matters worse, its multifaceted history and politics have complicated the situation. In addition, religious differences exacerbated conflicts, and the colonial legacy which created the concept of local nation-states and absolute monarchies based on artificial borders traced by Europeans, do not harmonize or ease the complex, cultural, political and economic situations of this region. The term "Middle East" can thus be as divisive as the region it is supposed to cover.

However, since ancient times, the people of this region have undeniably played an important role in the world's political, economic, trade and religious affairs. Christianity has broadened Western civilization around the world, and Islam has spread the Arab culture.

It would be reasonable to assume that the Middle East, a region that does not have exact limits nor a specifically defined territory, may be considered by many to be the center of the world.

The East, the Near East and the Far East

To have a broad understanding and comprehensible definitions of the term "Middle East", it's important to define the word "East", and elucidate the enigma, origin and descriptions of the terms "Near East", "Far East", and the geographical limits of each of these regions. Clarifying the borders and cultural limits of these terms might allow us to identify the confusing geographical settings of the Middle East.

The East

Geographically speaking, the East is one of the four cardinal direction points, and the opposite of the West. Logically, from a Western European point of view, all countries located in the East of the European continent, stretching all the way to Japan should be considered as Eastern or Orient countries. That is why occidentals consider Easterners or Orientals all inhabitants of countries lying in the east of the European continent from Turkey to Japan. Similarly, countries located from Poland in the north to the Balkans in the south, as well as Russia are referred to as Eastern Europeans.

From a Western viewpoint, the variations of these two categories of countries are basically not only in the semantics or geographical positions, but also have a cultural and racial judgment. Some Westerners, consider the word Oriental or “Orientalism”, to be the alien culture of Asia. In recent years, the meaning of the word “Oriental” has even acquired derogatory and racial connotations.

To describe a person as Oriental is considered to be impolite and politically incorrect by some in the United States, Canada and Ireland; the term Asian is now widely used. In the United States, Oriental now refers essentially to objects and material goods such as rugs and teapots.¹

The Asian continent is vast; it is therefore divided into five sub-regional geographical areas, East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Southwest Asia and Central Asia. People from the Central Asia are not considered as Eastern or Orientals possibly because they were members of the former Soviet Union and they are therefore linked to Russia. The different interpretations of the words “East” and “Oriental” by different people during different periods of time illustrates how Westerners have twisted the meaning of a term for their own purpose.

The Near East

The region was named the “Near East” by European colonial powers for geopolitical objectives ever since the late 1890s. It was later on adopted by the Americans and the rest of the world. For centuries, it has served as an important route for Westerners for traveling to Africa and Southeast Asia. This region covers a vague territory and overlaps with the current modern Middle East and has therefore created divisive views on labeling its precise territory.

The region roughly covers Eastern Mediterranean countries or the Levant. In some circumstances, the East Mediterranean islands, the Balkan region, and Turkey, are considered to be part of the Near East. For political perspectives and hegemonic ambitions Westerners sometimes considered North Africa as part of the Near East or they culturally associated it with the Middle East.

Arabs, mainly from the Arabian Peninsula call this region of the Near East as “*Sham*”.

The confusing views on labeling this region confirm the complexities in determining its geographical limits. For instance, the US Department of State does not have a division of the Middle East; the affairs of these countries are under the supervision of the Department of the Near East. In the United Kingdom, which is one of the closest political allies of the United States, its Foreign and Commonwealth Offices does have a Department called the Middle East and North

¹<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orient>

Africa, and it covers identical countries considered as Near East by the US Department of State. It could be assumed that the region considered as the Near East by one person, could also be called Middle East by another.

The Far East

The term “Far East” emerged from a Eurocentric concept; it consists of countries located on the extreme east of the Asian continent or from the East Asia sub-region and with an opposition to the Near East. The Far East is mainly associated with the following countries; China, Japan, Mongolia, Myanmar, North and South Korea. In some cases, the Far East stretches to Southeast Asian countries.

The Ancient Middle East

Archeologists, historians and scholars support that the first civilizations occurred along the banks of three rivers, the Nile in Egypt, the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, (current Iraq), and the Indus in South Asia.

The Ancient Near East is the land where fascinating and significant ancient civilizations rose and fell; it is the native and holy land of the three main Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Moreover, the followers of these three main monotheistic religions clung to the belief that the city of Jerusalem in Palestine is a sacred territory. Consequently, Jerusalem became the center of this area and a major religious, political and capital of world affairs where, all the significant know-how of ancient civilization flourished since 3500 BC.

All the developments of those times played a major role for humanity and have certainly influenced our modern lives in one way or another.

Ancient Empires

For millennia, this region has been a battlefield among tribes, dynasties, and empires. There has been desire for colonial domination and imperialism stranglehold for the control of geo-strategic locations, cultural domination and other political and religious influences.

As a result, and ironically, the cultural, economic, and geopolitical strategic value and significance of this area has made it one of the most sensitive, troubled and at the same time envied regions on the planet.

It would be realistic to consider that the ideologies and knowledge from this region were disseminated around the planet for millennia. It would therefore be logical to consider that Jerusalem and its surrounding areas of what was also known as the Levant or Sham in Arabic, to be the center of the Middle East.

Mesopotamia, currently Iraq, was one of the early centers where several cultural and political activities began. The kingship system

was first established in this region. The cultural activities and principles flourished and extended to many neighboring areas by the Sumerians, a group of local extended families which ruled southern Mesopotamia around 3000 BC.

After the decline of the Sumerian dynasty, several other successful people formed kingdoms and empires, among others, Babylonians, Assyrians, Ancient Israelites, and Persian Empire.

In the 5th Century, Christianity was the principle religion of the Roman Empire and of the Middle East, but later on the Empire split into East and West. Rome became the Capital of the Western Empire and Constantinople of the East.

The Medieval Middle East

The medieval Middle East era was dominated by the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with a common theological linkage of the Abrahamic faiths with Jerusalem as their focal Holy Land. Over time, Islam became the dominant faith of the Middle East

The Arabic influence in the Middle East

The most important aspect which assisted Islam to firmly impose itself in the Arabian Peninsula and the world was the Arabic language. On the one hand, the Qur'an, the Holy Book of Islam, was the first written book in Arabic and the latter was the dominating language of the region, as a result it provided an efficient apparatus to communicate the new religion. It actually started in the Arabian Peninsula where the tribes were largely Arabs and could easily communicate and understand the message of the new religion. And on the other hand, Islam, assisted the Arabic language to obtain an international status and emerge as one of the main world languages.

Since Arabic was the main language of the Arabian Peninsula and the Levant, it was easy to use it to preach and spread Islam. The latter became a unifying factor for the Arab nomadic tribes who were constantly in conflict. Thus this could be the logical reason why Islam and Arabic are currently associated with the Middle East.

One could also deduce that Islam had a tremendous impact on the internalization of the Arabic language and culture and *vice versa*. The parallel advancement of Islam and Arabic could therefore be a very important element in describing the definitions of the Middle East. Undoubtedly, the Westerners traced and defined the Middle East according to the limits of the Arabic language and the Islamic background.

The Ottoman Empire

Until the arrival of the Ottomans in the 11th Century, the Seljuk dynasty defeated the Byzantine Empire and ruled from Central Asia to the Middle East. From the early 13th Century, the latter established a successful Empire covering the territory of the Byzantine

Empire -- expanded to some parts of Southern East Europe, the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa, to the shore of the Caspian Sea. The Ottomans conquered the territories that covered the crossroads of Africa, Asia, Europe and major sea and land trade routes. Moreover, its wealth was largely due to its presence and influence on this region's important intersection.

Historians are in unanimous agreement on the main reason that hastened the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century lay in the lack of administrative reform, the instability of its provinces, the revolt of the Young Turks, and the increase in foreign invasions and occupations.

European influence in the Middle East

The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was precipitated by World War I. On August 10, 1920, the victorious Allies and the Ottoman Empire signed a peace treaty, the Treaty of Sèvres which decreed the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire and obliged it to renounce all the rights over all its provinces.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, the geo-strategic position of the Middle East has interested Europeans since the mid-nineteenth century. It was the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century that gave the way to European powers to realize their colonial and imperial ambitions. It was during World War I, that some Europeans signed secret agreements, in anticipation of the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire.

Among the most disreputable was the Sykes-Picot Agreement signed in 1916 between the United Kingdom and France, with the acquiescence of imperial Russia. The Agreement determined the relevant spheres of influence of the victorious allies in the Middle East, and the total dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire into several absolute monarchies and "independent" nation-states. Consequently, most of the current Arab countries in the Middle East are of recent origin and were the product of the partition of the Ottoman Empire under the blessing and auspices of European political and commercial objectives.

A year later the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, which favored the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. This Declaration was contradictory because it never opted to create an Arab Palestinian state.

The Treaty of Sèvres and these two secret agreements are at the origin of the current situation and carnage in the Middle East and particularly in Palestine. The European powers divided this region according to their Eurocentric political strategy and military requirements. This partition separated the inhabitants of the Middle East, and created artificial boundaries among them against their will.

The Modern Middle East

In the early 19th Century, the Middle East was the lifeline of the British Empire when it started its advance through the Mediterranean into Africa and to India via the Suez Canal.

From an economic and political angle, even before the discovery of oil in the early 20th Century, this region has been coveted by Empires. Western imperialists and colonial powers had aspirations of controlling the whole region as an important maritime route.

The situation has worsened in recent years due to the large oil reserves. The Middle East has become a focus of interest to all industrialized countries and this has thus increased tensions in the region.

European Legacy in the Region

The imprecise boundaries in the Middle East - the legacy of European colonization - are the main ingredients underlying the current conflicts in the region. In the Middle East, as in the Americas, and indeed in much of Africa, the positioning of boundary lines on maps is a relic of the imperial age, and reflects the conflicts and compromises of the former imperial powers²

The Kuwait invasion by Iraq in 1991 was the more recent example and direct consequence of this European legacy. Historically, Iraq had always claimed that Kuwait was an integral part of Iraq but was separated by the British who divided and traced the boundaries of this region according to their own strategic needs after the Ottomans were defeated during World War I.

The creation of the State of Israel and the unconditional support that it receives from the West is another European legacy. While western direct involvement on this issue began after the discovery of oil in the Middle East, the unobstructed support of the State of Israel has created an unbalanced and unsustainable approach in Palestine. Arabs and Muslims all consider the question of Palestine as the root cause of all recent crises in the Middle East.

Outer limits of the Middle East

The question often asked is how far does the Middle East go. For instance, Afghanistan has always been part of Central Asia. But in recent years, particularly after the Al-Qaida terrorist attacks against the US on September 11, 2001 there is a tendency to include Afghanistan in a Greater Middle East because of its Islamic background.

Given the importance of the war on terrorism to current US foreign policy, it might be appropriate to include Afghanistan and other

²The Multiple Identities of the Middle East. Bernard Lewis, Schocken Books NY 1998

neighboring Central Asian states in the definition. The average American sees Afghanistan as a country in the Middle East.³

Another recent example is Somalia, located in the Horn of Africa, and separated from the Middle East by the Red Sea. Despite its Arab-Islamic background, it was not associated with the Middle East in the past, but since the breakout of its civil war in 1991, its current growing sea piracy, and its recent perceptible involvement with Islamist terrorists groups, some Western countries have associated this African country with the wider Middle East.

Questions are also asked constantly about Iran and Pakistan and their relationship with the Middle East as component entities.

Perhaps the best way then of identifying the Middle East would be to see it as a set of concentric circles; an inner circle of historical Palestine with Jerusalem as a focal point, and middle circle of the surrounding Arab land, and an outer circle of other Muslim lands.

Cultural commonalities

This brings up the question of cultural commonalities. While the Arabic language is an obvious cementing factor, Islam is also a critically important binding force even beyond Arab lands.

Based on the historic, religious and political aspects illustrated herein, it would be safe to assume that despite the complex geographic definitions of the Middle East, the cultural, religious and linguistic factors associated with this region have exceeded its confusing boundaries.

As another example, in general, all the twenty two member states of the League of Arab States are considered to be part of the Middle East, while there are some member states like Mauritania and the Comoros islands which are respectively located in West Africa and in the Indian Ocean, thousands of miles from the Middle East, and have no geographic proximity or link with the Middle East. Their only affiliation with this region is the Islamic religion and Arabic cultural background.

Challenges

Ironically, the geo-strategic importance, gigantic energy reserves and historical background of the Middle East are the curse of this region and have incited and motivated several foreign invasions, occupations and wars.

The region's vast petroleum supplies - two-thirds of the world's known oil reserves - is a major reason for the world's interest. But the influence of MENA, (Middle East and North Africa) extends beyond its rich oil fields. It occupies a strategically important geographic

³Defining the Middle East. Carol J. Riphpenburg, Ph.D. Professor/Political Science
<http://www.cod.edu/Middle/maps/defined.htm>

position between Asia, Africa, and Europe. It has often been caught in a tug-of-war of land and influence that affects the entire world.⁴

These factors and others have prevented political unity within this region, but the lack of social cohesion and solidarity among the countries of this region has worsened the situation. As a result, foreigners have taken advantage of this discord and are exploiting it for their own interests against the interests of the native populations. The people of this region need to realize that their enemies are within them at home, and not the foreigners.

Political Unity

Political unity in this region is a utopian ideal because of several reasons.

Firstly, most of the countries in this region were created after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Their frontiers were concocted without any legal, logical or sociopolitical reality. Several states are still claiming their patrimony or historical assets from their neighbors.

Secondly, despite the existence of common linguistic and religious aspects, respectively Arabic and Islam, these factors cannot be a common denominator to create a politically integrated block because of the other significant minority communities of non-Muslims and non-Arabs, namely, Jews, Kurds, Berbers, Druze and others.

Thirdly, another dividing factor lies in the separation of Muslims between Shias and Sunnis. Though this was a relatively minor factor in the past, it has assumed much greater importance after the Iranian Revolution of 1979. It is not unusual to hear people say that it is only as adults that they realized they were Sunnis or Shias. Earlier, they had identified themselves simply as Muslims.⁵ The recent resurgence of Shiism as a result of the Iranian Revolution has widened a latent rift between Sunnis and Shias, and this might have a grave impact on the potential for unity in the Middle East in the future.

Fourthly, the recent rhetoric from some Westerners regarding the reconfiguration of the Middle East based on the democratization of this region is a new factor. This theory has its own contradictions, partly because the ostensible talk of democracy has not prevented many Western countries from supporting eminently un-democratic regimes in the Middle East, and partly because it merely justifies external Western intervention in sovereign states.

⁴December 2001. Population Trends and Challenges in the Middle East and North Africa. by Farzaneh (Nazy) Roudi <http://www.prb.org>

⁵Across Arab World, a Widening Rift'

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/11/AR2007021101328.html> By Anthony Shadid
Washington Post Foreign Service Monday, February 12, 2007; Page A01

Finally, the Arab-Israel issue is the most important challenge for the region. The crisis could be resolved if Israel and its allies could be convinced either to accept peace and create a two-state solution of an independent Israel and an independent Palestine, or to live in peace in a united one-state single Palestine in which Jews and Christians and Muslims would co-habit in future as they have done in the distant past.

In either case, it is clear that the status quo cannot be sustained for ever, hence the imperative need for a solution.

Conclusion

The Middle East is a Western concept portraying a region vaguely covering a territory with variable geographical parameters. Its flexible and extendible territory covers and overlaps into three different continents. At the same time its cultural frontiers have transcended its geographical limits. Its people have been martyrs since ancient times because of its multifaceted religious character and its geo-strategic position.

Nobody is then quite sure as to where the Middle East begins, and where it ends, or even whether all countries within its imagined parameters are constituent elements. For example, is Morocco, on the western edge, a part of the Middle East? Some would say yes, because of the Arab character of Morocco, others would say no. Is Turkey a part of the Middle East? Once again, some would say yes because of its Muslim character, others would say no. Is Iran a part of the Middle East? Or Azerbaijan, or Afghanistan or Pakistan?

The geographical flexibility and the conceptual manner of denoting the Middle East is thus unique. This uniqueness is not only in its flexible definition but it is also in nearly all of its historical, religious, political and socio-economic aspects. Regardless of its continuous and tumultuous history and its geo-strategic position, it will remain the center of the world and a magnet for all outsiders.

LINGUISTIC COMMONALITIES

Introduction

There is obviously an intimate link between language and culture. Commonality of culture is normally developed when a group of individuals bond together for a specific purpose and a common goal. Language is the most common cement that binds such individuals together. The symbiotic relationship between both language and culture, is such that each of them becomes an enabling factor for the development and evolution of each other.

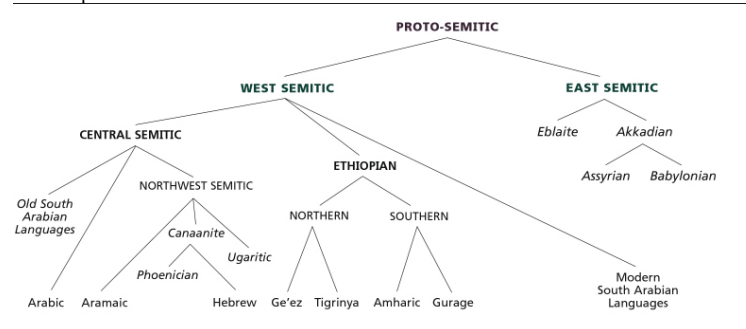
In observing the impact of language and culture on the group, it is important to understand that while language and culture are enabling factor for the growth of a group, it is also the limiting factor. It behoves us therefore to study the commonalities in the languages of the Middle East, as determinants of group relationships.

There are a wide variety of languages and dialects that are being spoken in the Middle East. These languages include Arabic, Aramaic, Azeri, Berber, Persian, Gilaki, Mazandarini, Hebrew, Turkish, Urdu, French, English, Russian, Romanian and many others.

Historically, the Middle East is also the cradle of civilization, with ancient civilizations ranging from Mesopotamia and Babylon, each with its own language, though linked and derived from each other. Based on anthropological classifications, these languages are firmly located in the family of Afro-Asiatic languages known as the Proto-Semitic languages, or more commonly as the Semitic languages.

History of Middle East Languages

The Semitic languages are split into two major categories – the East Semitic languages which are now extinct, and the West Semitic languages which are part of the branches of today's surviving Semitic languages. The tree below provides a pictorial representation of the evolution of the Semitic languages which is a good summary of its development.



The East Semitic languages are split into Eblaite and Akkadian. Eblaite is extinct and was spoken in the ancient city of Ebla (in today's Syria) around 2,300 BC, and is believed to be extinct after 1,600 BC. Akkadian on the other hand survived much longer, ranging from 2,500 BC to 100 AD, going through the Akkadian Empire, and the Babylonian and Assyrian period.

The West Semitic languages have Ethiopian and Central Semitic branches. The Ethiopian branch develops in the African region, however in the recent time, due to large amount of immigration from Ethiopia to Israel Amharic is also widely spoken in Israel.

Central Semitic languages consist of the Arabic language which is widely in use. The other branch would be the Northwest Semitic language which includes Aramaic which is still in use in Syria, while Ugaritic and Canaanite on the other hand are now extinct. Ugaritic was in use in the city of Ugarit (in today's Syria) from around 1,400 BC to 1,170 BC when the city was destroyed. Canaanite is in existence from about 1,600 BC to 400 BC while Phoenicia was in use from about 1,550 BC to 300 BC.

History of Surviving Middle Eastern Languages

According to Wikipedia, the three most popular living Semitic languages that originate from the inner core of the Middle East are:

- Arabic with an estimated 280,000,000 speakers⁶
- Hebrew with an estimated 7,000,000 speakers⁷
- Aramaic with an estimated 2,200,000 speakers⁸

The following sections analyse the history of these three languages in order of their magnitudes.

History of Arabic

The oldest form of Arabic is known as Classical Arabic. The first documented written Arabic language is around 400 AD. The Arabic language during this time is known as Pre-Islamic Arabic. Some of the most famous examples of these works are some exemplary poems of that time which is known as Al-Muallaqāt, which literally means The Hanging Poems or The Suspended Odes. Examples can be seen hanging around the Kaaba in Mecca, written in gold. It should be noted however that this early Arabic existed mainly in verbal form.

In the 7th Century, the Quran which is the Holy Book of Islam, was revealed to Prophet Mohammad. This is the single most widely read Arabic work. As the Quran is considered a holy text, alterations to the book are not allowed. The language of the Quran is therefore considered as the purest form of classical Arabic. Since the compilation

⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic>

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_language

of the Quran and written records of Arabic during that time, it is believed that literacy increased dramatically. With the strong bond between Islam and the classical Arabic language, the spread of the language was proportionate to the spread of Islam.

During the Middle Ages, the Middle East included the Babylonian, the Egyptian and other great civilization and was one of the primal location for trade, and knowledge, especially that which spanned Europe, Asia and Africa. Common trading commodities such as cotton (qutn), amber (anbar), elixir (al-iksir), jar (jarrah), and many other words in science from mathematics and chemistry such as algebra (al-jabr), alkali (al-qala)⁹. These linguistic exchanges have brought the influence of the Arabic language to become an integral part of many of the languages currently in use.

Modern Standard Arabic is a relatively new form of Arabic. It is still disputed whether should it be considered as a new language or just a part of Classical Arabic as it is based on Classical Arabic. With the advent of new concepts and items in our society, the borrowing of words from other languages along with the exploration of a less rigid style basically forms the basis of Modern Standard Arabic.

In our current society, Arabic is mainly spoken in the Middle East and Northern Africa region. It is also an official language in twenty five countries. According to New York Times Almanac, it is also the third most spoken language in the world.

History of Hebrew

Hebrew is historically part of the Canaanite Semitic languages. It was first spoken in the Canaan region (Jerusalem) from 950 BC to 586 BC. During this period, the Hebrew language that is used is known as Archaic Biblical Hebrew. The Tanach (Hebrew Bible) is written using scripts from this period of time.

In 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II captured Jerusalem and enslaved many Israelites who were forced to learn Aramaic. During this period, the Hebrew that was spoken and used is more developed into the form that is known as Classical Biblical Hebrew.

In 539 BC, after Cyrus the Great captured Babylon and released most of the Israelites and allowed Hebrew to be used once again in Jerusalem, the popularity of Hebrew was reborn. The Hebrew language spoken during this period is known Late Biblical Hebrew which lasted till the 4th Century.

During the 3rd century BC to the 1st century AD, the Imperial Aramaic scripts of that time evolved into the Hebrew Square script which was used to write most of the Dead Sea Scrolls which is also

⁹ English words obtained from Arabic
<http://www.canadianarabcommunity.com/arabiclanguage.php>

known as Qumran Scrolls, and therefore, the Hebrew language during that period is known as Qumran Hebrew or Dead Sea Scroll Hebrew (DSS Hebrew).

From the 1st Century AD to 3rd or 4th Century AD, which correspond to the Roman period and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, Kothba letters were used which is also known as Tannaitic Hebrew or Early Rabbinic Hebrew.

After that, due to the constant persecutions of the Jews, the Hebrew language became less prominent, and was used solely to communicate between Jewish people from different locations.

This trend however was over turned in the 19th Century when the revival of the Jewish language took place. Eliezer Ben-Yahuda who was part of the Jewish national movement pushed to revive Hebrew as the mother tongue of the Jewish people and succeeded in rebuilding it as the official language of Israel and of the Israelites.

In our current society, Hebrew is mainly spoken in Israel and as the language of Judaism. It is the official language of Israel, with approximately seven million speakers in Israel and an additional seven million Jews in the diaspora living outside of Israel.

History of Aramaic

Old Aramaic usually refers to the Aramaic used during the period from 1,100 BC to 200 AD. The language was originally that of the Aramaeans which were settled in the upper Mesopotamia. Some early evidence of the written language exists as early as 1,000 BC in diplomatic agreements between the kingdoms. It was the official language of Assyria in 740 BC and subsequently became the primary language or “lingua franca” of the Persian Empire, and the official written language between the different regions of that empire.

In the year 331 BC, after the conquest of Alexander the Great, Greek has slowly replaced the Aramaic language in Syria and Egypt, however the language continue to flourish in the Syrian dessert, and in Arabia and Parthia.

Aramaic itself continued to exist. However with the differences and linkages it evolved into various forms of more dialect like Aramaic, such as Nabataean Aramaic, Palmyra Aramaic, Arsacid Aramaic. One other significant of Aramaic during this period, is that it is also the language that is in use in Judea area and is the mother tongue of Jesus¹⁰.

It is noted that sections of the Bible’s Old Testament such as Book of Daniel and Book of Ezra, along with many in the New Testament such as Book of Mark, Romans, Corinthians and many

¹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aramaic_of_Jesus

others, all contains sections written in Aramaic. It was also widely used during the period that Jesus was setting up his ministry.

The Middle Aramaic period refers to the Aramaic language spoken around 200 AD to 1200 AD. The Aramaic during this period is split into Eastern Middle Aramaic and Western Aramaic.

The Eastern Middle Aramaic is composed essentially of three sections. The first part is Syriac which is the language of Syriac Christians. The second part is the Jewish Babylonian Aramaic which was used by Jewish writers during the period of 400-1100 AD and was used in writing the Talmud.

Western Aramaic on the other hand evolved mainly through the Palestinian area, where it developed into three branches which are the Jewish Middle Palestinian Aramaic, the Samaritan Aramaic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic. All three are in use by each of these minority groups.

The Modern Aramaic period refers to the Aramaic language spoken after 1200 AD to the present day.

In our current society, Aramaic is mainly spoken in six countries, which are Iran, Iraq, Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Turkey. It currently has an expected speaker base of 2,200,000 speakers.

Linguistic links

In order to identify the similarities and links between the languages, there are several aspects that can be considered.

Firstly, from an anthropologist perspective; based on the diagram on the language tree reproduced above, it can be observed that Arabic is part of the Central Semitic branch which also give rise to the Northwest Semitic languages. From the Northwest Semitic languages, Aramaic and Canaanite language was branched out which Hebrew is part of the Canaanite language.

Secondly from a religious perspective; as Judaism, Christianity and Islam all branched out of Abrahamic faith¹¹. The Table of Nations¹² which is based on the Book of Genesis in the Torah, traces the ancestry of the Israelite (Judaism and Christianity) to Isaac, the son of Abraham through his wife Sarah; the Arabic Muslims on the other hand trace their ancestry to Ismael who is the Son of Abraham through his wife Hagar.

Secondly, since the origin of these three religions trace back to the same father and the same God, there would naturally be many similarities in terms of the practices, cultures as well as possibly languages.

¹¹ Abrahamic Faith – http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abrahamic_faith

¹² Table of Nations – <http://ldolphin.org/ntable.html>

Thirdly, from a geographical and time line perspective, Aramaic started around 1,100,BC in Mesopotamia. Its influence is felt throughout the region including Jerusalem. Noting that Hebrew is part of the Canaanite languages and Canaanite languages are closely linked to Aramaic, the two languages survived side by side.

This lasted until the Persian Empire defeated the Kingdom of Judah, and claimed Jerusalem, and then invited the Israelites back to Jerusalem. This allowed the Jewish language to continue to flourish. However at the same time, the official language of the Persian Empire was the Aramaic language. This ensured that during that time in Jerusalem, both languages were commonly used and hence cross pollinated each other. Furthermore, as previously cited, Aramaic is also the language that was used during the time of Jesus and many sections of the Bible are actually written in Aramaic.

With the strengthening of the Aramaic language due to its adoption by the Persian Empire, the status of Aramaic language continued to rise. In the 1st Century AD, the Aramaic script was developed into the Hebrew square script which was extended into the Dead Sea Scroll scripts which is very similar to the scripts in use today by Hebrew.

As an extension of the similarities, the early form of Arabic seems to be derived from Nabataean Aramaic, and this explains the great similarity between the Arabic and Aramaic languages. However as the Arabic language was developed towards the southern part of the Arabia peninsula, while Aramaic was largely confined to the northern area of modern Syria, Iraq and Eastern Turkey, there were obvious differences and variations.

Following the slow decline in the Aramaic language and the rise of the Arabic language due in large part to the rise of Islam throughout the Middle East, Arabic started to become the main language that is spoken in the Middle East.

During the 10th and 11th Centuries, the rise in Islam had virtually taken hold of the entire Middle East. During this time, many Jewish scholars live in lands that were ruled by Muslim rulers, where many cultural exchanges took place, and where medieval Jewish scholars engaged in comparative study of Arabic and Hebrew.

Due to the blossoming of information and the development of the Arabic vocabulary, concepts in the Arabic language was borrowed to help in explain the more obscure Hebrew concepts. Consequently, until the present day, commentaries and articles written by Biblical scholars still cite evidence regularly from Arabic translations to support specific meanings of a Hebrew word or passage.

Finally, in reviewing the similarities of the languages, a list of common word sounds is presented in the table below :

English	Hebrew	Aramaic	Arabic
Approach	qarab	qrib	qaraba
Bear (child)	yalad	ilid	walada
Greetings	shalom	salam	salam
Daughter	bat	barta	bint
Dog	keleb	kalba	kalb
Dream	halam	hlam	halima
Five	hmissa	hammsa	xamsa
Hundred	me'a	ma	mia
River	nahar	nahra	nahr
Salt	melah	milha	milh
Water (noun)	mayim	mayya	ma

In terms of the scripts between these Hebrew and the Aramaic (Syriac) language, it can be seen that even the fonts are very similar. In both the Hebrew and Aramaic scripts, there are a total of 22 characters. It can also be seen that there are significant influences in the ordering of the letters.

We should note however that in Arabic scripts; there are a total of 28 characters which are more complex and which show a deviation from the generic Aramaic language background.

Letter name	Letter form	Equivalent Hebrew	Equivalent Syriac	Sound value
Ālaph	א	א	ܐ	/ʔ/, /aː/, /eː/
Bēth	ב	ב	ܒ	/b/, /v/
Gāmal	ג	ג	ܓ	/g/, /ɣ/
Dāliath	ד	ד	ܕ	/d/, /ð/
Hē	ה	ה	ܗ	/h/
Waw	ו	ו	ܘ	/w/, /oː/, /uː/
Zain	ז	ז	ܙ	/z/
Hēth	ח	ח	ܚ	/h/
Tēth	ט	ט	ܛ	emphatic /t/
Yudh	י	י	ܝ	/j/, /iː/, /eː/
Kaph	כ	כ	ܟ	/k/, /x/

Conclusion

After reviewing the history of Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew, it can be seen that these languages have a deep influence on each other.

The core of the Middle East countries follow Abrahamic beliefs. The Table of Nations traces their common lineage back to Abraham and his sons

Following from the derivation of Hebrew and Arabic from the original Aramaic language, there were also many cross cultural exchanges between Arabic and Hebrew scholars. This is most evident during the medieval times, where Jewish scholars were studying their

scriptures using Arabic dictionaries. These lead to the constant reinforcement and development of the two languages in similar directions. Simultaneously, during the medieval period of Europe, Jews and Muslims fought side by side against the incursions by the Christians. Subsequently after Saladin's recapturing of Jerusalem, both cultures again existed side by side in peace and harmony.

Hence the conclusion is that there are great similarities between the languages developed in the Middle East over the past three thousand years.

CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Introduction

Middle East anthropology is organized into four fields, each of which plays an important role in research on culture: biological anthropology, linguistics, cultural anthropology, and archeology.

Because most modern societies are composed of disparate social groups, discerning the culture of any one society by itself is not easy, and examining the culture of an entire region, especially one as varied as the Middle East, becomes a particularly arduous venture. The changing societies themselves contain contradictory and countervailing elements, each of which may have its own specific cultural orientations. It is easy to detect cultural similarities at the elite/intellectual level, where the awareness of historical continuities, literature, and language, serve as powerful unifying forces among the learned strata.¹³

In looking at a region of such profound cultural diversity as the Middle East, cultural analysis needs to be made on a micro as well as on a macro level. Exactly where to draw the line between these levels of analysis is open to interpretation. One would soon conclude, however, that while specific cultural differences exist at the micro level within each nation and between different nations, there are also some pronounced similarities at the macro level. To elaborate on the underlying causes of such cultural similarities would require mapping out a detailed cultural history of the region, a task greater than the one at hand. But a quick survey can be made of such historically unifying forces as language (Arabic in the west, Farsi in the east, and Turkish in the north), religion (Islam), political rule (colonialism of the Ottomans and later that of the Europeans), nationalism, personality cults, diplomacy (the Palestinian issue among others), and a series of historical events.¹⁴

Examining the role of Islam in Middle Eastern popular culture is to highlight its social and cultural totality. Unlike perhaps any other ideological system, with the possible exception of communism, Islam has meticulously constructed a social and cultural, as well as a political, universe of its own. It is, therefore, above all a cultural system. One may add that in the Muslim Middle East, Islam by and large is reality, offering practical guidelines for daily conduct, language, diet, clothing, value orientations, ritualized practices, and conscious decisions. Historians and sociologists have offered different explanations for Islam's all-encompassing nature.¹⁵

¹³ Mehran Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East*, New York Chatham House Publishers, 1998, pg. 168

¹⁴ *ibid* pg. 169

¹⁵ *ibid* pg 170

Islamic Culture

Judaism was established first, then Christianity, and then Islam. These three religions share the same God, and share most of the prophets, except that Judaism does not believe in Jesus and Mohammad, and Christianity does not believe in Mohammad. Islam, on the other hand, believes that all the prophets, including Moses, Jesus and Mohammad, are his messengers.

Muslim artists and scientists, princes and laborers together made a unique culture that has directly and indirectly influenced societies on every continent. The Islamic Golden Age, also sometimes known as the Islamic Renaissance, was traditionally dated from 700 AD to 1200 AD, but has been extended to the 15th and 16th Centuries by some scholars. During this period, artists, engineers, scholars, poets, philosophers, geographers and traders in the Islamic world contributed to the arts, agriculture, economics, industry, law, literature, navigation, philosophy, sciences, sociology, and technology, both by preserving and building upon earlier traditions, and by adding inventions and innovations of their own.¹⁶

During the Muslim conquests of the 7th and early 8th Centuries, Rashidun armies established the Islamic Empire, one of the ten largest empires in history. The Islamic Golden Age was soon inaugurated by the middle of the 8th Century by the ascension of the Abbasid Caliphate and the transfer of the capital from Damascus to the Persian city of Baghdad, illustrating the strong Persian presence in the Abbasid Caliphate. The Abbasids were influenced by the Quranic injunctions and Hadith, such as “The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyrs”, stressing the value of knowledge. During this period, the Muslim world became the unrivalled intellectual center for science, philosophy, medicine, and education, as the Abbasids championed the cause of knowledge, and established the House of Wisdom in Baghdad, where both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars sought to translate and gather all the world’s knowledge into Arabic. Many classical works of antiquity that would otherwise have been forgotten were translated into Arabic, and later in turn translated into Turkish, Persian, Hebrew and Latin. During this period, the Muslim world was the cauldron of cultures which collected, synthesized, and significantly advanced the knowledge gained from ancient Iraqi, Roman, Chinese, Indian, Persian, Egyptian, North African, Greek, and Byzantine civilizations. Rival Muslim dynasties, such as the Fatimids of Egypt, and the Umayyads of Al-Andalus, were also major intellectual centers with cities such as Cairo and Cordoba rivaling Baghdad.

¹⁶ www.wikipedia.com

A major innovation of this period was paper, originally a secret tightly guarded by the Chinese. The art of paper making was obtained from prisoners taken at the Battle of Talas in 751 AD, and resulted in paper mills being built in the Persian cities of Samarkand and Baghdad. The Arabs improved on the Chinese technique of using mulberry bark, by using starch to account for the Muslim preference for pens versus the Chinese brushes. By 900 AD, there were hundreds of shops employing scribes and binders for books in Baghdad, and even public libraries began to be established, including the first lending libraries. From here, paper making spread west to Fez, and then to Al-Andalus, and from there to Europe in the 13th Century.¹⁷

Much of this learning and development can be linked to topography. Even prior to Islam's presence, the city of Mecca served as a center of trade in Arabia. The tradition of pilgrimage to Mecca became a center for exchanging ideas and goods. The influence held by Muslim merchants over African-Arabian and Arabian-Asian trade routes was tremendous. As a result, Islamic civilization grew and expanded, based on its merchant economy, in contrast to their European, Indian and Chinese peers who built societies from agricultural land-holding nobility. Merchants brought goods and their faith to China, India, Southeast Asia, and the kingdoms of western Africa, and returned with new inventions.

Aside from traders, Sufi missionaries also played a large role in the spread of Islam, by bringing their message to various regions around the world. The principle locations included: Persia, ancient Mesopotamia, central Asia, and North Africa. Although the mystics also had a significant influence in parts of eastern Africa, ancient Anatolia (Turkey), south Asia, east Asia, and southeast Asia.

Though society was still controlled under Islamic values, religious freedom helped create cross cultural networks by attracting Muslim, Christian, and Jewish intellectuals, and thereby helped spawn the greatest period of philosophical creativity in the Middle Ages from the 8th to the 13th Centuries.

Islamic institutions

A number of important educational and scientific institutions, previously unknown in the Asian world, have their origins in the medieval Islamic world, with the most notable examples being: the public hospital, the public library, the academic degree granting university, and the astronomical observatory.

The first universities which issued diplomas were the Bimaristan medical university hospitals of the medieval Islamic world, where medical diplomas were issued to students of Islamic medicine

¹⁷ www.wikipedia.com

who were qualified to become practicing doctors of medicine from the ninth century onwards.

The Guinness Book of World Records recognizes the University of Al-Karaouine in Fez, Morocco, as the oldest degree granting university in the world with its founding in 859 AD. The University of Al-Azhar founded in Cairo, Egypt in 975 AD offered a variety of academic degrees, including post graduate degrees, and is often considered the first full-fledged university.

The origins of the doctorate also date back to the medieval Madrassas, which taught Islamic law, and had a license to teach and issue legal opinions.

By the 10th Century, Cordoba had 700 mosques and 70 libraries, the largest of which had 600,000 books. The library of Cairo had two million books while the library of Tripoli is said to have had as many as three million books before it was destroyed by the Crusaders.

The number of important and original medieval Arabic works on the mathematical sciences far exceeds the combined total of medieval Latin and Greek works of comparable significance, although only a small fraction of the Arabic scientific works have been studied in modern times.¹⁸

A number of distinct features of the modern library were introduced in the Islamic world, where libraries not only served as a collection of manuscripts as was the case in ancient libraries, but also as a public library and a lending library, a center for the instruction and spread of sciences and ideas, a place for meetings and discussions, and sometimes as a lodging for scholars, or a boarding school for pupils.

The concept of the library catalog was also introduced in medieval Islamic libraries, where books were organized in specific genres and categories.

Polymaths

Another common feature during the Islamic Golden Age was the large number of Muslim polymath scholars, who were known as “Hakeems”, each of whom contributed to a variety of different fields of both religious and secular learning, comparable to the later “Renaissance Men” (such as Leonardo da Vinci) of the European Renaissance period.

During the Islamic Golden Age, Polymath scholars with a wide breadth of knowledge in different fields were more common than scholars who specialized in any single field of learning.

Notable medieval Muslim Polymaths included Al-Beruni, Al-Jahiz, Al-Kindi, Avicenna, Al-Idrisi, Ibn Bajja, Ibn Zuhr, Ibn Tuffail, Averroes, Al-Suyuti, Geber, Abbas Ibn Fimas, Alhacen, Ibn Al-Nafis,

¹⁸ www.wikipedia.com

Ibn Khaldun, Al-Khwarizmi, Al-Masudi, Al-Muqaddasi, and Nasir al-Din Al-Tusi, among others.

Geography

The Islamic empire significantly contributed to globalization during the Islamic Golden Age, when the knowledge, trade and economies from many previously regions and civilizations began integrating due to contacts with Muslim explorers, sailors, scholars, traders, and travelers. Some have called this period the “Pax Islamica” or “Afro-Asiatic age of discovery”, in reference to the Jewish and Muslim traders and travelers who travelled most of the Old World, and established an early global economy across most of Asia and Africa and much of Europe, with their trade networks extending from the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea in the west to the Indian Ocean and the China Sea in the east.

Early forms of proto-capitalism and free markets were present in the Caliphate, where an early market economy and an early form of merchant capitalism was developed between the 8th and the 12th Centuries, which some refer to as “Islamic capitalism”. A vigorous monetary economy was created on the basis of the expanding levels of circulation of a stable high value currency (the dinar) and the integration of monetary areas that were previously independent. Innovative new business techniques and forms of business organizations were introduced by economists, merchants, and traders during this time.

The systems of contract relied upon by merchants was very effective. Merchants would buy and sell on commission, with money loaned to them by wealthy investors, or by a joint investment of several merchants who were often Muslim, Christian, and Jewish. Recently, a collection of documents was found in an Egyptian synagogue shedding a very detailed and human light on the life of medieval Middle Eastern merchants. Business partnerships would be made for many commercial ventures, and bonds of kinship enabled trade networks to form over huge distances. Networks developed during this time enabled the world in which money could be promised by a bank in Baghdad and cashed in Spain creating the exchange system of today. These innovations made by Muslims and Jews laid the foundations for the modern economic system.

Industrial Growth

Muslim engineers in the Islamic world made a number of innovative industrial uses of hydro power, and early industrial uses of water mills. These date back to the 7th Century. By the 11th Century every province throughout the Islamic world had these industrial mills in operation, from al-Andalus and North Africa to the Middle East and Central Asia. Muslim engineers also invented crankshafts and water turbines, employed gears in mills and water raising machines, and

pioneered the use of dams as a source of water power, used to provide additional power to water mills and water raising machines.

Architecture

The Great Mosque of Xian in China was completed in 740 AD, and the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq was completed in 847 AD. The Spanish Muslims began the construction of the Great Mosque at Cordoba in 785 AD marking the beginning of Islamic architecture in Spain and north Africa. The mosque is noted for its striking interior arches. Moorish architecture also reached its peak with the construction of the Alhambra, the magnificent palace fortress of Granada with its open and breezy spaces adorned in red, blue, and gold. The walls are decorated with stylized foliage motifs, Arabic inscriptions, and arabesque design work, with walls covered in glazed tiles.

Another distinctive sub-style is the architecture of the Mughal Empire in India in the 15th through the 17th Centuries. Blending Islamic and Hindu elements, the Emperor Akbar constructed the royal city of Fatehpur Sikri, located 26 miles west of Agra in the late 1500s, and his grandson Shah Jehan constructed the mausoleum of Taj Mahal for Mumtaz Mahal in the 1650s.

Philosophy

Arab philosophers like Al-Kindi (Alkindus) and Ibn-Rushd (Averroes), and Persian philosophers like Ibn Sina (Avicenna), played a major role in preserving the works of Aristotle, whose ideas came to dominate the non-religious thought of the Muslim and Christian worlds. They would also absorb ideas from China and India, adding to them tremendous knowledge from their own studies. Three speculative thinkers Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina, fused Aristotelianism and neo-Platonism, with other ideas introduced through Islam, such as Kalam and Qiyas. This led to Avicenna founding his own Avicennism School of Philosophy, which was influential in both Islamic and Christian lands.

From Spain the Arabic philosophic literature was translated into Hebrew and Latin contributing to the modern European philosophy. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides, the Muslim sociologist historian Ibn Khaldun, the Carthage citizen Constantine the African, all translated Greek medical texts. The collation of mathematical techniques by the Muslim scholar Al-Khwarizmi, was an influential text throughout Europe for several centuries. One of the most influential Muslim philosophers in the west was Averroes (Ibn Rushd) founder of the Averroism School of Philosophy, whose works and commentary had an impact on the rise of secular thought in Western Europe.

Another influential philosopher who had a significant influence in philosophy was Ibn Tuffail. His philosophical novel, Hayy

Ibn Ya'qub translated into Latin as *Philosophus Autodidactus* in 1671 AD, developed the themes of empiricism, *tabula rasa*, nature versus nurture, condition of possibility, materialism, and Molyneux's Problem. European scholars and writers influenced by this novel include John Locke, Gottfried Leibniz, Melchisedech Thevenot, Quakers, and Samuel Hartlib. Al-Ghazali also had an important influence on Jewish thinkers like Maimonides and Christian medieval philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Rene Descartes, who expressed similar ideas to that of Al-Ghazali in his *Discourse on the Method*.

Islam: Past and Present

Islam, more than any other factor, has given the Middle East its distinctive identity. The social, cultural, and political life of every nation in the region, including Israel, bears the stamp of the three great monotheistic religions. After more than thirteen centuries the spiritual force of Islam is still vital, although the form in which it was first propagated by the Prophet Mohammad has undergone change. Today the original teachings have been diffused into a variety of traditions, practices, and customs. But Islam is still the one pattern that covers the whole Middle East.

The Mongolian Invasion

After the Crusades from the west that resulted in the instability of the Islamic world in the 11th Century, a new threat came from the east in the 13th Century, namely, the Mongol invasions. In 1206 AD, Genghis Khan from Central Asia established a powerful Mongol empire. A Mongolian ambassador to the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad is said to have been murdered, which may have been one of the reasons behind Hulagu Khan's sack of Baghdad in 1258 AD.¹⁹

Eventually the Mongols that settled in parts of Persia, central Asia and Russia, converted to Islam, and, as a result, the Ilkhanate, the Golden Horde and Chagatai Khanates became Islamic states. In many instances Mongols assimilated into various Muslim or Turkic peoples (for instance, one of the greatest Muslim astronomers of the 15th Century, Ulugh Beg, was a grandson of Timur). By the time the Ottoman Empire rose from the ashes, the Islamic Golden Age is considered to have come to an end.

The Decline of Islamic Science

"The achievements of the Arabic speaking peoples between the 9th and 12th Centuries are so great as to baffle our understanding. The decadence of Islam and of Arabic is almost as puzzling in its speed and completeness as their phenomenal rise. Scholars will forever try to explain it just as they attempt to understand the decadence and fall of

¹⁹ www.wikipedia.com

Rome. Such questions are exceedingly complex and it is impossible to answer in a simple way”.²⁰

Islamic civilization which had at the outset been so creative and dynamic in dealing with issues, began to struggle to respond to the challenges and rapid changes that it faced from the 12th Century onwards towards the end of the Abbasid rule. Despite a brief respite with the new Ottoman rule, the decline continued until its eventual collapse and subsequent stagnation in the 20th Century.

Conclusion

Despite a number of attempts by many writers historical and modern, none seemed to agree on the causes of decline. The main views on these causes comprise the following: the political mismanagement after the early Caliphs from the 10th Century onwards; the closure of the gates of interpretation and “ijtihad” in the 12th Century, the foreign involvement by invading forces (the 11th Century crusades, the 13th Century Mongol empire, the 15th Century Reconquista, the 19th Century European colonial empires); and the disruption to the cycle of equity based on Ibn Khaldoon’s famous model of Asabiyyah (or the rise and fall of civilizations), which points to the decline being mainly due to political and economic factors.

There was an increasing lack of tolerance of intellectual debate and freedom of thought with some seminaries systematically forbidding speculative philosophy, while polemic debates appear to have been abandoned in the 14th Century. A significant intellectual shift in Islamic philosophy is perhaps demonstrated by Al-Ghazali’s late 11th Century polemic work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which lambasted metaphysical philosophy in favor of the primacy of scripture, and was later criticized in *The Incoherence of the Incoherence* by Averroes. Institutions of science comprising Islamic universities, libraries, including the house of wisdom, observatories and hospitals were later destroyed by foreign invaders like the Crusaders, and particularly the Mongols, and were rarely promoted again in the devastated regions. Wide illiteracy overwhelmed the devastated lands, and stagnation set in. As that happened, the great cultural innovations of Islamic science faded into the fogs of the modern era.

²⁰ www.wikipedia.com

JERUSALEM – CRUCIBLE OF RELIGIONS

Introduction

Jerusalem is the holiest place in the world. It is a city where three world faiths meet: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Since the beginning of time, these faiths have shared stories, prophets, and undying devotion to this holy place making it a battleground for some and a place of wonder and worship for others. For all three faiths, Jerusalem is the gateway to heaven, a direct connection to God. As a result, the land has been destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times and captured and recaptured 44 times.²¹

Jerusalem is at the core of entanglements between religion, faith and politics. It is a city with a diverse heritage with Western and Arab cultures. Currently, Jerusalem remains one of the core issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The struggle for Jerusalem has existed and will continue to exist. A possible outcome of two independent states in the holy of holiness seems highly unlikely. Jerusalem is embedded in the identity of these three faiths and its respective followers. This identity for each faith is deeply rooted, mainly comprised of history, holy scriptures, and an extreme devotion to their respective belief system. Therefore, Jerusalem will always lie at the intersection three world faiths and three gateways to heaven.

History

Jerusalem plays an important role in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The city is located in the Judean Mountains between the Mediterranean Sea and northern tip of the Dead Sea. It is the oldest city dating back to the 4th millennium BC.

Jerusalem has been sacred to the Jews since King David proclaimed it his capital in the 10th Century BC. Jerusalem was the site of Solomon's Temple and the Second Temple. In accordance with the Hebrew Scripture, Solomon (son of King David), who built the Holy Temple on Mount Moriah, Solomon's Temple (later known as the First Temple), went on to play an essential role in Jewish history as the "storehouse" for the Ark of the Covenant. Known in history as the First Temple Period, Jerusalem was the political capital of the Kingdom of Judah and a religious center to the Israelites. The First Temple period ended around 587 BC when the Babylonians conquered Judah and Jerusalem and ruined Solomon's Temple.

After 50 years of Babylonian control, the Persian King, Cyrus the Great, invited the Jews to return to Judah to rebuild the Temple. The Second Temple was completed in 516 BC, during the rule of Darius the Great, almost 70 years after the destruction of the First Temple.

²¹ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerusalem>

Jerusalem again became the capital of Judah and the center of Jewish worship.¹

Under Herod the Great (a Jewish client King), the area of the Temple Mount (Second Temple) doubled in size. Herod the Great built walls, towers and palaces and expanded the Temple Mount. In 6 AD, the city and the surrounding area came under direct Roman Rule as the Iudaea Province. The Romans ruled over Jerusalem and the region, and it was challenged by the first Jewish-Roman War, which ended with the destruction of the Second Temple (70 AD).²²

Beginning in 132 AD, Jerusalem once again served as the capital of Judea during the period known as the three-year rebellion, Bar Kokhba revolt. The Romans recaptured the city in 135 AD. For five centuries following the Bar Kokhba revolt, the city remained under the Roman and then Byzantine rule. In the 4th Century, under the Roman Emperor Constantine I, Christian sites, most notably, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, were constructed in Jerusalem. During this period, Jews were banned from Jerusalem.

After a few decades, Jerusalem shifted from Roman to Persian rule. The Roman-Persian War was fought between the Sassanid Empire of Persia and the Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire). It was an intense war between both empires that occupied the majority of the 6th and early 7th Centuries. In 614, after 21 days of relentless warfare, Jerusalem was captured by the Persians. The conquered city remained in Sassanid control for some fifteen years.

In 638 AD, under the Arab conquest, Jews were allowed back into the city. In addition, the Rashidun caliph, Umar ibn al- Khattab, signed a treaty with Monophysite Christian Patriarch Sophronius that assured Jerusalem's Christian holy places and population would be protected under the Muslim rule.¹ For the next four hundred years, Jerusalem's reputations lessened as Arab powers in the region maneuvered for control.

In 1099 AD, Jerusalem was conquered by the Crusaders who wanted to liberate the holy city of Jerusalem from Muslim rule. The Crusaders declared the city the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem. "The Muslims were described as uncouth infidels defiling the holiest of holies and as "a race alien to God" who had desecrated ground sanctified by the blood of Christ."²³ They massacred all the Muslims and Jews in a form of religious cleansing. The viciousness of the Crusaders' conquest deeply disturbed the Muslim world. They destroyed the city leaving a presence of isolation and fear.

²² Armstrong Karen, *A History of Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths*

²³ Karabell Zachary, *Peace Be Upon You: The Story Of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish CoexistenAD*

After the massacre of the Muslims and Jews, the Kingdom of Jerusalem entered a long period of clam and prosperity. In 1187 AD, Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt, conquered Jerusalem putting an end to the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. Saladin gradually restored the city and permitted the Jews and Muslims to return and settle in Jerusalem. For Muslims, Saladin was seen as a hero against the Crusaders. In the Islamic world, the period of the Crusades was regarded as a cruel and savage attack by Christians.

By 1517 AD, Ottoman Turks entered Jerusalem and remained in control until 1917 AD. The people of Jerusalem welcomed the Ottoman Turks. Jerusalem experienced a period of peace and stabilization under Suleiman the Magnificent. He was able to establish a strong and Centralized government. During this period, the Muslim Turks also helped stabilize Jerusalem. They introduced many innovations, such as the use of wheels for modes of transportation and modern postal systems. It was among the first signs of a modern city.¹ By mid-Century, Jerusalem had a railroad. Foreign missions and consulates became established in the city. Religious minorities, such as Egyptian Muslims and Jews from Algiers and North Africa, began to settle in Jerusalem in growing numbers. Ottoman rule is thought to be the beginning of a reformation into the modern age.

By 1917 AD, the British Army, led by General Edmund Allenby, captured the city of Jerusalem. With the Ottoman Empire conquered, the Arabs of the region were awaiting their independence. By April 1920, Great Britain had become the Mandatory of Power in Palestine. Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant insisted that Great Britain apply “the principle that the well-being and development of the people in Palestine form a sacred trust of civilization.” The British implemented the Balfour Declaration which established a National Jewish home in Palestine. This situation caused tension between the relationship of Arabs and Jews in Palestine. On the 29th of November in 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted for the creation of a special international regime in the city of Jerusalem. The United Nations was to remain in control of Jerusalem. A referendum was proposed under the regime in which the residents were to decide the future regime of their city. The implementation of the plan was unsuccessful. Instead, the War of 1948 occurred, and the British withdrew from Palestine and Israel.

The Holy City was regarded as essential to the new Jewish state. Tensions once again rose and fighting broke out in Palestine almost immediately after the passing of the UN resolution. The war led to the displacement of Arab and Jewish populations. This marked the beginning of the Palestinian mass departure from their country. By the

end of the war, Jerusalem had become two separate cities, East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem.

The War of 1948 ended with Jerusalem being divided between Israel and Jordan (then Transjordan). In 1949, the Armistice Agreement between Jordan and Israel was signed. The agreement ended the hostilities of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and established the armistice lines between Israel and the Jordanian held West Bank. This agreement was said to be the necessary step for reestablishing peace. It emphasized that in no way was the armistice line to be interpreted as a “political” or “territorial” border, nor did it constitute interference with the rights, claims or positions from any side. In addition, the United Nations was to monitor the established armistice lines. These armistice lines held until the 1967 Six Day War.

From 1949 to 1967, Jerusalem was divided by walls and by barbed wires. West Jerusalem served as Israel’s capital. There was a division of the population; “hardly any Arabs remained in West Jerusalem and no Jews remained in the East.”²⁴ West Jerusalem was not recognized internationally because of the UN General Assembly resolution 194 that envisioned Jerusalem as an international city. Jordan assumed control of the holy places in the Old City. Contrary to the terms of the Israeli-Jordanian Armistice Agreement, access to the Jewish holy sites was denied. During this period, the status of Jerusalem changed radically. Key questions about Jerusalem were no longer about religion or holy places. It was directly political. Jerusalem was a center of political conquest.⁴

In June 1967 during a Six-Day War, Israeli forces captured both East Jerusalem and the entire West Bank. The takeover of East Jerusalem was met with international criticism. This sentiment deepened after Israel’s declaration that Jerusalem would be the capital of Israel. After the victory in 1967 Six-Day War, Israelis eventually found out that by taking over all of Jerusalem, it had opened the door to an endless religious and political battle with the Muslims of Jerusalem. As a result of the 1967 Six Day War, both East and West Jerusalem came under Israeli control. Additionally, in June of 1967, the government of Israel extended Israeli law and jurisdiction to East Jerusalem, but agreed that the Temple Mount would be maintained by the Jordanian Ministry of Religious Endowments. By 1993, the Oslo Accords stated the final status of Jerusalem would be determined by negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority. The Palestinian National Authority regarded East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. Today, the status of Jerusalem remains one of the core issues in the

²⁴ Wasserstein Bernard, *Divided Jerusalem: The Struggle for the Holy City*

Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israeli's occupational control of East Jerusalem has been repeatedly condemned by the United Nations.

Three World Faiths

For thousands of years, Jerusalem has drawn people from all over the world to this center of monotheism, the belief in one God. People of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths come to contemplate the stories of their ancestral patriarchs in the world of the prophets that they believe were sent by God. All three faiths trace their history back to the same source; revelations from God to specific messengers or prophets on Earth. Jerusalem is believed to be the link between the physical world and that of faith and ideas. In order to better understand the role Jerusalem plays in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, one must examine the basic principles of each faith.

Judaism

Jerusalem has been the holiest city in Judaism and the spiritual center of the Jewish people since the 10th Century BC. Judaism is the religion of the Jewish people. The values and history of the Jewish people is a major part of the foundation of the other Abrahamic religions, Christianity and Islam. Judaism began with the Covenant between God and Abraham. In Judaism, the most important religious principle is the belief in a single, omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, transcendent God, who created the universe and continues to govern it.²⁵

According to Jewish tradition, the God that created the world established a covenant with the Jewish people leading them out of their bondage in Egypt. God revealed his law (Torah) to them at Mount Sinai and chose them to be a light to all humankind.⁵ Judaism has a rich history of religious texts, but the central and most important religious document is the Torah. The Torah is the first part of the Jewish Bible. The second most important source is the Talmud, which consists of comprehensive written version of the Jewish oral law.²⁶

Jewish traditional or oral law, also called *Halakha*, is the interpretation of the laws of the Torah. The *Halakha* constitutes the practical application of the 613 commandments in the Torah.⁶ It is a comprehensive guide to all aspects of human life, both physical and spiritual. Its laws, guidelines, and opinions cover a vast range of situations and principles in an attempt to realize what is implied by the Central Biblical Commandment to "be holy as I your God am holy". The laws cover the best way for a Jew to live, when commandments conflict and how one may choose correctly, and what is implicit and

²⁵ Encyclopedia Judaica, <http://www.experienADfestival.com/a/Judaism/id/1895678>

²⁶ <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/jewfaq/halakhah.htm>

understood.²⁷ Judaism is among the oldest religions with a long tradition of documentation that is still in practice today.

Through the course of its history, variations of formulations of Jewish principles of faith have appeared, and though they differ with respect to certain details, the core ideology demonstrates a commonality. Jews trace their religious lineage to the biblical patriarch, Abraham, who established a covenant with God and is considered to be the starter of Judaism. Judaism is not only a set of beliefs about God. Jews believe people should be judged not so much by the intellectual content of their beliefs, but by the way they live their faith - by how much they contribute to the overall holiness of the world. In exchange for all the good God has done, Jews follow God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives. Jews follow a comprehensive way of life with rules and practices that affect every aspect of their faith. There are some religious beliefs that combine elements of Judaism with other elements. The most well-known is Christianity.

Christianity

Christianity is centered on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is a teacher, the model of a virtuous life, and the revealer of God. Jesus Christ is an incarnation of God and most importantly, the savior of humanity who suffered, died, and was resurrected to bring about salvation from sin.²⁸

Christians believe that Jesus Christ was put on Earth to teach God's plan for all humanity and to save the people of the world from their wrongdoings. In Christianity, God is almighty and rules over all of Heaven and Earth. He is the one that created the Earth and one day will cast judgment over the entire Earth. Christians understand that through Jesus Christ people can be saved from this judgment. "I believe in Jesus Christ, his only-begotten son, our Lord."²⁹

The traditional story of Jesus Christ tells of his birth in a stable in Bethlehem in the Holy Land to a young virgin named Mary who had become pregnant with the Son of God through the action of the Holy Spirit. The story of Jesus' birth is told in the writings of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament of the Bible.

After the story of his birth, little is known about Jesus until he began his ministry at the age of about 30. He then spent three years teaching, healing and working miracles. He taught in parables- everyday stories which had divine messages for those who would hear it. He had twelve disciples whom he called to follow him and help him in his work.⁸ Jesus Christ's teachings can be summarized briefly: love of God

²⁷ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/halakhah>

²⁸ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity>

²⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/Christianity>

and love of one's neighbor. Jesus said that he had come to fulfill God's law rather than teach it. Christians believe in justification by faith. This faith stems from their belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection, it is believed that Christians can have the right relationship with God whose forgiveness was made once and for all.⁹

In Christianity, Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. Jesus, having becoming fully human, suffered the pains and temptations of a moral man, yet he did not sin. As fully divine, he defeated death and rose to life again. By spreading the "Word of the Lord", Jesus was found guilty for blasphemy and was sentenced to death. He was executed by crucifixion. Three days after his death, Jesus arose from his tomb and appeared to his disciples. He later ascended into heaven.⁹ Christians believe that Jesus Christ will return to judge the living and the dead, granting everlasting life to his followers. "For Christians, [Jesus Christ](#) is the source of salvation and faith."⁹ Moreover, Christians believe that God took human form as Jesus Christ and is present today through the work of the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that there is a life after earthly death. While the actual nature of this life is not known, Christians believe that many spiritual experiences in this life help to give them some idea of what eternal life will be like. Christians are taught to worship the Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

In Christianity, the Holy Bible is the most important religious text. It is made up of two volumes, the Old Testament and the New Testament. It is believed by Christians that the Holy Bible was written by human authors under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The majority of the Old Testament is Jewish scripture, and it is used as moral and spiritual teaching materials by Christians. The New Testament contains the story of Jesus Christ and the early Church. In the New Testament, the message of Jesus Christ is referred to as the Gospel meaning good news.

Islam

Islam originated in the Middle East in the 6th Century in the city of Mecca. The city of Mecca was rising as a new commercial center with new wealth, but there was also a growing division between the poor and rich class that caused a challenge to the traditional system of the Arab tribal values. During this time, the Prophet Muhammad began to preach the message of the Quran. Islam is not considered a new religion nor is Muhammad seen as a founder of a new religion. Instead, Muhammad is seen as a religious reformer. Muhammad said that he did not bring a new message from a New God, but he called people back to the one true God and to a way of life that they had forgotten or deviated from.

A believer to Islam is known as a Muslim. The word Islam means peace and surrender to God.³⁰ In Islam, the Qur'an is considered to be the literal word of God, which forms the basis of Islamic teachings. Muslims refer to God as "Allah", which comes from the Arabic language and means literally the one and only God. It is said that in the Qur'an it declares that Allah is the same God that spoke to the Jews and Christians. So when Muslims speak about Allah (God), they are referring to the one and only God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad."

The Qur'an is the eternal, literal word of God preserved in the Arabic language. Muslims believed that God sent revelations first to Moses (the Torah), then to Jesus (The Bible), and then to the Prophet Muhammad through the Islamic scripture (The Qur'an).

For Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad has been the ideal model to follow as they attempt to do God's will. Muslims look upon Muhammad as both a prophet and a human figure that they try to imitate. Additionally, Muslims recognize four official sources to guide the development of Islamic law: The Qur'an, the Sunnah (actions and sayings of Muhammad), analogical reasoning (*qiyas*), and the consensus of the Muslim jurists (*ijma*).¹⁰ In Islam, *Shariah* is the expression of the divine will and "constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon a Muslim by virtue of his religion's belief."³¹

The basic principles of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam explain why their respective followers are so devoted to their faith. These basic principles demonstrate some of the fundamental similarities and differences between Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Each faith believes and worships in the same God and then has its own interpretation of why their faith is the "chosen one". Moreover, Jews, Christians, and Muslims have taken the "Word of God" and incorporated it into daily life cementing it into each of the cultures. These traditions, passed on from generation to generation further prove that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam will co-exist until the end of time. It is then that the role Jerusalem plays for each faith will be fully understood.

Similarities and Differences

In Jerusalem, Judaism, Christianity and Islam shared stories, prophets and a devotion to this Holy Place. Islam and Christianity originated from Judaism, and all share many of the same beliefs. For each faith, their history is told differently, but the essence of their stories is remarkably similar. All three faiths are collectively known as Abrahamic religions because they all trace their origins, history, and religious belief to the covenant of God made with Abraham in the

³⁰ Emerick Yahya, A Complete Idiot's Guide to Understanding Islam

³¹ <http://www.britannica.com/Shariah>

Hebrew Bible. “Jews, Christians and Muslims can all claim, if not physical, certainly spiritual descent from a common ancestor.”³² The most striking similarity is that all three faiths believe and worship in the same God.

All three faiths trace their history from the same source, revelations from God through prophets. Each faith traces their history through Abraham. However, the details of their stories are slightly different. For example, Muslims consider Ismael, the first-born son of Abraham, to be the “Father of the Arabs” and Abraham’s second son, Isaac, to be the “Father of the Hebrews”. Jews refer to Abraham as “Our Father Abraham”. Muslims believe that Muhammad is God’s final prophet. Christians believe Jesus Christ is the Messiah who was anointed by God as ruler and savior of humanity.

It is in the holy scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that the stories are slightly different. “The Holy Scriptures of three faiths are not the same; but they share a foundational role a belief in divinely given written sacred scriptures.” For Muslims, the Qur’an is the scripture of Islam. In Christianity, the Holy Bible is the written “Word of God.” In Judaism, the Hebrew Bible (Torah) is used as the moral and spiritual teaching material by Jews. The Holy Bible and the Qur’an do share similarities though. The Qur’an contains many references to people and events that are mentioned in the Bible. For example, the Qur’an has stories of the prophets of Islam, along with stories that include Moses and Jesus. Muslims believe that Moses was given the Torah (Hebrew Bible), and Jesus was given the Gospel from God. Muslims believe that part of God’s teachings has been lost or distorted to produce what are now the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament.¹³ Moreover, Muslims believe that the Qur’an is the final revelation from God and the completion of the previous revelations.

A fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity is the concept of Jesus Christ. Christians believe in the Trinity. It refers to the teaching that One God comprises three distinct, eternally co-existing persons: the Father (from whom the Son and Spirit proceed), the Son (incarnate in Jesus Christ) and the Holy Spirit. There is criticism that Christianity is not a monotheistic religion because of the belief in the Holy Trinity, the notion of three separate Gods. However, the Christians believe the concept of the Trinity represents both the immanence and transcendence of God.

In all three faiths, there exists the expectation of an individual who will proclaim the end of time. Judaism awaits the coming of the Jewish Messiah, a human being who will usher in a messianic era of peace and prosperity for both the living and the deceased. This

³² Catherwood Christopher, *A Brief history of the Middle East: From Abraham to Arafat*

“messiah” will bring about a revival of the ancient Kingdom of Israel and construct the Third Temple on the Temple Mount.³³ Christians also believe in a judgment day. Their judgment day occurs after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Christians believe there will be an anti-Christ (false prophet), and Jesus Christ will defeat him in a battle called the Battle of Armageddon. Islam awaits both the Second Coming of Christ and the “Day of Judgment”.

Conflict over Jerusalem

There is no other city in the world where three world religions shared common roots, faith and values, and yet, so often find themselves in conflict while trying to remain faithful to their beliefs. No other city can compare to the historically and religiously significant sites of Jerusalem. All three faiths have an identity within the Holy City. Currently, Jerusalem is divided into four quarters: Armenian, Christian, Muslim and Jewish. Although Jerusalem contains many historical and religious sites, there is one site that is at the Center of religious and political control. One of the holiest sites to Judaism and Islam is the Temple Mount (Noble Sanctuary).

The Temple Mount (Noble Sanctuary) has been the focus of intense investigation, much debate and discussion, and growing controversy. Among the controversies about the Temple Mount (Noble Sanctuary) is the precise location of the First Temple build by the Jews. There is no evidence that pinpoints the exact location since the First Temple dates back to the 10th Century BC. For Jews, the Temple Mount is where King Solomon built the First Temple of Israel. It was then later destroyed by the Babylonians. Years later, the Jews returned from exile and built the Second Temple on the same site under Herod the Great. He expanded the area of the Second Temple (Temple Mount) by building walls and towers to support it. The Second Temple was destroyed during the first Jewish – Roman War in 70 AD. The only part of the Temple Mount that remained intact was the western supporting wall referred as the Western Wall. In Judaism, the Western Wall is the most sacred place because of its close proximity to the Holy of Holiness in the original Temple. The Western Wall is a center of mourning over the destruction of the temples and the persecution of the Jews.

The Temple Mount (Noble Sanctuary or Haram-esh-Sharif) is identified in both Jewish and Islamic tradition as the area of Mount Moriah where Abraham offered up his son in sacrifice to God. “Both sides equally reverence the identical spot in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount, which is closely associated with a key event in Abraham’s life – his decision to sacrifice his son until enabled by God to choose an alternative sacrifice.”¹⁴ For Muslims, the Dome of Rock, located on

³³ <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TempleMountMiddleEast>

Noble Sanctuary (Temple Mount), is identified as the site where the Prophet Muhammad, accompanied by the Angel Gabriel, made the Night Journey to the Throne of God. The Al Aqsa Mosque, adjacent to the Dome of Rock, constitutes Islam's third holiest site after Mecca and Medina.³⁴

Christianity's devotion to the city of Jerusalem derives from the events associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Specifically, the Church of Holy Sepulchre, located in the center of Jerusalem, is the holiest site in the Christian faith. According to the writings of the New Testament, the church was built on the site where Jesus Christ was crucified, buried and rose from the dead.³⁵ In addition, the Via Dolorosa, which is the route that Jesus Christ took on his way to his crucifixion, is meaningful and important to the Christian followers as well.

Jerusalem is home to some of the holiest sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Yet, it is the law of physics that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. With that said, the most likely scenario for this sacred location is no solution. The battle for control of the Temple Mount (Noble Sanctuary) is a microcosm of the struggle for Jerusalem. The followers of Judaism and Islam are so intertwined with their own beliefs that neither side is willing to compromise.

Conclusion

The city of Jerusalem has played a key role in civilization since the beginning of time. In ancient times, it is thought that the nation of Israel was situated strategically on the military and trade routes linking Europe, Africa, and Asia. Jerusalem rested physically on a central mountain ridge. Based on its location, the Middle East, including Jerusalem, is thought of as the place of origin for many things we know today. For example, mathematics, astronomy and computer technology all have their origins in the Middle East.. The evolution of human thought and free will in this part of the world confirms the likelihood of why religion was able to transform from polytheism to monotheism. More Specifically, Abraham may have experienced his revelation with God on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem because of its close proximity to "heaven" and God. This may be the reason why Jerusalem was chosen as the beginning and the end to each monotheistic faith.

Throughout its history, Jerusalem has held the sacred soils for Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All three faiths trace their history to Abraham and to Jerusalem. This is a major reason why Jerusalem has

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http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/Hi/English/Static/In_depth/Middleast/2000/HolyPlaces/Al-Asqa

³⁵ http://www.orthodoxphotos.com/Holyland/Holy_Sepulchre_Church/Index/shtml.

been in control by each faith at some point in the past. Moreover, this rich history plays a key role in the identity of each of these faiths. Ancestors of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have shed blood over this Holy Land, and this will never be forgotten. The unwillingness for Jews, Christians and Muslims to compromise for the future by putting aside differences from the past confirms the notion that it is impossible to decipher who rightfully should have control of Jerusalem. Jerusalem's turbulent past will continue to influence the present and future for each of these faiths.

Another contributing factor in determining the outcome of Jerusalem is the impact the "Holy Scriptures" have on Jews, Christians and Muslims. Worshippers of the Torah, Holy Bible, and Qur'an all claim their respective religious text to be the "Word of God". The fundamental similarities and slight differences found throughout the "Holy Scripture" of each text "validate" for its followers the belief that it is truly the "Word of God". For example, the belief in the same God who had revelations with Abraham and then Moses lends itself to think that these accounts actually occurred. However, since the details of these accounts are slightly different for each faith, it reinforces for the follower of that particular faith that his/her version is truly God's word. Furthermore, in each holy book, it explains how each of its followers should lead his/her life on Earth. The commitment and devotion that Jews, Christians and Muslims have to lead their lives based on their version of the "Word of God" greatly impacts their identity. It has become part of their culture. For example, each faith has its own account of the "Day of Judgment" occurring around Jerusalem, and how its respective followers will have salvation. As a result, the belief and extreme devotion that Jewish, Christian, and Muslim followers have for their own faith fosters the strong connection they feel towards Jerusalem. Based on "Holy Scripture" and the extreme devotion to God, each faith will remain deeply rooted in the city of Jerusalem until the end of time. Ironically, the city of Jerusalem, termed the "City of Peace", will always remain a city of conflict.

INTER-FAITH DIALOGUES

Introduction

Religion plays a large part in the rhythm of daily life, not only through prayer and study, but also in determining the end of the work week. Shops in different neighborhoods close down on Fridays for the Muslim holiday, Saturdays for the Jewish Sabbath, and Sundays for the Christian day of rest. Religious festivals and remembrances, like Eid al-Fitr (the Festival of Fast-Breaking, celebrated at the end of Ramadan), or the Jewish Passover holiday, or Easter Sunday as determined by the Roman or Eastern Orthodox Christian churches are all recognized as national holidays in different countries. Religion, after all, is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (for example, freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace.³⁶

The ambiguity of religion's relationship to conflict is better understood when religion is recognized as a type of living tradition, "a historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute the tradition."³⁷ Violent and nonviolent actors alike claim monolithic authority to justify and advocate as well as to deflect criticism. For instance, religious leaders who condemn violence often seek to distance their religion from co-religionists who have committed acts of terror or provoked violent conflict.³⁸ While this is an understanding impulse, labeling a religious actor or a religious movement unauthentic is ultimately misleading and unhelpful. As Marc Gopin writes, "*The fact is that while I agree that there are great untapped resources for peacemaking and conflict resolution in the world's religions, there is also a vast reservoir or texts and traditions ready and waiting to be used to justify the most barbaric acts by modern standards of human rights.*"³⁹

Human beings must respect one other in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a previous asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations can and should be actively promoted. This is possible by finding,

³⁶ Abdul Aziz Said and Nathan C. Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution" (presented at the European Parliament for the European Centre for Common Ground, September 2001), 1.

³⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1997), 204-205.

³⁸ David Little, "Religion, Conflict and Peace," *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 31, no. 1 (2006), 98.

³⁹ Marc Gopin, "Religion and International Relations at the Crossroads," *International Studies Review* 3, no.3 (Fall 2001),

strengthening and extending a few common and basic values that everybody has the opportunity to adopt. The fundamental belief is that mutual respect, trust and tolerance are the way towards a better world.

Monotheistic Religions

Even though the earliest known instance of monotheism dates to the reign of Akhenaton of Egypt in the 14th Century BC, monotheism is more characteristic of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, all of which view God as the creator of the world, who oversees and intervenes in human events, and as a beneficent and holy being, is the source of the highest good.

Judaism

Judaism is the oldest surviving monotheistic religion, arising in the eastern Mediterranean in the second millennium BC. Abraham is traditionally considered to be the first Jew and to have made a covenant with God. Because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize Abraham as their first prophet, they are also called the Abrahamic religions.

Judaism is more concerned with actions than dogma. In other words, observance of rules regulating human behavior has been of more concern than debates over beliefs. Jewish law, or halakhal, includes 613 commandments given by God in the Torah, as well as rules and practices elaborated by scholars and custom. Jewish law covers matters such as prayer and ritual, diet, rules regulating personal status (marriage, divorce, birth, death, inheritance, etc.); and Passover (the feast celebrating the exodus of the Jews from slavery in Egypt).

Christianity

Christianity started as an offshoot of Judaism in the 1st Century. Until the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 324 AD, early Christian communities were often persecuted. Then the Roman Empire became the Holy Roman Empire, and its capital was relocated from Rome to Constantinople (formerly Byzantium and now Istanbul). Many early Christian saints lived in the Middle East.

Veneration of Saints in folk Christianity, in particular the concept of patron saints responsible for a certain aspect of life or society, may in some cases become indistinguishable from polytheism, and indeed in many cases seamlessly continues pre-Christian traditions.⁴⁰

Christians in the Middle East are found throughout the Arab world, and occupy very different positions socially, demographically, economically, religiously, culturally, and politically. For example, Christians in Lebanon comprise over one-third of the country's

⁴⁰ "Polytheism and Christian Belief" by Michael C. Rea _The Journal of Theological Studies_ 2006 57(1) :pp133-148

population and hold a relatively significant share of the political and social capital; Christians in Egypt comprise about 10 percent of the country's 75 million population and have a relatively meager share of the political and social capital. Christians in Palestine comprise about 3 percent or less in the West Bank and Gaza and have some voice in Palestinian political and cultural affairs; they represent about 2 percent of the population of Israel and have little or no voice in politics. In Iraq, they represent less than one million of the thirty million population and have little political significance; the same can be said about Christians in Syria. In Jordan they represent about three percent of the population and enjoy a relatively significant profile in politics, economics, culture and society.

Islam

Islam arose in the early 7th century AD in the settled desert community of Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia). It developed from both the Judeo-Christian tradition and the cultural values of the nomadic Bedouin tribes of Arabia.

Islam has long encouraged interfaith dialogue and action, with historical examples coming from Muslim Spain, Mughal India, and even starting as far back as Muhammad's time, where people of the Abrahamic faiths lived in harmony.

Many traditional and religious texts and customs of the faith have encouraged this, including specific verses in the Quran, such as: "O people! Behold, we have created you from a male and a female and have made you into nations and tribes so that you might come to know one another".

Polytheistic Religions

Polytheism is the belief in or worship of multiple deities, such as gods and goddesses. These are usually assembled into a pantheon, along with their mythologies and rituals. The word comes from the Greek words *poly* + *theoi*, literally "many gods." Many religions, both historical and contemporary, have a belief in polytheism, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Shinto, Ancient Greek Polytheism, Neo-pagan faiths and Anglo-Saxon paganism.

Polytheists do not usually worship all the gods equally, but are monolatrists, specializing in the worship of one particular deity. Other polytheists can be kathenotheists, worshipping different deities at different times.

Polytheism is a type of theism (belief in one or more gods) but contrasts with monotheism (belief in a singular god), which is the dominant belief in the world today. In certain religions the various deities are seen as emanations of a greater Godhead.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the predominant religion of the India. It is often

referred to as Sanâtana Dharma, a Sanskrit phrase meaning “the eternal law” by its practitioners. Hindu beliefs vary widely, with concepts of God and/or gods ranging from panentheism, pantheism, polytheism, monotheism, and atheism with Vishnu and Shiva being the most popular deities. Other notable characteristics include a belief in reincarnation and karma, as well as personal duty, or dharma.

Among its roots is the historical Vedic religion of Iron Age India, and as such Hinduism is often stated to be the “oldest religious tradition” or “oldest living major tradition.” It is formed of diverse traditions and types and has no single founder. Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion after Christianity and Islam, with approximately a billion adherents. Countries with large Hindu populations can be found across southern Asia.

Hinduism’s vast body of scriptures is divided into Śruti (“revealed”) and Smṛiti (“remembered”). These scriptures discuss theology, philosophy and mythology, and provide information on the practice of dharma (religious living). Among these texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads are the foremost in authority, importance and antiquity. Other major scriptures include the Tantras, the Agama, the Purānas and the epics Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana. The Bhagavad Gītā, a treatise from the Mahābhārata, spoken by Krishna, is sometimes called a summary of the spiritual teachings of the Vedas.

Hinduism has a developed system of symbolism and iconography to represent the sacred in art, architecture, literature and worship. These symbols gain their meaning from the scriptures, mythology, or cultural traditions. The syllable Om, and the Swastika sign have grown to represent Hinduism itself, while other markings such as tilaka on the forehead identify a follower of the faith.

Buddhism

In Buddhism, there are higher beings commonly designed (or designated) as gods or Devas; however, Buddhism, at its core, does not teach the notion of praying nor worship to the Devas or any god(s). Devas, in general, are beings that have had more positive karma in their past lives than humans. Their lifespan eventually ends when their lives end, they will be reborn as devas or as other beings. When they accumulate negative karma, they are reborn as either human or any of the other lower beings. Humans and other beings could also be reborn as a deva in their next rebirth, if they accumulate much positive karma.

Buddhism has largely flourished outside of India. In his life, Buddha undertook many fasts, penances and austerities. Ultimately Buddha abandoned these methods on his discovery of the Middle Way or Magga.

Taoism

A Taoic religion is a religion, or religious philosophy, that

focuses on the East Asia concept of *Tao* (“The Way”). This forms a large group of religions including Taoism, Confucianism, Jeung San Do, Shinto, Yiguandao, Chondogyo, Chen Tao and Caodaism. In large parts of East Asia, Buddhism has taken on some taotic features.

Tao can be roughly stated to be the flow of the universe, or the force behind the natural order. It is believed to be the influence that keeps the universe balanced and ordered and is associated with nature, due to a belief that nature demonstrates the Tao. The flow of Chi, as the essential energy of action and existence, is compared to the universal order to Tao. Following the Tao is also associated with a “proper” attitude, morality and lifestyle. This is intimately tied to the complex concept of De, or literally “virtue”. De is the active expression to Tao.

Dialogue Initiatives

Jewish-Christian

To better understand the long path of reconciliation between the Church and Israel, it is necessary to look briefly at the past. History is the teacher of life, the ancients used to say. Recognizing the common past of tensions and struggles allow one to see with more serenity the importance and the future of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

Jewish-Christian dialogues which began in many places all over the world after Second World War, gained momentum in the late sixties and in the seventies. In the early stages of the dialogue, most Jews were primarily interested in discussing the history of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Many Christians, on the other hand, wanted to discuss theological topics and to measure their understanding of Scripture against Jewish interpretations. While this asymmetry in the dialogue can still be felt, there has been a tremendous growth toward mutuality in the eighties and nineties. Both sides are interested in understanding both the faith and the life experiences of the other, and in finding ways that they can work together for peace and justice in the world, especially in the Middle East.

Jews-Christian dialogues have enabled Christians to appreciate anew the Jewishness of Jesus and the Jewish background of the New Testament, as well as to learn about vitality of Jewish life and thought today. Jews, in turn, have learned about the many varieties of Christian thought and practice, and about the urgent efforts that Christians have been making to purge their faith of every vestige of “the teaching of contempt.” Very frequently, participants in such dialogues report that their faith is strengthened and clarified by the experience.

Muslim-Christian

Dialogue between Muslims and Christians is permanent and continuous. It has not stopped since the early Islamic period up till now, even though it has not gone on in a positive manner during all the epochs. The reasons for this have to do with occasional confrontations

lying outside the realm of the two religions.

Muslim and Christians share a long history of strained and often confrontational relationships as well as of experiences of mutual enrichment. Both communities have been engaged in spreading their faiths and have contributed to the emergence of religious plurality in hitherto homogeneous societies. While there are many examples where Muslims and Christians have lived alongside each other for generations or centuries, sharing each other's lives and cooperating with each other for a common good, attention today is focused on contexts.

Dialogue has been manifest in environments where Muslims have lived together with other people belonging to heavenly revealed religions. Andalusia, under Islamic rule, topped all the countries where atmosphere of coexistence and tolerance was prevalent; so were the parts of the Middle East, especially Jerusalem (which was a fertile land for such coexistence and tolerance). The same holds true in Morocco, which gained fame because of the good treatment it reserved for the Jews who were permitted to be free citizens.

There have been relations between Christians and Muslims. The Qur'an itself contains reference to Christians and indications on the way dialogue should be conducted. At different periods and in different places the relationship has been one of co-operation or conflict. There has been much cultural interaction between Christians Muslims. One could mention the Christian contributions to the Islamic assimilation of the Greek heritage in Abbassid times and the later transmission of this heritage to Europe.

Perhaps the oldest of all such dialogue groups is the Association for Religious Fraternity (al-ikhâ' al-dînî) in Cairo. In its present form it dates to 1975, but in fact, it is the revival of an earlier body, the Association of the Sincere Brothers (ikwân al-safâ), which met from 1941 until the Egyptian revolution in 1953. It is unlikely that there were many places in the world at that time where Christians and Muslims were meeting together for formal dialogue on a regular basis.

Christian-Muslim dialogue groups exist in a number of countries. One example, of course, is Al-Liqâ' which is headquartered in Bethlehem; yet there are others, such as the Pakistan Association for Interreligious Dialogue, the Warm Hearts Association in Bangladesh, and the Silsilah Movement in the Philippines.

A joint Christian Muslim dialogue group exists in the Lebanon. An interesting feature of this body is that, on the Christian side, it includes representatives of the different Churches, and on the Muslim side there are representatives of the Sunni, Shi'a and Druze communities.

The Middle East Council of Churches has also been instrumental in setting up a Christian-Muslim dialogue group covering the whole of the Middle East.

Jewish-Muslim

Jews and Muslims are sharing many traditions of love and respect in the midst of a generations-old conflict that has brought about distrust, violence and non-cooperation between the two communities in many corners of the world.

The Center for Jewish-Muslim Relations hopes to strengthen relations between Jews and Muslims through creating leadership collaboration; enabling grassroots education and interaction and providing a forum for shared inquiry and communication through the written word. Fulfilling this will enable them to fight anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, enhance Jewish and Muslim identity in pluralistic society, and work together for the good of the wider community.

Jewish and Muslim religious laws (known as the Halakha and the Sharia respectively) differ in many details, but they share much in outlook. Both are vast codes which touch on such diverse matters as family relations, social behavior, personal habits, and political attitudes. From cradle to grave, morning to night, few acts of an observant Jew or Muslim escape the demands of the law. But “law” is not an entirely apt term to describe the Halakha and Sharia, for they contain many precepts outside the jurisdiction of law as understood in the West – how to wash, what to eat, where to pray.

For Jews, living in accordance with the Halakha is the primary means of reaffirming God’s covenant with Abraham. For Muslims, fulfilling the Sharia permits them to live as Muhammad and his companions did; for both, the letter of the law counts as much as its spirit. Jews and Muslims have always been most preoccupied with the religious code of laws. Scholars of both communities have devoted enormous attention to elaborating a complete system of precepts out of the books of divine inspiration, their oral commentaries, juridical treatises, and legal handbooks.

Development of the Halakha and Sharia followed similar patterns. Both were drawn up by pious men without formal school or government influence. In some cases, terms of analysis are so similar in the two codes, the direct influence of Jewish jurisprudence on the Islamic seems likely – although ultimately both derived much from common sources of Middle East thought and Greek logic. Indeed, both were elaborated primarily in Iraq; and compilation of the Talmud drew to a close in the 6th Century, while collections of the Hadith began not long thereafter, making direct influence plausible.

Parallel law codes led to many similarities in the way of life of traditional Jewish and Muslim communities. A sampling of similarities

follows: synagogue and mosque services are both informal, with a great deal of coming and going; the absence of a priest in charge means that each person can pray on his own, adding an element of chaos to the proceedings. Women need not go to services those who choose to be relegated to a separate section where they are less visible to men. References to God, to blessings and curses, and to ritual life permeate conversations among Jews and Muslims.

Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien (GRIC)

Groupe de Recherches Islamo-Chretien (GRIC) is a network of scholars around the Mediterranean who specialize in inter-faith dialogue. Comprised solely of Muslim and Christian scholars, the group primarily has branches in Tunisia, Morocco, France and Belgium. Every year a meeting of representatives of the national sections is held, the work accomplished is reviewed and material for publication is approved. GRIC has tackled the following questions: revelation, secularism, faith and justice.

It is at present working on the concept of sin and ethical responsibility, and also on the notion of exclusion. Three works by GRIC have been published so far.⁴¹ A fourth book is in preparation on sin and ethical responsibility.

Vatican initiatives

The Roman Catholic Church issued the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate*, instituting major policy changes in the Catholic Church's policy toward non-Christian religions in 1965.

Pope John Paul II has been a major proponent of interfaith dialogue, promoting meetings in Assisi in the nineteen eighties. However, Pope Benedict XVI has taken a more prudent approach, stressing the need for inter-cultural dialogue, but reasserting Christian theological identity. In the book published with Marcello Pera in 2004, the Pope "*explains clearly that an inter-religious dialogue in the strict sense of the word is impossible*". He called for more discussion of the practical consequences of religious differences.

Former Crown Prince Hassan

As part of efforts to promote significant dialogue amongst followers of monotheistic faiths, Prince Hassan has taken the lead among Arab intellectuals. He has initiated several inter-faith meetings, including with lesser known communities, such as with the patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the meeting, the Prince stressed the significance of dialogue in societies, and has warned against the danger of moderates coming under attack from extremists of all religions.

⁴¹ *Ces Ecritures qui nous Questionnent, la Bible et le Coran*, Paris, Centurion, 1987; *Foi et Justice* 1993 Paris, Centurion; *Pluralisme et Laïcité. Chrétiens et Musulmans* Proponent, 1996 Paris, Bayard Ed. Centurion

United Nations Initiatives

The United Nations held a special session of the General Assembly at the level of world leaders in New York in November 2008 to discuss the interfaith dialogue initiative taken by King Abdullah.

The idea was to send a unified clear message that the world community is in consensus in promoting interfaith dialogue, and in speaking against extremist, intolerance, and terrorism”.

A two-day interfaith conference at the United Nations encouraged dialogue among different faiths while rejecting the use of religion as a tool for terrorism and violence. Eighty nations participated in the Conference for Dialogue between Religions and Civilizations, which was initiated by Saudi Arabia as a follow-up to a similar symposium it led in Madrid in July 2007.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared that the International Day of Peace be observed on 21st September every year as “a day of global cease-fire and nonviolence, an invitation to all nations and people to honor a cessation of hostilities.”

Inter-Faith Dialogue in Israel-Palestine

Some of the most successful efforts for inter-faith reconciliation are happening in Israel and Palestine through the Middle East Peace Initiative. The Middle East Peace Initiative began in 2003, when one hundred and twenty-three members of the American Clergy Leadership Conference went to Israel with a desire for reconciliation, after a profound period of reflection about the painful historical relationship between Christians and Jews. Christians also engaged in dialogue with Muslim clerics.

For the last two decades scholars and practitioners of peace have promoted the hypothesis that religions actors can be sources of peace and pluralism, and not only sources of war, violence and conflict. Others are less sure of the benefits of including a religious aspect in resolving conflicts. In Israel-Palestine, some even feel that the inclusion of religious actors do more harm than good in attempting to resolve the conflict.

It is usually incorrect to view any conflict as being caused or dominated by one source or dimension. Thus, religion and religious identity in places of conflict like Northern Ireland, the Philippines, India or Israel/Palestine should be seen as one influential factor among several others, such as economics or politics. Nevertheless, in a context like the Israel-Palestine conflict, religion has been manipulated by the three religious groups involved to fuel and perpetuate past and current violence (religious symbols, rituals, and sites are constantly brought into the conflict dynamics). It is, therefore, crucial to constructively engage people’s religious identify as a source of peace and pluralism to counter its manipulation in the cycle of political violence.

Having completed a study that examined inter-faith dialogue in five Middle Eastern societies of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine, it became clear that many civil societies and some of these governments understand the potential constructive role that interreligious meetings can play in bringing the gaps within each society. However, there are few inter-faith initiatives between Israelis and Palestinians in the region. Some of the reasons Palestinians gave for demonstrating caution in participating in such meetings were the risk of normalizing the occupation; frustration resulting from the failed Oslo peace process; the fact that Jewish-Israeli organizations are the initiators of these activities; and that most of these meetings avoid focusing on the political reality of occupation and oppression.

Among the more successful initiatives is the well-cited January 2002 Alexandria meeting, convened by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. George Carey, and hosted by the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi. This resulted in the Alexandria Declaration, the first ever declaration signed by leaders of all faiths in the Holy Land, including the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, Bakshi-Doron; the Chief Justice of the Sharia Courts, Sheikh Taisir Tamimi; the Latin Patriarch, His Beatitude Michel Sabbah; Deputy Foreign Minister, Rabbi Michael Melchoir; and the Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem, the Rt. Reverend Riah Abu El-Assal. Their statement called for the Palestinian and Israel governments to implement a peace process and, as religious leaders, they pledged to continue a joint quest for a just peace that would lead to reconciliation in Jerusalem and the Holy Land, for the common good of all the peoples. They also announced the establishment of a permanent joint committee to carry out the recommendations of this declaration, and to engage with their respective political leaderships accordingly.

Unfortunately, escalating violence reduced the impact of this important declaration, and its translation into immediate practical steps on the ground. However, the recent inauguration of a Palestinian/Israeli Religious Leaders Council and the establishment of interfaith centers in Jerusalem and Gaza can be seen as offshoots of the Alexandria process.

Although interfaith dialogue is not going to resolve the conflict and end the occupation, many Palestinian participants continue to attend such dialogues in hopes of educating Israeli Jews about their national aspirations and accurately presenting their Muslim and Christian faiths and their basic tenets. Similarly, Jews who attend these meetings, though they understand that they are meeting with politically “marginalized” Palestinians, discover that they are alike in their desire for peace and rejection of violence.

Successes and Failures

The inter-faith dialogue, when it runs successfully, is a place

for learning, communicating and sharing of information that should alter the way in which we perceive. To clear the neutral pathways and dark hallways of the cobwebs that prevent such clear perception, we need some basic rules of engagement. It can be enormously valuable for persons of each religious community to hear members of the other communities confess the problems and shortcomings that the community is experiencing.

The principal goal must be to build trust; this can be achieved through coming to know and understand the other. Those engaged in these efforts must be prepared to take risks and confront the possibility of offending or alienating both members of one's own community and those of the other communities. But over time and through creative efforts, misunderstandings can be overcome and trust will hopefully follow. As the very core of any trust-building program must be empathy. Authentic trust cannot be built without convincing demonstration of empathy emanating from all sides.

Future Scenarios

Cultures can change, and the nature of their impact on politics and economics can vary from one period to another. Yet the major differences in political and economic development among civilizations are clearly rooted in their different cultures.

The religious diversity of the Middle East is matched by its political complexity. There are very few places in the world today where the political and human stakes are as great, and where the danger of military conflict is so high.

Dialogue and tolerance are closely connected. Without tolerance one cannot expect to be able to create a healthy dialogue. Through dialogue, mutual understanding can be achieved. The goal of a genuine dialogue is not conversion but mutual understanding and it is achieved by conviction, not convenience.⁴²

Inter-faith dialogue in the Middle East is an emerging field of practice. It needs a great deal of support and courage. Nevertheless, to develop into a potentially influential force in local and regional politics, the organizers need to take certain steps, such as designing and implementing inter-faith dialogue within a strategic framework; launching initiatives characterized by both vision and long-term sustainability; linking the inter-faith agenda to the concrete realities of the local communities; and fortifying the dialogue process against threats from external political events. Inter-faith dialogue can have a profound influence on peace in the Middle East.

On the political level, both Jews and Palestinians need to compromise on the tangible issues in dispute, including territory,

⁴² UNESCO's actions for the Dialogue among Civilizations, Delhi, India 9 to 10 July 2003.

sovereignty in Jerusalem, water resources, arsenals of weapons, and the repatriation or rehabilitation of refugees. There is also need to encourage policies that make both Muslims and Christians feel comfortable in other countries in the Middle East. That is one of major factor leading to the emigration from Israel (and Palestine) of both Muslims and Christians.

Conclusion

Many people have expressed an interest in joining with those of other faiths to meet and pray together for peace in the world, especially the Middle East. Inter-faith prayer can be a moving and heart-opening experience that shines like a beacon in the world fraught with division and hopelessness. There will be learning from one another through prayer and the sharing of traditions and celebrations. One will also come to see his and/or her own tradition in a new light. Praying and talking together will provide an opportunity for intercultural as well as inter-religious dialogue and connection, resulting in true friendships and other opportunities to work together in community.

The most important function of learning about the other lies in seeing them as human beings, like oneself, which is the first step towards a more emphatic relationship. When one encounters each other as people, one begins to communicate on a human level. A process of humanization, rather than demonization, can occur. Hopefully, this will, at the very least, stop one from killing each other, and, at best, will provide the basis for the mutual recognition of ones legitimate needs and rights, such as self-determination and security.

ISRAEL – THE JEWISH VIEW

Introduction

Is it pure coincidence or the result of divine prophecy to mankind that the Jewish DNA has survived over 2000 years of the Diaspora movement and persecution? How did their identity (religious belief and Hebrew language) remain unaltered over centuries? This is what makes Jewish history so unique. Despite various documented efforts to exterminate them, their identity has not been destroyed. On the contrary, persecutions have only contributed to a strengthening of this identity.

For most Jews this identity meant a return to their biblical homeland, Israel, also known as their “promised land”. Although God promised the holy land to the Jewish people, a thorny issue still exists between the Zionist Jews and the Anti-Zionist Jews as to whether or not the creation of the Zionist state of Israel was a result of divine prophecy.

Throughout the ancient scriptures, the Jews are described as God’s “chosen people”, to be an example to other nations. God establishes a covenant with the Jewish forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They promised to serve him. On His part, He promised them and their descendants the ‘Holy Land’. However, they did not keep their part of the bargain, and the Jewish nation was then scattered all over the world. Nevertheless, God promised them that a time would come when they would return to their land.

Jewish history

Jewish identity is deeply rooted in its biblical history. This history begins with God’s call to Abraham to leave his country, Ur of the Chaldeans⁴³, and to become his servant: “leave your country... and go to the land I will show you”. This is how he came to the land of Canaan, which today encompasses Israel, the rest of Palestine, Lebanon and some parts of Jordan, Syria and northeastern Egypt. There, the Lord made his promise to him: “to your offspring I will give this land”. The same was repeated to Abraham’s son, Isaac and his grandson, Jacob⁴⁴.

Over the centuries, God kept his covenant with the Jews even though they acknowledge that they did not always deserve it. During Samuel’s tenure as the Jewish High Priest, many Jews departed from God’s commandments. Fearing that the presence of the Lord would disappear with Samuel’s death, the Jews asked God

⁴³ Genesis 15:07. Ur was a city in ancient Sumer is now known as Tell el-Mukayyar (Iraq) and is situated near the Euphrates River.

⁴⁴ Genesis (26:4); Genesis (35:11).

for a King because they wanted to be like all other nations⁴⁵. Thus, for the first time since his call to Abraham, the Jews rejected God as their only King⁴⁶. Although against the idea, God satisfied their wish and gave them a King, but cautioned them at the same time about the demands the King would exact from his subjects. He emphasized that he would not intervene whenever the people would be discontent with the King's requests⁴⁷. Saul, a Hebrew from the tribe of Benjamin and son of Kish, was appointed the first King over Israel. Unfortunately, Saul committed two major sins: He made offerings to other Gods and ignored God's command during a battle against the Amalekites, to totally destroy everything they possessed⁴⁸. Consequently, the Lord rejected and replaced him.⁴⁹

Saul's successor was the popular King David, the youngest son of Jesse of Bethlehem. Yet, he didn't replace Saul as King right away. His fame begun at the time he was in Saul's service⁵⁰. Then he had killed the famous philistine giant, Goliath, with only a sling and a stone in his hands. From then onwards, all Jewish people knew that the Lord was with David. He was highly ranked in Saul's army and succeeded in all that he did. His popularity among the people grew even faster than that of Saul⁵¹. This confirmed divine revelation that David was now the anointed one. Thus, the many attempts at David's life by Saul started only ending after Saul's death.

The United Kingdom under David

Long before the nation of Israel requested its first king, the Jewish territory was divided into "the twelve tribes of Israel"⁵². Those were the descendants of Jacob's twelve sons Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph's tribe was allocated to his two son's Manasseh and Ephraim, and the tribe of Levi was dedicated to the priesthood and was denied any land. Instead, the levities became forty-eight cities, from which six were cities of refuge⁵³. It was Joshua, Moses successor, who led the Jews out of exile to their

⁴⁵ 1 Samuel 8: 4

⁴⁶ 1 Samuel 8:7

⁴⁷ 1 Samuel 8: 15-18

⁴⁸ 1Samuel 13:13; 1 Samuel 15:2

⁴⁹ 1 Samuel 15:26)

⁵⁰ David started as a Harp player in Saul's service to calm the tormenting of the evil spirit that was tormenting Saul. Since God had rejected him as King, his spirit had departed from him. 1 Samuel 16:14-18

⁵¹ 1 Samuel 18:7

⁵² The twelve tribes are the descendent of Jacob, whom God had renamed Israel in his advanced years. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/tribes.html

⁵³ Each city of refuge had a high priest who had to judge and protect an accused guard (Numerous 35:6-32).

promised land and distributed it to the descendants of Jacob's sons, according to God's commands⁵⁴

At the end of Saul's reign, the twelve tribes became divided. While the northern part Israel supported Saul, Judah, the southern part -which consisted of the tribes of Benjamin, Judah and some Levities - anointed David as their King. After Saul's death, his son Ish-bosheth succeeded him, but was killed seven years later by his officers. Hence, David became ruler over both territories and made Jerusalem a significant political and religious capital for strategic reasons. Due to its location on the boarder of both realms, David saw its strengthening as the answer to the reunification of all the Jewish tribes. Accordingly, he brought the Ark of God⁵⁵ to the city and fortified the walls of Jerusalem, the City of Zion. Thanks to his brilliant leadership skills and wisdom, the United Kingdom ejected their enemies, the Canaanites and Philistines, from the land, subdued them, secured and extended its boarders to the Euphrates in the North and to the Red Sea in the South⁵⁶. Thus, for the first time after the Jewish prosperity in Goshen (Egypt) before their captivity, Israel had flourished and gained enormous prosperity. Subsequently, David intended to build a temple, had even drafted his plans, where the Ark of the God could rest for ever. David reigned forty years (1000-961). and was succeeded by his son Solomon.

The United Kingdom under Solomon

David was succeeded by his son Solomon, who by the time was still a child. However, he became soon well-known for his wisdom, which he had asked God for⁵⁷ and was able to bring justice among the people. His great achievement was the building of the holy temple in Jerusalem⁵⁸. Solomon reinstated slavery to cut the expense of its construction. Thirty thousand slaves from Amorites, the Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites from all over Israel contributed to the finishing of the temple⁵⁹. During his reign, Solomon accumulated enormous wealth coming from an annual income of 666 gold talents excluded tax revenues from traders, merchants, from the Arabian kings and the internal governors⁶⁰. Yet, his weakness for women (seven hundred wives and three

⁵⁴ Joshua 13:8- 19:48

⁵⁵ The Ark was a chest made of acacia wood and overlaid inside and out with pure gold ,containing stone tablets with the Ten Commandments, scrolls of the Law, manna, and the rod of Aaron:

<http://hiswhisperings.wordpress.com/2008/03/01/what-is-the-ark-of-god/>

⁵⁶ 1Chronicle 18:3-14

⁵⁷ 1 kings 3:7

⁵⁸ 1 Kings 7:1

⁵⁹ 1Kings 9:20-23

⁶⁰ 1 King 10:14

hundred concubines) was his undoing. Solomon began to turn away from the Lord and worshiped the gods of his wives. In response, because of his sins, the Lord appeared to him and reduced his son's inheritance: "I will certainly tear the Kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates...I will tear it out from the hands of your sons and give him one third"⁶¹. With Solomon's death came the decline of the golden age, and until today the United Kingdom hasn't found to his fullness again.

The Jewish Diaspora

The Jewish Diaspora began at the time of Jacob when Joseph, his penultimate son, was sold by his brothers to Midianite merchants, who brought him to Egypt⁶². There, he served an official of pharaoh's court. Meanwhile, the Egyptian Pharaoh had a series of disturbing dreams and Joseph was the only one who could interpret them for him. Joseph predicted seven years of harvest, followed by seven years of famine in the land. The Torah states that he attained the position of Prime Minister of Egypt because God gave him wisdom to implement the plan to provide food supplies to Egypt and surrounding countries. During the time of famine, his family moved from Canaan to Egypt. Due to Joseph's position, the Pharaoh offered him and his family Goshen as the place to live. For several decades, the Hebrews flourished and multiplied until one day a new pharaoh was displeased with the situation and made them slaves. The period in Exile lasted four hundred years, just as God had predicted to Abraham⁶³.

Nevertheless, the beginning of the long suffering in exile has its roots in the disobedience of the Jewish ancestors. It was through Moses that God revealed to the Hebrews the consequences they would have to face in case of disobedience: "*Then the LORD will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There... you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart*"⁶⁴.

The Ten Lost Tribes of Israel

As already mentioned above, the United Kingdom was divided after the death of Solomon. His son Rehoboam ruled southern Judah while Israel was granted to Jeroboam. Over several centuries, Israel committed more sins in the eyes of the Lord, which explains the foreign invasion took place in the north.

⁶¹ 1Kings 11:7-11

⁶² His brothers were jealousy of him because he repeatedly dreamed of the future, being the head of them.

⁶³ Gen.15:13-14).

⁶⁴ Deuteronomy 28:64-65

It was in 722 B.C that the Assyrian King Shalmaneser V invaded the northern Kingdom of Israel and captured its last King, Hoshea. Hence, within two years, the Hebrew was deported and dispersed throughout the Middle East and became slaves. Since then, the trace of the ten tribes of Israel has been lost⁶⁵. Again, the disobedience of the Lord's commandments led to this destiny⁶⁶.

The fall of Judah

In 587 B.C, over 200 years after the fall of Israel, Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar and his army. This triggered a wave of deportation of the Jews toward the Euphrates valley. Ever since this event till the present day, most of the Jewish people lived in exile and never returned to their homeland.

Similar to previous cases, the lord was also angry about the sins committed throughout the country and about the people's ignorance of his warnings through the prophet Jeremiah. So, he handed the kingdom over to the King of Babylon. *"I will summon all the peoples of the north and my servant Nebuchadnezzar...I will bring them against this land ...and against all the surrounding nations. I will completely destroy...this country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years"*⁶⁷. "

The Original Diaspora

As it had already been foretold, the captivity in Babylonian lasted seventy years. The Lord instructed Cyrus⁶⁸, King and founder of Persian Empire, to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem and to provide the commodities for it such as gold and silver.

In this way, he steered the return of many Jews back to their homeland. This confirmed Jeremiah's prophecy about the promise of restoration: *"For I will restore the fortunes of the Land as they were before"*⁶⁹. *"It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble... the anointed one...on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation"*⁷⁰.

Indeed, in the next centuries, Jerusalem experienced severe invasions, from the Greeks in 333 BC, over the Hellenistic domination (332-167 BC) and the Hasmonean realm (167-63 BC), to the Romans occupation (63 BC-324 AD).

⁶⁵ http://www.ehow.com/how_2029227_jewish-diaspora.html

⁶⁶ 2 kings 17:7-23

⁶⁷ Jeremiah 25:1-11

⁶⁸ Isaiah 45

⁶⁹ Jeremiah 33:11

⁷⁰ Daniel 9: 25-27

It was only under Roman rule that Herodes⁷¹ became king of Judah (37 BC-4 AD) and completed the construction of the Temple. He also rebuilt the fortress of Jerusalem, whose remains have survived the ravages of time. When Herodes died in 4 AD⁷², Jerusalem was ruled by Roman governors whose political power slowly emerged in the region. The increasing oppression on Jewish people finally led to a revolt in 66 AD. In the same year, the Jews chased the Romans out of Jerusalem and slew about 600 troops. However, the Jewish rebellion was defeated in 70AC soon after Titus attacked their siege from the paschal festivities⁷³, cutting off all supplies and causing tremendous famine. Over one million Jews were suppressed; thousands died due to starvation while others were captured and carried out into exile. Meanwhile, the Romans burned the temple and people turned down every single stone trying to save the melted gold. This confirms the account of Jesus Christ who had said: “*Do you see these large buildings? Not one stone here will be left on another that will not be torn down*”⁷⁴. Since this period, the Jews haven’t presented sacrifices to God on their altar⁷⁵.

With the defeat of Jerusalem, the Sadducees, Jewish aristocrats, who had initiated the rebellion, disappeared. In comparison, the less conservative Pharisees that represented the middleclass businessmen, sought reconciliation with the Romans⁷⁶. The peace agreement didn’t last long, as already in 132 AD another Jewish rebellion under Simon Bar Kokhba took place in Jerusalem. After three years of war an estimated 580,000 Jews had been killed and the Romans prevailed, devastating the holy city and banning the Jews from living there⁷⁷. The ban was the stimulus for the biggest diaspora in Jewish history.

The Persecutions

Followed by the Roman ban in 135 AD, Jewish destiny was marked by a long period of persecutions throughout Europe and the Middle East that ended with the end of World War II in 1945.

Christians against Jews

Given that Christians claim Jesus to be the son of God, Jews have always rejected him as the proclaimed Messiah. Fearing his

⁷¹ Herodes count to the last Jewish destiny. He is famous for having given the order to execute all Hebrew firstborn after having known about the birth of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 2:16)

⁷² <http://www.sacklunch.net/biography/H/Herod.html>

⁷³ According to Josephus, who was in charge of the Jewish rebellion, about 2,500,000 Jewish were gathered in the city for the festivals.

⁷⁴ Mark 13:2

⁷⁵ <http://latter-rain.com/Israel/jewar.htm>

⁷⁶ <http://www.gotquestions.org/Sadducees-Pharisees.html>

⁷⁷ <http://www.fanaticus.org/DBA/armies/dba66.html>

growing popularity, both Pharisees and Sadducees staged a plot against him, and were responsible for his crucifixion under the Roman governor Pontus Pilatus. After his death in 33 AD, Jesus' followers, especially the apostles, were constantly persecuted by Roman Jews.

The antipathy between both parties was fostered after the legalization of Christianity through the Edict of Milan (313 AD). Its creator, Emperor Constantine the Great, had anticipated freedom of practice for all religions⁷⁸, but due to the growing influence of the Christian church, the emperor restricted Jewish rights. For instance, Jews were no longer permitted to hold Roman citizenship or to possess slaves⁷⁹. From that moment on, the Christian influence emerged and culminated in the establishment of the Papal hierarchy in Rome. Anti-Semitism can be traced back to this time with the labeling of Jews as the “Christ killers” (Chrysostom).

The Crusades

Most people tend to associate the Crusades with Christian military marches from Europe to Jerusalem spurred by the idea of protecting the ‘Holy City’ from Muslim invaders. But it was through these Crusades that the persecution of the Jews began throughout Europe.

When Pope Urban II made an appeal to the nobility and clerics in Clermont (France) on 17 November 1095, his concern was particularly directed towards the military success of the Muslim Seljuk Turks, who had extended their realm from Central Asia to the borders of the Byzantine empire in Syria. Most importantly, they had been provoking Christian pilgrims on their way to holy places in Israel. It was in 1071 AD, that the Muslims overrode the Byzantine troops in the battle of Manzikert. During the next two decades, there had been tensions on the border of both empires so that in 1095 AD the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus urged for help from his Christian brother Pope Urban II. The request caused a wave of fear among Christians which facilitated the Pope's mobilization of an army against “non-believers” in the name of Jesus Christ. Yet, some false priests and groups of German peasants took advantage of the new movement to plunder Jews of their wealth to finance the long journey to Jerusalem. Violence culminated in the devastation of Jewish communities in Speyer, Worms, and Mainz (Germany).

With the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 AD, the crusaders slaughtered many non-Christians living in the city, including Jews

⁷⁸ <http://ancienthistory.about.com/od/constantine/g/edictofmilan.htm>

⁷⁹ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/jews-romanlaw.html>

who were burned alive in their synagogues while seeking refuge. Others were sold into slavery.

The turning point came in 1187 BC with the victory of Muslims over the Crusaders under the Saladin. He reestablished the Jewish right to resettle in their holy city⁸⁰.

All in all, it is stated that almost a full half of all European Jews were persecuted during the period of the ten crusades from 1095 to 1291 AD⁸¹.

The Spanish Inquisition

Spain had been considered as one of the most tolerant countries in Europe for all religious groups. This changed as soon as the young royal couple, King Ferdinand V and Queen Isabella I, requested the creation of an inquisition system in the 15th Century. In 1480 AD, the royal couple appointed the first powerful Inquisitor Tomas de Torquemada. Twelve years later, in 1492 AD, Torquemada was granted a royal edict to expel Jews who might be reluctant to convert to Christianity⁸². Approximately 160,000 Jews or more were expelled from Spain. Some ten of thousands lost their lives while fleeing due to rumors that they had swallowed their jewelries. In other cases, they were thrown overboard in the ocean by Spanish crews⁸³. Until today, the scar of the Spanish Inquisition hasn't healed as the Sephardim Jews⁸⁴ made an oath to themselves and their descendants to never go back to Spain.

The Russian Pogroms

The Russian pogroms need to be seen in the context of the socio-political development of the 18th Century after the annexation of Belorussia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine and Poland in 1772 AD. Russia then started to absorb the Jewish communities in those countries. The rapid migration subsequently raised the question of Jewish integration, and the extent to which the new community could obtain certain rights.

During the second half of the 18th century a new Jewish movement, the Russian Hashkalah, arose, for the progress of Jewish integration. For instance, under the leadership of Nicholas I, Hashkalah's activists had a closer cooperation with the government to develop a Jewish educational system in Russia. Later on, under the reign of Alexander II, Nicholas' I successor, those activists were

⁸⁰ Reich, Bernard p.11

⁸¹ Rabbi Benjamin Blech p.133

⁸²

<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=ede#1775>

⁸³ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/expulsion.html>

⁸⁴ The Jews that had managed to escaped were now called Sephardim ,which means "Spain" in Hebrew

eager to reform the traditional Jewish thinking and urged the Jewish communities to adapt to the Russian lifestyle. This new movement jeopardized the balance of political power and with the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, many suspected Jewish involvement. Hence, anti-Semitism arose and led to the Russian pogroms that started in Elisavetgrad and spread all over the country⁸⁵. Afterwards, Tsar, Alexander III adopted new laws repressing Jewish civil rights. Subsequently, this led to emigration of about 2,500,000 Jews between 1881 and 1914 AD from Russia to the US and Palestine⁸⁶.

The Holocaust

The Holocaust marks the climax of Jewish persecution. The extent of anti-semitism that had emerged throughout the centuries in Europe culminated in the worse mass genocide that the world has ever seen, killing an approximated number of 6 million Jews within the period of 1939-1945 AD⁸⁷. This was a result of consistent anti-Jewish propaganda promoted throughout Germany and facilitated by Hitler's Nuremberg Law of 1935 AD. From that point on, Jews were made second class citizens. The decisive moment in anti-Semitic riots occurred on the Crystal Night of November 1938, with nationwide violence against Jews and their property. Store windows were broken, synagogues burned up, and many Jews were arrested, mistreated and executed. Some prisoners were given the opportunity to leave the country.

It is worth mentioning that in 1933 AD, when Hitler and his party took power, they wanted the German territory to be a "Jew free zone", by deporting the targeted group out of the country. However, with the annexation of East European countries, the situation took a new turn and this achievement proved to be difficult due to the large number of Jews.

For instance, it is estimated that the Soviet Union and Poland, both hosted about 5 1/2 million Jews, so that the capacity of expulsion would have been limited⁸⁸. Hence, Hitler and his party were obliged to find a new way to get rid of the Jews. Accordingly, in a secret gathering of high SS officers and Hitler by Berlin in 1942 AD, Reinhard Hedyrich presented a plan that consisted of building Jewish Ghettos in Poland.

Step by step, Jews were deported to death, labor centers and gas chambers. The rest of the history of the Holocaust is well documented already.

⁸⁵http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Modern_History/1700-1914/Emancipation_and_Enlightenment/In_the_East/Russia.shtml

⁸⁶ Reich, Bernard p.15

⁸⁷ Reich, Bernard, p.35

⁸⁸ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/jewpop.html>

The Return to the Promised Land

In the light of this sad history, the return to the promised land in Israel is a fundamental part of Jewish identity and conviction. Despite this commonality, there are two different viewpoints held by Jews concerning the restoration of Israel.

The Zionist Belief

The birth of the current state of Israel in May 1948 AD was made possible by the Zionism political movement that emerged in Europe during the end of the 19th Century. Led by Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist, the movement strove for manifesting the Jewish nationality through the creation of its own national state. The movement was based on growing anti-Semitism in France. Knowing about historical persecutions against his people, Herzl started to promote the creation of a sovereign Jewish state. On 23 August 1897 he organized the first Zionist meeting in Basel (Switzerland), in which the World Zionist Organization (WZO) was created and the main idea of an independent Jewish state was introduced. At first he had limited support, because Orthodox Jews were against his vision..

A significant event in the creation of Israel was the Balfour Declaration of November 1917, under which the British Government, influenced by a small group of Zionists supported the realization of a Jewish state. This was the beginning of Chaim Weizmann's political career, who later became the first Israeli President⁸⁹.

Hitler's holocaust had given the decisive impulse for the creation of a Jewish state. This was reflected in the UN Partition Plan for Israel. Under Resolution 181 the plan foresaw a division of the land of Palestine into two parts, giving one part to the Jews and the other one to Palestine. This creation of the state of Israel is seen as the fulfillment of the biblical prophecy. Accordingly, since the reestablishment of the state Israel, many Jews from all corners of the earth have come back to their promised land.

The Anti-Zionist belief

Unlike the Zionists, the Anti-Zionist Jews share an orthodox view on the return to the Holy Land. In their belief, the Diaspora was a divine punishment due to their ancestors' sins during the ancient time. Therefore, only God can dissolve the penalty and drive his chosen people back to Israel at the appropriate time.

At the inception of the Zionism movement through Theodor Herzl, this group has been openly criticizing the movement. The Jewish Anti-Zionists especially blamed the Zionists for their improper cooperation during the Second World War with

⁸⁹ Bregman, Ahron p. 16-17

the US and some European countries, in which thousands of innocent lives could have been saved. In his article “the role of Zionism in the holocaust”, Rabbi Gedalya Liebermann highlights some facts that support this view. To give a specific example, in 1941 and 1942, there were different offers from the German Gestapo to drive out all European Jews to Spain in exchange for their properties in Germany, as well as in occupied France on condition that (a) the refugees ought to continue their route solely toward the US or the British colonies; (b) the departure from Spain to Palestine would be prohibited to all Jews. But the Zionists rejected the proposals due to their ambitious ideology of creating a sovereign Jewish State in Palestine⁹⁰.

Moreover, Anti-Zionists accuse their brethren of disloyalty toward the Torah and also of false prophecy referring to Jeremiah (29:8-9): “Do not let the prophets and diviners among you deceive you. Do not listen to the dreams you encourage them to have. They are prophesying lies to you in my name.” Another accusation concerns the Zionists’ violation against the main law to the Jewish foreign policy that was given to them by God: “*Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the lord for it because if it prospers you will prosper*”⁹¹.

Jewish identity

It is evident that due to the historical impact and background in different countries, we find pluralistic identities. These are expressed in grouped subdivisions such as Orthodox, Reform, Progressive, Conservative, Liberal and secular⁹². For Jews, however, their identity is not a matter of definitions but rather of the promise to the eternal right to their Promised Land, the land of Israel. And because of their covenant with God, the identity is also tied to the Torah that retains the common history and protects the revelations given to their ancestors.

Anti-Semitism

Historically, the word “anti-Semitism” originated in Germany during the 19th Century. However, Anti-Semitism is a global issue that goes back to the beginning of Christianity and has gained multiple layers of complexity. Its roots appear to lie in three areas: Christianity, socio-economic reasons, and political fields.

The relationship between Jews and Christians centers around the Messianic origin of Jesus and the Jewish responsibility for his

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<http://www.jewsgainstzionism.com/antisemitism/holocaust/gedalyaLiebermann.cfm>

⁹¹ Jeremiah 29:7

⁹² Webber, Jonathan p. 20

crucifixion. Why was Jesus rejected as such even though he was a Jew and a descendant of David? This question continues to be the subject of theological debates.

The problem with Jesus being the promised Messiah is that it contradicts with the traditional Jewish teaching that states that the appearance of the Messiah would bring eternal peace on earth, which is still lacking today⁹³. However, the real point of contention between both communities is about the crucifixion of Christ.

The New Testament documents that the Jewish conspiracy led to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In this context, most Christians believe that through Jesus' crucifixion and rejection by Jews, the Jews no longer have the right to be called the "chosen people" and claim the title for themselves.

This accusation has become fundamental for the development of anti-Semitism in the Western world throughout the centuries, escalating in the massacres and persecutions that killed millions of innocent Jews.

Socio-economic reasons are just as important contributory factor for anti-Semitism. Jews have a reputation of controlling the world economy, since they are among the wealthiest in the world. It surely goes back to the ancient times, in their involvement in mercantilism. By the mid-9th Century, Jews controlled the trade monopoly between the East and the West with their caravans and ships. Over the centuries, the Jews managed to professionalize the money lending industry creating well-managed financial institutions all over⁹⁴.

Political reasons cover the jealousy against Jewish influence in politics. Much of this influence was the direct result of Jewish wealth and financing. Up to the 11th Century, the Jews dominated the East and West trade so they had royal support⁹⁵.

However, the birth of the federal system in Europe in the 11th to 18th Centuries brought a new era of exchange, and Jewish capital was no longer needed because all social strata had now access to money.

Subsequently, the function of the Jews was reduced to urban usury, and many were forced into ghettos. This was also the beginning of persecution and expulsions⁹⁶.

Relief came with the French revolution that promoted equality for all, including the Jews who were emancipated in the wave of rationalization.

⁹³ Rabby Morris Kerkzer p.276-277

⁹⁴ Fast Howard p.149

⁹⁵ The Kings supported them because Jews provided the capital for War

⁹⁶ Leon, Abram p. 154

Jewish Survival

One may call it a miracle but what exactly hindered the extermination of the Jewish identity in spite of so much violence against them? The traditional Jew would argue that it was divine protection. He has no reason to doubt God's word as throughout history his ancestors have experienced the manifestation of divine prophecies. Thus, as long as he remains obedient, he will be protected. Thus the transmission of the doctrine to new generations is extremely important. That's why global remembrance of the Holocaust has emerged as a critical survival tactic.

Israel today

Surrounded by Muslim countries that do not really recognize Israel as a Jewish State but rather as an occupant of Palestinian territory, Zionists have reason to live in constant fear of violent threats. As a small country of merely 7.3 million people, they have no choice but to depend on a foreign superpower to secure its borders. Despite the history of Christian-Jewish relations, Christian countries are the main allies and protectors of Israel. It is certain that the guilt of the Holocaust lies behind the German support. However how does one explain the "strategic" US-Israel relationship? Can it only be based on oil interests in the Middle East or are there other core reasons behind the mysterious bond? The debate continues, as do the many theories about the real strength of the bond between the right-wing Bible Belt and the Zionist lobby.

Conclusion

There is no way to explain the Jewish history without focusing on the bible because their destiny lies in God's hand and he will pave the way to the everlasting. Thus, the Holy Land tied to the Jewish identity.

Today, Israel has flourished and many Jews are returning to their Promised Land. Zionists are supported by the western Christian countries that had long persecuted the Jews but seem to back Israel, probably because of their guilt. The biggest supporters are also the puritans due to their strong belief in the Holy Bible. As long as they will have the financial and military possibility, they will endow Israel accordingly.

That still leaves the question of how long the current situation can continue, with an Israeli island living in the middle of an Arab sea. Ultimately, this state of tension is not sustainable. Hence the inevitable need for a durable understanding between geographical neighbors, based on mutual respect and tolerance.

PALESTINE – THE ARAB VIEW

Introduction

Palestine is at the core of the Middle East, the cradle of civilizations and graveyard of empires. What goes on there attracts the attention of the world and its super powers; however, they all seem to ignore the lessons from history. Eventually, they will all learn, no matter what their intentions, as so many others have learned.

Palestine until this day is still a place of conflict. After World War II a Jewish state was created in Palestine at the expense of the indigenous Arab population there, out of sympathy and a sense of guilt toward the Jews. Consequently, the Palestinian people were forcibly expelled from their homes, denied their basic right of return, and condemned to live in prolonged misery. The peace process is still at a crossroads. Although some sound and durable solutions for peace in the Middle East were articulated, the political will to make it a reality is still weak.

Israel, the occupying power, not only restricts the freedom of the Palestinians and denies their lawful right of return in contravention of international law; but also inflicts a cycle of arrogant violence on them, of which the recent Gaza War is just one example.

Eventually, unless Israel comes to terms with the Palestinians in a just manner, which enables them to return to their land live freely and establish their sovereign state of Palestine, no peace will ever exist.

History of the Land of Palestine

Ancient History

The earliest settlers in Palestine history are the Mousterian Neanderthals around 200,000 BC. The Canaanites occupied the region around the Bronze Age (3000–2200 BC)⁹⁷. They are believed to be “a group of Semites who left Arabia about 2500 BC and settled along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea”⁹⁸. The late Canaanite period saw the Palestinian region entering historical texts for the first time.

The Philistines and Israelites were ancient West Asian powers. The two empires fought each other for control of the region comprising not only Palestine, but also Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. They existed during the period from 1100 to 732 BC. The Philistines were known as the "Sea Peoples" in common parlance at that time. They were experienced in the art of iron smithy. King David of the Israelites defeated the Philistines in 1000 BC. The first cities began to appear in the history of Palestine around 1000 BC.

⁹⁷ “Canaan.”, *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica Online.

⁹⁸ “Arabian Peninsula”. *uk.encyarta.msn.com*. Microsoft Encyclopedia.

The Greek emperor Alexander the Great conquered Palestine around 330 BC. The Greek control continued for about 200 years after that. The Roman influence in Palestine started when Rome took over the region around 63 BC. The effective control over present day Palestinian territories was left under the administration of local Jewish kings. The most famous of them was King Herod, who ruled the areas comprising the present Palestine region from 37 to 4 BC. Jesus Christ was born under his rule. The Roman influence over Palestine was particularly exhibited during his rule, where cities were reconstructed according to Roman plans and architecture. Emperor Hadrian took control over the region in 135 AD. Emperor Constantine assumed the Roman throne on 313 AD. He actively promoted Christianity and built a number of notable Christian religious structures like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Church of the Resurrection.

Palestine during the Middle Ages

The Crusaders conquered the Palestinian region in 1099; however, Saladin claimed it back in 1187 AD. In 1516 AD Palestine was brought under the fold of the Ottoman Empire. Local government functionaries were appointed from the Ottoman capital city of Constantinople. The walls of Jerusalem were repaired by the Ottoman emperor Suleiman the Magnificent in 1537 AD. The Ottomans divided Palestine into two administrative divisions the Sanjak district and Wilayat province.

Modern History of Palestine

It wasn't until 1917 that the British took over the region. The Palestine British Mandate was created with the objective of administering a few predetermined parts of the failing Ottoman Empire. This mandate was effective starting from 1923. The official name was the "British Mandate of Palestine". It included the modern territories of Israel, Jordan, Gaza Strip and the West Bank. It was officially ended by the creation of the Jewish State of Israel in 1948.

Following the adoption of the United Nations Resolution 181 (UN Partition Plan) in November 1947 and the declaration of the State of Israel in May 1948, all Arab countries were outraged. As a result, the Arab-Israeli War (1948-1949) broke out. This war had created a major humanitarian crisis, with about 711,000 Palestinians becoming refugees. In 1949, an armistice agreement was signed between Israel, on the one hand, and Egypt Jordan Lebanon and Syria on the other; with the understanding that this armistice was not, in any way, meant to establish or recognize any territorial custodial or other rights of any party.⁹⁹

In July 1956, Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company. Israel responded in October of the same year by invading the Sinai

⁹⁹ United Nations Dept. of Public Information. *Question of Palestine*. New York: 2008.

Peninsula with British and French support. The conflict ended with the withdrawal of the invading forces and by the deployment of the first United Nations peacekeeping forces (UNEF-I).

In May 1967, Egypt requested the UNEF-I to leave. Hostilities broke out again between Israel and Egypt Jordan and Syria and the Six-Day War began (5-10 June 1967). By the time a ceasefire was called for by the UN Security Council Resolution 242 and the parties had accepted it, Israel had occupied Egyptian Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank including East Jerusalem, and the Syrian Golan Heights.

In October 1973, war started again between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai front and between Israel and Syria in the Golan Heights front. The United States and the Soviet Union requested an urgent meeting of the Security Council and the UN Security Council Resolution 338 was adopted, which reaffirmed the principles of the previous resolution (242) and called for "a just and durable peace in the Middle East."

Following the Camp David Accords of 1978, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty in March 1979. As a result, the Sinai Peninsula returned to Egypt, while the Gaza Strip remained under Israeli control, to be included in a future Palestinian state.

In October 1994, Israel and Jordan also signed a peace agreement, making Jordan the second Arab country after Egypt to normalize relations with Israel.

Treatment of Palestinians in Israel

After World War II, a state for Jewish people was created in Palestine without much concern for the existing indigenous Arab population there. Accordingly, Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes by Jewish militias (1948 onwards). Those who remained behind faced various forms of discrimination, such as in housing or employment. Until today, many job opportunities in Israel are open only to those with previous military service. Those who do not serve in the Israeli military (typically Israeli Arabs) are denied those opportunities.

Treatment of Jews in the Arab world

The Fall of Granada

Today, Granada is the capital of Andalusia, one of the seventeen autonomous regions of Spain. In 711 AD the city was captured by the forces of Tariq bin-Ziyad, a general under the Umayyad Caliphate. Jews who had lived in these regions since Roman times were considered by Muslims as "People of the Book" (those who received scriptures from God, namely, Jews, Christians and Muslims), and were given protected status. This special status of Jews under Muslim rulers attracted Jewish immigration, and therefore Jewish communities in that region flourished at that time.

In 1492 AD the last Muslim ruler of Spain, Muhammad XII, surrendered Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella, king and queen of Castile (later the Kingdom of Spain). The king and queen issued the Alhambra Decree (The Edict of Expulsion of the Jews) less than three months after the surrender of Granada, in which Jews were accused of trying "to steal faithful Christians from Catholic faith...to their [the Jews] own wicked belief and conviction"¹⁰⁰ And thus were ordered to leave the kingdom or convert to Christianity in a period of three months. Although they were permitted to take their belongings with them, an exception was made for "gold or silver or coined money"¹⁰¹ which they were not allowed to take away. Besides, those who failed to leave or convert by the deadline were simply ordered to die. Even those, non-Jews, who sheltered or hid Jews, were punished by confiscation of all their belongings and hereditary privileges.

As a result of this decree, Spanish Jews fled to North Africa and south-eastern Europe where they were granted safety under the Ottoman Empire.

Zionist Immigration as a Cause of Conflict

As in the case of Jewish immigration into North Africa, there is nothing wrong with Jewish immigration into Palestine or into any other part in the world. Jewish communities in the Middle East (Mizrahi Jews) have long lived and flourished under Islamic rule. Then, the international Jewish Political Movement (Zionism) came along with its leader Theodor Herzl; who, during the movement's First Congress, that took place in 1897 AD in Basel, laid out the movement's main goal of "establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine."¹⁰² Herzl could not secure a legal foundation for the Jewish state through the Ottoman Sultan. He then tried to convince the Sixth Zionist Congress to accept the Uganda option (a proposal by the British government to establish a Jewish state in a 5000-square-mile of land in Uganda) as a temporary solution, "without surrendering the ultimate goal of Palestine"¹⁰³. However, "the Zionist of Zion faction, under the leadership of Menahem Ussishkin, opposed the Uganda plan even as provisional arrangement, and as a result, the plan was finally rejected by the [Zionist] Seventh Congress in 1907"¹⁰⁴.

Zionist immigrants started to flow into Palestine with the objective of taking over and establishing a Jewish majority state. And

¹⁰⁰ Peters, Edward. "The Edict of Expulsion of the Jews". Foundation for the Advancement of Sephardic Studies and Culture, n.d. Web. Mar 9 2009.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² "First Zionist Congress". *wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, 6 Mar. 2009. Web. 9 Mar. 2009.

¹⁰³ Cohen, Aharon. *Israel and the Arab World*. Great Britain: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970. page(42).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

this was made possible, not by Palestinian self-determination or consent, or with a just proposal for an Arab-Jewish state where all could have lived in peace, but rather with a classified formal promise by the British government in 1917 called “Balfour Declaration”. In it, Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Minister, stated “*His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people... [with the understanding that]...nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine...*”¹⁰⁵. This Declaration devastated the Arabs.

The subsequent history of the establishment of Israel on Palestinian land, and the forced evacuation of the Palestinians themselves from their territory, is well documented, as are the subsequent tensions and wars which have resulted in consequence. Sixty years later, peace is just as elusive as it was on the first day of the establishment of Israel. It has already been a Sixty Years War, and from most projections it might turn out to be longer than the Hundred Years War that devastated Europe.

The Peace Process

The search for peace has gone through many ups and downs. This paper will just summarise the latest initiatives.

In the name of Former US President George Bush and Former Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev, US Secretary of State, James A. Baker, and Boris Pankin of the Soviet Union issued an invitation (Madrid Invitation) to Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians, requesting them to come together and hold a peace conference in Madrid, Spain in 1991. The conference called for separate bilateral talks with the Arab states and the Palestinians as required by Israel. Although it was being conducted outside the framework of the United Nations it enjoyed the support of all parties concerned. It brought, for the first time, the parties of the conflict face-to-face in an international conference for peace. Talks continued in Washington DC but with no real results, until a major milestone in the Arab-Israeli conflict was achieved in Oslo, Norway in 1993 in the form of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (Oslo Accords). This framework resulted in the creation of a Palestinian Authority with responsibility for the administration of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Accords also called for the withdrawal of the Israeli Forces from these territories. This arrangement was to last no more than five years (until 1996) during which the parties were expected to reach a permanent agreement. Other thorny issues in the conflict such as (a) Jerusalem, (b) Palestinian refugees, (c) Israeli settlements, (d) security and (e) borders, were left for later negotiations.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid* 120

In 2000, US President Bill Clinton invited Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to a peace summit in Camp David, Maryland. The summit ended without reaching an agreement on any of the five main issues in the conflict mentioned earlier. Barak offered Arafat "sovereignty" over Gaza Strip, most of the West Bank and East Jerusalem; however, he demanded control over 10% of the West bank which contained settlements, and denied Palestinians control over their own borders, airspace and water sources. Besides, the proposed "sovereignty" did not include the ability to maintain an army with heavy weapons, or to form alliances with other countries without Israeli approval, and not even a guarantee that Israel would not deploy troops in to the West Bank if it were to feel threatened. Arafat refused. According to the Palestinian negotiating team, this proposal presented just a re-packaging of military occupation, not an end to it.¹⁰⁶

King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia then introduced a comprehensive peace initiative (Arab Peace Initiative) in March 2002 at the Arab League Summit in Beirut, Lebanon. This peace initiative is based on a formula: "Land for Peace", in which Israel (a) returns to pre-June 1967 borders, (b) accepts a "just" solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees (right of return), and (c) accepts the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state. In return, Arabs would "consider the Arab-Israeli conflict over, sign a peace agreement with Israel... [and] establish normal relations with Israel within the framework of this comprehensive peace."¹⁰⁷ While this initiative was welcomed by Shimon Peres, the then Israeli Foreign Minister; however, he said in response: "the details of every peace plan must be discussed directly between Israel and the Palestinians, and to make this possible, the Palestinian Authority must put an end to terror..."¹⁰⁸. In other words, Israel was not ready for the "full withdrawal to 1967 borders and the right of return for the Palestinian refugees"¹⁰⁹.

In April 2003, the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations (the Quartet) introduced a "road map" for peace to the long lasting Arab-Israeli conflict. The "road map" consists of three phases with the ultimate goal of ending the conflict by 2005. Phase I (to be achieved by May 2003) is to mark the end of Palestinian violence; ensure Palestinian political reform; freeze on settlement

¹⁰⁶ Palestinian Negotiating Team. "Camp David Peace Proposal of July, 2000 ". Media Monitors Network, 26 Jul. 2001.

¹⁰⁷ "Text: Beirut Declaration". BBC News, 28 Mar. 2002.

¹⁰⁸ "Response of FM Peres to the decisions of the Arab Summit in Beirut". Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 Mar. 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Eran, Oded. "Arab-Israel Peacemaking." *The Continuum Political Encyclopedia of the Middle East*. Ed. Avraham Sela. New York: Continuum, 2002. page (147).

expansion and Israeli withdrawal; and finally perform Palestinian elections. Phase II (June-Dec 2003) is to conduct an International Conference to support Palestinian economic recovery; establish an independent Palestinian state with provisional borders; engage on issues including regional water resources, environment, economic development, refugees, and arms control issues; and restore Arab states trade offices to Israel. Phase III (2004-2005) is to conduct a second international conference; reach a permanent status agreement and end of conflict; settle the borders, clarify issues of Jerusalem, refugees and settlements; and eventually agree to peace deals with Israel.¹¹⁰ This “road map”, unfortunately, led to nowhere.

In November 2007, US President George Bush, tried to jump start the “road map” peace process by calling for a conference in Annapolis, Maryland. In its Joint Declaration the parties agreed “to engage in vigorous, ongoing and continuous negotiations and shall make every effort to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008.”¹¹¹ Obviously, this did not happen.

The United Nations Role

On the 29th of November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine (United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181), a plan to partition the region into separate Jewish and Arab states (see map¹¹²), under which the Greater Jerusalem area (an approximately 100 square mile space surrounding the Old City of Jerusalem) would be under international control. Palestinian and Arab leaders rejected this partition and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War followed. Consequently, the partition plan was never implemented and the region is still occupied until present time.¹¹³

One may ask why did the Arabs not accept the partition plan. It was more than what they are asking for now. To answer that question one must put oneself in the Arabs shoes of that time. Imagine that you have a home, which has belonged to your family for many generations, even centuries. Some people came along saying that their ancestors had lived two thousand



¹¹⁰ "a performance-based roadmap to a permanent two-state ...". Global Policy Forum.

¹¹¹ "Annapolis Joint Declaration". wikipedia.org. Wikipedia.

¹¹² Copied from "Issues in the Middle East", Atlas, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, 1973.

¹¹³ *Question of Palestine*.

years ago on the same territory. With the help of foreign outsiders, they want you out of your home to build their "promised family house". Apparently, the big guys, out of sympathy with those people's aspirations, wanted to grant them your home. You complained and cried out for help, but all went in vain. Then you decided to go to the new police station (United Nations) to get your home back. Instead of restoring your rights, the police proposed a Solomonic solution of cutting your home into two parts. The plan was put to a vote without your participation, and this vote divided your home, gave your family 43%, and give the others (who were just half of your number) 56%, leaving your master bedroom under police supervision. No wonder that the plan was not accepted.

Israel Violations of International Law

"Occupied" or "Disputed" Territories

The Geneva Conventions recognize that a land that is "occupied" is subject to the laws of war; if (a) it was conquered in the course of a war; and (b) its disposition is unresolved through subsequent peace treaties.

This is exactly the situation with regard to the Palestinian territories. They were captured by force of arms and against the will of the Palestinians. Besides, the UN Security Council Resolution 242 specifically calls for "the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict". In other words, this international binding resolution confirmed that the Palestinian territories are indeed "occupied" and not "disputed", and thus international laws of war and international humanitarian law apply.

In January 2006 Hamas - the Islamic resistance movement in Palestine - successfully acquired a majority of 76 seats out of 132 seats in the Palestinian parliamentary elections. In 2007 it then took control of the Gaza Strip. Israel, in retaliation, declared Gaza as a "hostile territory" and sealed all its borders.

"The siege and further tightening of closure of the border[in Gaza], curtailing the movement of people and most goods, with the exception of imports of the most basic humanitarian supplies, constitutes collective punishment, in contravention of article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention."¹¹⁴

This isolation and collective punishment has significantly deteriorated the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Not enough fuel; no proper electricity supply (cuts of 8 to 10 hours per day); about 80 per cent of the population there lives under the poverty level and relies on food aid; with the worst yet to come.

¹¹⁴ " Work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices ...". United Nations, 2008. (a/63/273).

The Gaza War

In December 2008, Israel launched an attack (Operation Cast Lead) on the Palestinians in Gaza. This carefully planned and well-campaigned operation was “justified” under the slogan of “self defense”. This so called self-defense operation resulted in the murder of more than 1400 Palestinians (almost all civilians) in three weeks, over 300 of them were children including those who were sheltered in the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees) schools; another 5000 others were injured, and thousands of homes were destroyed, leaving over a hundred thousand homeless.

Self-defense is defined as *“The right to protect oneself against violence or threatened violence with whatever force or means are reasonably necessary.”*¹¹⁵ What happened in Gaza was no self defense; it was an act of hubris and outrageous arrogance.

A report of Amnesty International published in February 2009 states: *Amnesty International has found indisputable evidence that Israeli forces used white phosphorus, which has a highly incendiary effect, in densely populated residential areas in Gaza, putting the Palestinian civilian population at high risk. Israeli forces’ use of artillery and other non-precision weapons in densely-populated residential areas increased the risk, and the harm done, to the civilian population.*¹¹⁶

Gideon Levy, an editorial board member in the Haaretz newspaper and the spokesman for Shimon Peres from 1978 until 1982, himself describes what Israel Defense Forces (IDF) did in Gaza as a “brutal operation”. He says: *“we have trained our soldiers to think that the lives and property of Palestinians have no value whatsoever. It is part of a process of dehumanization that has endured for dozens of years, the fruits of the occupation.”*¹¹⁷ One of those “well-trained” soldiers says: *“That’s what is so nice, supposedly, about Gaza: You see a person on a road, walking along a path. He doesn’t have to be with a weapon, you don’t have to identify him with anything and you can just shoot him...”*¹¹⁸ The recent war in Gaza is just one example of the atrocities inflicted upon the Palestinians by Israel, the occupying power.

The Separation Wall

In 2002 Israel started the construction of a “separation barrier” (703 kilometers or 436 miles of wall) in the West Bank. Approximately 58 per cent has been completed. This wall that penetrates the West Bank not only separates Palestinian children from their schools, or farmers from their lands, but also results in the isolation of whole communities, and is thus tearing the fabric of the Palestinian society.

¹¹⁵ "self-defense." Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. 25 Mar. 2009.

¹¹⁶ "Fuelling conflict: Foreign arms supplies to Israel/Gaza" Amnesty International February 2009: page (10).

¹¹⁷ Levy, Gideon. "IDF ceased long ago being 'most moral army in the world'" Haaretz Newspaper 22 Mar. 2009.

¹¹⁸ Harel, Amos. "Shooting and crying" Haaretz Newspaper 20 Mar. 2009.

In July 2004 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued an Advisory Opinion calling for the separation wall to be removed, and for Palestinians to be compensated for any damage done: "*The Court finds that the construction by Israel of a wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and its associated régime are contrary to international law*"¹¹⁹. However, the construction of the wall continues and so do the agonies of the Palestinians.

Illegal Israeli Settlements

In the same ICJ Advisory Opinion "*The Court finds that [the] settlements [in the occupied Palestinian territories] have been established in breach of international law.*" And UN Security Council Resolution 446 declares clearly that the Israeli settlements there are illegal. In spite of that, there are currently 121 Israeli settlements on the occupied Palestinian territories. And in 2008 the construction of new settlements increased despite the "settlement freeze" agreed upon in the Annapolis framework.

Restricted Freedom of Movement

Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states: "*(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state; (2) Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.*" However, over the last forty two years Israel has implemented a policy of movement restrictions in the Palestinian territories including checkpoints, earth mounds, trenches, gates, road-blocks, by-pass roads, accompanied by a very complex system of permits. From 1967 to 1991, restrictions on the movement of Palestinians were relatively light; however, with the beginning of the first Intifada in 1987, Israel increasingly restricted Palestinian freedom of movement by implementing a strict permit system. In 1988, Israel began preventing Palestinians from traveling between Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Later on, in 1991, Palestinians were required to obtain individual permits, instead of general permits that applied to the population as a whole. By 1993, Israeli military check-points were not only established along the 1949 armistice line between the West Bank and Israel and between the West Bank and East Jerusalem but also between cities within the West Bank itself.

By September 2008 there were about 699 closure obstacles in the West Bank. Approximately 130 of these have been added right after the Annapolis Conference began in November 2007.

Similarities with World War II Germany

After World War I the Jews were wrongly blamed for the defeat of Germany. The Nazis then created a society based on racial laws that discriminated against Jews, took away their property,

¹¹⁹ "Separation barrier - Summary - Press release" ICJ advisory opinion 9 Jul. 2004.

prevented them from joining the military, drove them into ghettos around which they built walls, made many of them refugees, and ended up murdering large numbers. Any case of Jewish resistance was punished with a totally indiscriminate and disproportional response of collective punishment. All this was justified with a well oiled propaganda machine, which deliberately spread dis-information. In a largely similar fashion, Israel has created a society based on racial laws that discriminate against Palestinians, taken away their property, prevented them from joining the military, driven them into "ghettos" around which they have built walls, made many of them into refugees, and ended up killing many of them in indiscriminate collective punishment.

It is unbelievable that a people who have suffered so much from racist discrimination in history should be following the same policies that they have always condemned.

Legitimacy of Resistance against Israel

UN Security Council Resolution 242, adopted after the Six-Day War, emphasizes "*the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security*" and calls for the recognition of the "*sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force*".

The Palestinian struggle for self-determination, and for their basic rights to their occupied lands, are therefore a legitimate struggle, and cannot be classified as terrorism.

*"According to international law, the people of a country, occupied by a foreign power, has the full right to fight for their liberation. [And] The Palestinian people, inhabitants of the territories, Israel has conquered and is occupying by military means since June 1967, too have this briefed right."*¹²⁰

The Palestinian Right of Return

In 1951, Palestinian refugees outside Palestine were around 711,000 according to the United Nations. Today, they and their descendants are estimated by the UNRWA to number more than 4 million.

UN General Assembly Resolution 194 calls for "*the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property*". This resolution should ensure for the Palestinians an inalienable and basic human right, namely, their right of return; however, Israel has deprived the Palestinians of this right, and confiscated their lands. In Israel's view a solution to the Palestinian

¹²⁰ Lebrecht, Hans. *The Palestinians- Past and Present*. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Publishers, 1987. page (219).

refugee problem must be sought, not through the legitimate return of the refugees to Israel, but through the resettlement of the Palestinian refugees elsewhere.

There is only one key component for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in Arab-Israeli conflict. That is the establishment of a sovereign “State of Palestine” where Palestinians have the right to return to and live freely therein. The ways to implement this however may very well vary. Some argue that a “one-state” solution is the only answer, in which one would see a single democratic state in which all communities, Palestinian and Arabs alike, would live in peace as they have lived in peace elsewhere. Others believe that the logic to the “two-state” solution is “long past its expiration date”, and propose a “three-state” solution where the Gaza Strip is absorbed by Egypt, the West Bank by Jordan and all live happily afterwards. In other words, forget about a Palestinians. Still others however propose a “five-state” solution where two states exist with the help of three, meaning Israel accepts the Arab peace initiative of Land for Peace, Egypt and Jordan help the new Palestinian state maintain order, and Saudi Arabia pays all the costs.

Conclusion

In reality, no solution can prevail without the right approach and atmosphere, and that is what is missing in the Middle East.

The Palestinians are struggling to resolve their differences, and Arab leaders cannot even agree to meet all together to sort out their own differences, let alone support the Palestinians. Besides, the 2009 Israeli elections that took place in February have brought a new, rather right wing, government to power. The new Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, does not believe in a “two-state” solution, and he has a Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, who is not only an anti-Arab hard-liner but also one who rejects the “land for peace” principle.

At the international level, the new US administration acted rather swiftly by appointing a special envoy and sending him to the region advocating for a lasting peace.

It is true that the Arab-Israeli peace process is complicated. However, one fact remains clear - there is no future for Israel unless it comes to terms with the Palestinians in a just manner, in the search for a solution which enables the Palestinians to return to their land, to live freely, and to establish their sovereign state of Palestine. No matter how logical and economically appealing any solution might be on paper, no peace will ever be durable unless it covers the above-mentioned facts.

WESTERN INFLUENCES

Introduction

Current events in the Middle East can best be understood if we start with a brief review of the history of the region. This review starts with the journey of Abraham from Ur through Haran to Canaan about 2000 BC, the Israelite enslavement in Egypt about five hundred years later, the powerful rules of King David and King Solomon about 1000 BC, the later captivity of the Hebrews by the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians, and the return of the Jewish people from exile to rebuild Jerusalem and the Temple about five hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ.¹²¹

It is important to note that the Greeks conquered the region three centuries before the early ministry of Jesus, and the Jews established an independent Judea that existed until the Roman conquerors came about fifty years later.

The Romans ruled with a firm hand, insisting on the maintenance of peace and proper payment of taxes. There was a Jewish revolt in 70 AD, which was crushed by the Romans, who then destroyed the Temple. After another revolt in 134 AD, many Jews were forced into exile, and the Romans named its province as Syria-Palestine while the Jews preferred it to be called Eretz Israel.

A few churches were formed by early Christians from Jerusalem and struggled for survival around the Mediterranean coast. After Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity around 325 AD, this powerful leader imposed his religious beliefs throughout the kingdom.

This Christian advantage in the region was largely overcome after the Prophet Mohammad (570-632 AD) declared the Islamic faith and united the Arabian peninsula, and his followers spread their political domination and religion throughout Syria- Palestine, Persia, Egypt, North Africa, and southern Europe.

Christian crusaders launched massive military crusades to retake Jerusalem and established dominion over Palestine in 1099 AD. However, Salahaldin, sultan of Egypt, retook the Holy City in 1187 AD, and, after 1291 AD, Muslims controlled Palestine until the end of the World War 1.

British Interests

Sykes- Picot Agreement 1916

The Sykes Picot Agreement, concluded in 1916, divided the Middle East into areas of influence for France, Great Britain and others,

¹²¹ We can have peace in the holy land a Plan that will work, Jimmy Carter.

giving the French the control over modern Syria and Lebanon. Most of Palestine was to be put under international control. Though the agreement mentioned the possibility of cessions by either side to an Arab State, it in fact made it impossible for Great Britain to honor the promises made by Sir Henry McMahon to Sheriff Hussayn in 1915.

The agreement excluded the districts "west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo" as specified in the Hussayn-McMahon agreement, extending the line south so that Palestine was excluded from Arab control. However, the agreement also excluded two much larger areas that would be under direct British and French control, and split the Arab area into zones of British and French influence that would preclude full independence.¹²²

It was accordingly understood between the French and British Governments :

*1. That France and Great Britain are prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab State or a Confederation of Arab States in the areas (A) and (B) marked on the annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. That in area (A) France, and in area (B) Great Britain, shall have priority of right of enterprise and local loans. That in area (A) France and in area (B) Great Britain, shall alone supply advisers or foreign functionaries at the request of the Arab State or Confederation of Arab States.*¹²³

Balfour Declaration 1917

Great Britain issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917 promising a Jewish national home in Palestine, with respect for the rights of non-Jewish Palestinians. The Declaration was issued in the form of a letter from the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur James Balfour, to Lord Rothschild. It was delivered to Chaim Weizmann, a Zionist activist, expressing British support for a Jewish "national home" in Palestine.

There are different theories about why the British agreed to issue the Balfour declaration when they issued it. Some of these "theories" such as the claim that "Jewish money interests" were being courted to help float a loan for Britain. Nonetheless the exact circumstances of the declaration are unclear. One possibility is that the declaration was deliberately contrived to allow the British to renege on earlier promises to France and the Arabs regarding Palestine. Lloyd George reportedly said that British control over Palestine would prevent it from falling into the hands of the agnostic atheistic French.¹²⁴

However, the Declaration did not fall as a bolt from the blue, but was rather the culmination of a long tradition in Britain that supported the restoration of the Jews to their own land. In his

¹²² www.mideastweb.org.

¹²³ www.lib.byu.edu.

¹²⁴ www.zionism-israel.com

introduction to Nahum Sokolow's History of Zionism, Balfour makes it clear that he supported the project of a "national home" for the Jewish people because he believed it was just. He had previously supported the plan by the Jews to seek settlement in Uganda.

The Jewish Migration to Palestine 1920

During World War I, the Jewish population declined because of the war, famine, disease and expulsion. In 1915, approximately 83,000 Jews lived in Palestine among 590,000 Muslim and Christian Arabs. According to the 1922 census, the Jewish population was 84,000, while the Arabs numbered 643,000. Thus, the Arab population continued to grow exponentially even while the population of the Jews stagnated¹²⁵.

In the mid-1920s, Jewish immigration to Palestine increased primarily because of anti-Jewish economic legislation in Poland and Washington's imposition of restrictive quotas.

The record number of immigrants in 1935 was a response to the growing persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany. However, the British administration considered this number too large, and informed the Jewish Agency that less than one-third of the quota it asked for would be approved in 1936.

The British gave in further to the Arab demands by announcing in the White Paper of 1939 that an independent Arab State would be created within 10 years, and that Jewish immigration was to be limited to 75,000 for the next five years, after which it was to cease altogether. It also forbade land sales to Jews in 95 percent of the territory of Palestine. The Arabs, nevertheless, rejected the proposal.

British Mandate 1922

In 1922, the League of Nations confirmed a British Mandate over Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan, and a French Mandate over Syria and Lebanon. Transjordan became an autonomous kingdom. Later, Palestinian Arabs demanded a halt to Jewish immigration and a ban on land sales to Jews, and in 1939 Britain announced severe restrictions on Zionist movement and land purchases in Palestine.

French Interests

The history of French influence in the Middle East was further complicated by unrelenting Anglo-French rivalries. Britain's industrial advantages, combined with the naval superiority it had acquired in the Mediterranean during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, limited France's strategic options and commercial opportunities. Overtaken by Britain at the Sublime Porte, the French tried to refocus their interest during the 1820s and 1830s on links with Muhammad Ali Pasha, the independent-minded and expansionist Ottoman governor of Egypt.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org

¹²⁶ www.answers.com.

However, they were unwilling to risk a European conflagration by coming to the Pasha's assistance in 1840, when Britain and the concert of Europe curtailed its power during the second Syrian war. During this period the two powers cooperated in an imaginative resolution to the civil strife that had broken out in Lebanon in 1860. In Egypt, France even won an advantage at this time by working for the construction of Suez Canal. Thereafter, however, three debilitating wars with Germany between 1870 and 1945 let the French at a lasting disadvantage. They had their eyes firmly fixed across the Rhine in 1882 when they failed to act with the British in Egypt, thereby forfeiting to Britain the base from which it was better able to develop its lead.

The French, having once more returned to reinforcing their links with the Maronites after 1870, were subsequently able to use Mount Lebanon as a stepping-stone to a sphere of influence in the Ottoman Empire's and Syrian region.

In the aftermath of the war, the French were peripherally involved in the question of Palestine and the Zionists as this problem developed into an Arab-Israel conflict that directly affected Britain and the United States. Frequently criticized for their failings in the Middle East, the French rarely denied themselves the opportunity to embarrass their allies by taking the high ground in their assessments of the problem. French involvement with Zionism, however, reflected their ambiguous relationship to the Jews as the "other".¹²⁷

In decades following World War II, France, deeply suspicious of Arab nationalism, was a major supporter of the Zionist state, and helped Israel establish its nuclear capability. After Israel, Britain and France collaborated in the 1956 Sinai campaign, and its ties remained strong.

The Alliance between France and Israel, involving prominent French political figures, flourished in the late 1950s and early 1960s. While France fought the Algerian insurrection, Israel remained a key to Middle Eastern stability in French eyes.

By 1963, however, once France ended the imbroglio in Algeria, President Charles de Gaulle began to reassess the French Middle Eastern policy. Deciding the future lay with the Arabs, he turned gradually against Israel. At the end of May 1967, a week before the Six Day War broke out; De Gaulle ordered a stop to all French military aid to Israel.

The bottom line in French Middle East policy is economic. France, like Germany and other EU members, has not hidden its eagerness to expand business with Arab and Islamic states, including those targeted by US sanctions, such as Libya, Iran, and Syria.

¹²⁷ www.cdn-friends-icej.ca.

German Interests

The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were racially superior and that the Jews, deemed "inferior" were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived "racial inferiority": Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples, Russians, and others, but the focus of their actions remained the Jewish population.

In 1933, this Jewish population of Europe stood at over nine million. Most European Jews lived in countries that Nazi Germany would occupy or influence during World War II. By 1945, the Germans and their collaborators killed nearly two out of every three European Jews as part of the Nazi policy to murder the Jews of Europe, which was known as the "Final Solution".¹²⁸

For this reason alone, German policy with respect to the entire region has always given particular weight to Israel and its neighbors. It also reflects the special German-Israeli relationship which is shaped on the one hand, by the persecution and murder of the European Jews, and on the other by the increasing intensity and depth of relations between German and Israeli society. For Germany in particular, peace between Arabs and Israelis would also end fears of a conflict between its special relations with Israel, and its interests in pursuing strong and good relations with the Arab states.¹²⁹

During times of peace, Germany's Middle East policy has historically taken a secondary position, subordinate to Germany's primary policy toward Europe and America. While of secondary importance, it was a tool that could be used to manipulate the Middle Eastern Question by playing off Western powers against each other. The German goal was a peaceful penetration of the Ottoman Empire. During world wars, however, Berlin elevated its Middle East policy to primary status by instigating jihad in the enemy's hinterland.¹³⁰

Before World War II, Germany intended Italy to be the main organizing power in the Middle East, replacing British and French rule. A Greater Arabia was to be set up under the influence of the Axis powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan. But initial German, particularly the fall of Paris, changed everything. As in World War I, the Germans tried to incite Arab populations to jihad against the allied nations. As the

¹²⁸ www.ushmm.org.

¹²⁹ Paper on Germany and the Middle East Interests and options, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin.

¹³⁰ <http://meria.idc.ac.il>.

war against the USSR dragged on and the tactics of "Blitzkrieg" failed, the Middle East became more and more important for the Nazis. After the fall of Moscow they regarded this region as the next main battleground for crushing the British Empire. Hitler revealed to the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem in late 1941, that after his victory against the Russians he would pursue the Jews in the Middle East as he was doing already in occupied Europe.¹³¹

United States Interests

The United States has been involved in the Middle East since the early days of the Republic, with much of the activity centered on education programs or missionary work. For some, a biblically inspired fascination with the Holy Land, and the role of Judaism in its history, led to support for the idea of restoring the Jewish people to a homeland there, a view that was embraced by certain religious leaders and, in a general way, by a few U.S. politicians. But it is a mistake to see this history for the modest and for the most part private engagement as the taproot of America's role in the region since World War II, and specially its extraordinary relationship with Israel today.¹³²

Between the routing of the Barbary pirates two hundred years ago and World War II, the United States played no significant security role anywhere in the region. While Woodrow Wilson endorsed the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Wilson did virtually nothing to advance this goal. Indeed, the most significant U.S involvement during this period, a fact finding mission dispatched under the leadership of Henry Churchill King and Charles Crane, concluded that the local populations opposed continued Zionist inroads and recommended against an independent Jewish homeland.

Yet as the historian Margaret Macmillan notes, "Nobody paid the slightest attention". The possibility of a U.S mandate over portions of the Middle East was briefly considered but never pursued, and Britain and France ended up dividing the relevant portions of the Ottoman Empire between themselves.

The United States has played an important and steadily increasing role in the Middle East security issues since World War II, driven initially by oil, then by anticommunism and, over time, by its growing relationship with Israel. America's first significant involvement in the security politics of the region was a nascent partnership with Saudi Arabia in the mid-1940s (intended by both parties as a check on British ambitions in the region). The first formal alliance commitments were Turkey's inclusion in NATO in 1952 and anti-Soviet Baghdad Pact 1954.

¹³¹ www.markuswiener.com.

¹³² Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East 1776 to the Present, (New York: Norton, 2007), Michael B. Oren.

After backing the establishment of Israel in 1948, U.S leaders tried to strike a balanced position between Israel and the Arabs and carefully avoided making any formal commitment to the Jewish State for fear of jeopardizing more important strategic interests. This situation changed gradually over the ensuing decades, in response to events like the Six Day War, Soviet arms sales to various Arab states, and the growing influence of pro-Israel groups in the United States. Given this dramatic transformation in America's role in the region, it makes little sense to try to explain current U.S policy by referring to the religious beliefs of a bygone era or the radically different forms of past American engagement. There was nothing inevitable or predetermined about the special relationship between United States and Israel.

Since the Six-Day War of 1967, a salient feature, and arguably the central focus, of America's Middle East policy has been its relationship with Israel. In fact, for the past four decades, the United States has provided Israel with a level of material and diplomatic support that dwarfs what it provides to other countries. The aid is largely unconditional: no matter what Israel does, the level of support remains for the most part unchanged.

In particular, the United States consistently favors Israel over the Palestinians, and rarely puts pressure on the Jewish state to stop building settlements, in violation of international law. The United States has also undertaken policies in the broader Middle East that reflected Israel's preferences. For example, since the early 1990, American policy toward Iran has been heavily influenced by the wishes of successive Israeli government.

Another example is the Bush administration's behavior during Israel's war against Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Almost every country in the world harshly criticized Israel's bombing campaign- a campaign that killed more than one thousand Lebanese, most of them civilians, but the United States did not. Instead it helped Israel prosecute the war, with prominent members of both political parties openly defending Israel's behavior. This unequivocal support for Israel undermined the pro-American government in Beirut, strengthened Hezbollah, and drove Iran, Syria and Hezbollah closer together, results that were hardly good for either United States or Israel.

Many policies pursued on Israel's behalf now jeopardize U.S national security. The combination of unstinting U.S support for Israel and Israel's prolonged occupation of Palestinian territory has fueled anti-Americanism throughout the Arab and Islamic world, thereby increasing the threat from international terrorism and making it harder for Washington to deal with other problems, such as shutting down Iran's nuclear program.

Since the United States is now so unpopular within the broader region, Arab leaders who might otherwise share U.S. goals are reluctant to help the U.S. openly, a predicament that cripples U.S. efforts to deal with a host of regional challenges.

The Importance of Oil

Securing the flow of affordable oil is a cornerstone of U.S. Middle East policy. Currently, U.S. domestic oil production supplies about 50% of total U.S. consumption. Foreign sources provide the rest, primarily the Gulf, Canada, Venezuela, Mexico, and some African countries.

The U.S. is strongly committed to protecting Gulf oil, although only about 10% of oil used in the U.S. is imported from the region. During the Cold War, U.S. strategy was primarily aimed at ensuring that the Gulf oil did not fall into hostile hands. Gulf oil was and remains important because of its impact on the global economy. U.S. competitors in Europe and Japan depend much more on Gulf oil than the U.S. does: 30% of European oil imports and nearly 80% of Japan's come from the Gulf. The U.S. exerts significant influence on these countries through control of Gulf oil.

Military and Financial Support to Israel

The most obvious indicator of US policy towards Israel is the total amount of foreign aid the latter has received from America's taxpayers. As of 2005, direct U.S. economic and military assistance to Israel amounted to nearly \$154 billion, the bulk of it comprising direct grants rather than loans.

US-Israeli relations had warmed by the late 1950s, but it was the Kennedy administration that made the first tangible U.S. commitment to Israel's military security.¹³³ In fact, in December 1962 Kennedy told Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir that the United States "has a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East really comparable only to that which it has with Britain over a wide range of world affairs" adding that "it is quite clear that in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel.

The various forms of economic assistance have been and remain important to Israel, but the bulk of U.S. support is now committed to preserving Israel's military supremacy in the Middle East. Not only does Israel receive access to top-drawer U.S. weaponry (F-15 and F-16 aircraft, Blackhawk helicopters, cluster munitions, "smart bombs", etc.) it has also become linked to the U.S. defense and intelligence establishments through a diverse array of formal agreements and informal links. According to the Congressional Research Service,

¹³³ See *Decade of Transition: Eisenhower, Kennedy and the Origins of the American – Israeli Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)

"U.S military aid has helped transform Israel's armed forces into one of the most technologically sophisticated militaries in the world".

Moreover, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Israel enjoys unusually wide latitude in spending the [military assistance] funds".¹³⁴ The Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) handles almost all the purchasing and monitors U.S aid for all other military aid recipients, but Israel deals directly with military contractors for virtually all of its purchases and then gets reimbursed from its aid account. Israel is also the only country where contracts for less than \$ 500,000 are exempt from prior U.S review.

In addition to the economic and military aid already described, the United States has provided Israel with nearly \$3 billion to develop weapons like the Lavi aircraft, the Merkava tank, and the Arrow missile. The United States sometimes benefits from the technology that Israel firms develop, but America would benefit even more if these funds were used to support high-tech industries in the United States.

Diplomatic Protection and Wartime Support

In addition to these tangible forms of economic and military aid, the United States provides Israel with consistent diplomatic support. Between 1972 and 2006, Washington vetoed forty two UN Security Council resolutions that were critical of Israel. That number is greater than the combined total of all the vetoes cast by all the other Security Council members for the same period, and amounts to slightly more than all of the American vetoes during these years. There were also numerous resolutions focusing on Israel that never reached a vote in the Security Council due to the threat of an American veto.

Outside the Security Council, the United States routinely backs Israel whenever the UN General Assembly passes one of the many resolutions condemning Israel behavior or calling for action on behalf of the Palestinians. Although these resolutions are nonbinding and largely symbolic, Washington's stance often puts it at odds with most of its allies and in the company of a tiny handful of other states. To take a typical example, UN General Assembly Resolution 59/124, on "Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian people," passed by a vote of 149 to 7 in December 2004. Among the many nations supporting the resolution were Japan, Germany, France, China, and Great Britain. The six countries that joined with the United States to oppose the resolution were Israel, Australia, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, and Palau.

Similarly, when Arab countries have tried to raise the issue of Israel's undeclared nuclear arsenal within the International Atomic

¹³⁴ David Rogers and Edward T. Pound, "How Israel Spends \$1.8 Billion a Year at Its Purchasing Mission in New York", *Wall Street Journal*, January 20, 1992.

Energy Agency, Washington has stepped in to prevent the organization from placing the matter on its agenda. As Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Jonathan Peled told the Jewish news paper *The Forward* in 2003, “The Arabs do this every year, but in order to have a comprehensive debate aimed at a consensus on a resolution against Israel, you need the okay of the board of governors [of the IAEA] and you do not have it” due to Washington’s influence on the board.¹³⁵

The Israel Lobby

The Israel Lobby is a convenient shorthand term for the loose coalition of individuals and organizations working to shape U.S foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction. The lobby is not a single, unified movement with a central leadership, however, and individuals and groups sometimes disagree on specific policy issues. The lobby includes both hard-line groups such as AIPAC (The American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and CUFI (Christians United for Israel) and dovish groups such as the Israel Policy Forum, the Tikkun Community, and the Americans for Peace Now. The lobby also includes think tanks as the Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA), The Middle East Forum (MEF), and WINEP, as well as individuals who work in universities and other research organizations. All of these groups agree that Israel ought to be defended, and the groups and individuals in the lobby work in various ways to shape U.S policy toward Jewish state along what they consider to be favorable lines, but they have occasionally deep divisions over exactly what policies are best for Israel.

The bulk of the lobby is comprised of Jewish Americans who are deeply committed to making sure that U.S foreign policy advances what they believe to be Israel’s interests. Yet the Israel lobby is not synonymous with American Jewry, and the “Jewish lobby” is not an appropriate term for describing the various individuals and groups that work to foster U.S support for Israel. For one thing there is significant variation among American Jews in their depth of commitment to Israel. Roughly a third of them, in fact, do not identify Israel as a particularly salient issue. In fact, a significant number of American “Hasidic” Jews, particularly in the Brooklyn neighborhoods, are quite vocal in their opposition to Israel, and to Zionism, which they believe is a deformation of the true message of Judaism.

Future Scenarios

One State or Two States

The "two-state solution" to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict, seems to be the consensus solution that is currently under discussion by the parties to the conflict, most recently at the Annapolis Conference in

¹³⁵ Marc Perelman, “ International Agency Eyes Israeli Nukes,” *Forward*, September5, 2003.

November 2007. It has been highlighted in different documents, including the Arab Initiative proposed by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the Arab League in Beirut Summit in 2002.

In 1947, the General Assembly, appointed a special committee that collected evidence and decided unanimously that Israel should be granted independence. Most of the committee members favored partitioning the land into two states, a Jewish State, and an Arab State, with Jerusalem under international supervision. In November 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted the Partition Resolution 181. This plan was the most serious attempt to bring a realistic solution to the conflict, through a two-State solution, with clear borders between the two states and Jerusalem under the international supervision.

One more recent peace proposal, presented in 2002 by the Quartet, which is composed of the European Union, Russia, the United States, and the United Nations, was the Road Map for Peace.¹³⁶ This plan did not attempt to resolve difficult questions such as the fate of Jerusalem or Israeli settlements, but left those to be negotiated in later phases of the process. Israel did not accept the proposal as written and stated that it had 14 "reservations" or changes that needed to be made before they would accept it. The proposal never made it beyond the first phase, which called for a halt to Israeli settlement construction and a halt to Israeli and Palestinian violence, neither of which was achieved.

The "one-state solution", also known as the "bi-national solution", is one of many other proposed approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Though increasingly debated in academic circles, this approach remains outside the range of alternatives in official efforts to resolve the conflict.

The recent Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip lasted for three weeks in January 2009, and led to the death of 1400 Palestinians with nearly 5,500 Palestinians wounded. Such escalations by Israel minimize the possibility of resolving the conflict through peaceful means and demonstrate that Israel is not genuinely interested in having a real and lasting peace in the holy land.

Unless genuine efforts are exerted by western powers, and pressure is placed on Israel to end its occupation and to allow the creation of a Palestinian state through peaceful negotiations based on international law, the conflict will continue further and to destabilize the entire region, and peace will remain an elusive dream.

¹³⁶ <http://en.wikipedia.org>.

RUSSIAN INFLUENCES

Introduction

For present day Russia, or for its predecessor the Soviet Union, the Middle East has been and always will be a strategically important region. This is due to two incontrovertible reasons. Firstly, due to its geographical proximity to Russian borders, the Middle East has remained a priority concern for Russian foreign policy and national security. Before the independence of the five former Soviet Central Asian republics put a geographical buffer between Russia and the Middle East, the Soviet Union shared boundaries with major Middle East states such as Iran and Turkey. Secondly, the region's oil resources and shipping lanes were also of significant interest to the Soviet Union, as they were to the West.

After World War II, the main Soviet goal in the region was to minimize the influence of the United States. Toward that end, the Soviet Union gave large-scale support to a group of radical Arab states that were united by their quest to eliminate Israel, and to oust all vestiges of Western influence from the region. Even though Russia pursued closer relations with the moderate states of the region such as Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait, and Israel, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it continued its ties with hard core Arab states including Libya, South Yemen, Iran and Syria.

In more recent times, however, there seems to be a dramatic shift beyond motives of interest. Throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the Soviet Union's position as the major arms supplier to the Middle East was not driven merely by economic aspirations, but rather by political and ideological motives. Post-Soviet Russia is desperately in quest of economic advantage in the region. Despite the fact that Russia does not necessarily crave Middle East oil due to its own bountiful oil reserves, the region remains an important source of income for Russian arms sales since the 1980s. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel, its engagement in the Arab-Israeli peace process and its extensive military sales to Syria, Iran, and Libya are emblematic of Moscow's long term Middle East ambitions.

Historical Background

Historically, Russia has had a positive relationship with the Islamic states of the Middle East region. Russia's deep-seated presence in the region has been felt for nearly four centuries, during most of which it shared a peaceful-coexistence and mutual influence with Turkish, Persians, Eastern Slavic and Caucasian Muslims. Throughout its expansionism period between 1677 and 1917, although the Russian emperors (Tsars) encountered thirteen fierce wars with the Ottoman Empire for the control of Caucasia and the Black Sea area, the Islamic

regimes of the Middle East as well as those within the Russian Empire have not always been in conflict¹³⁷. Instead, a cooperative relationship was visible during Imperial Russia, with an official policy centered on toleration, mutual interest and extensive comprehension.

The Russian Empire also showed no colonial ambitions in the region throughout most of the 19th and early 20th Century. From that stand point, most Islamic states of the region approved of Russia's high moral credentials and demonstrated a great propensity to establish cultural, trade and political relations with the Empire.

With the 1917 Revolution, that led to the establishment of the Soviet Union, the victorious Bolsheviks endorsed these relations further with the Middle East while denouncing the Western colonial foreign policy toward the region.¹³⁸ Lenin himself saw a new opportunity to spread greater influence in the Middle East. Towards that end, Bolsheviks supported Muslims aspirations in their anti-colonial struggles for freedom and the right to self determination. To demonstrate their good political will in practice, the Soviet Appeal declared the treaty for the partition of Persia as well as the partition of Turkey null and void. As a prominent Russian author Serge Zenkovsky has noted, "the Appeal was a brilliant piece of political tenet which disregarded all the atheistic and internationalist elements of Marxist and Leninist teaching, and appealed to the Moslems' religious and national feelings".¹³⁹

In addition, another significant step taken by Soviets to bridge the gap with Muslims was to invite the so called "enslaved people of Persia, Armenia and Turkey" to the Baku Conference of August 1920 during which Muslim delegates applauded as the Soviet delegate Grigory Zinoviev condemned English imperialism, and called upon Muslims to instigate a holy "jihad" against the British.

The takeover of the Soviet Union by Nikita Khrushchev in 1953, and the turnabout of the Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser during the 1956 Suez Crisis, opened a new chapter for Soviet involvement in the Middle East. The Suez Crisis, also known as the Tripartite Aggression, was a military invasion by France, Britain and Israel, to take control of the Suez Canal due to its strategic and geo-political importance. The Soviet Union, while extending its support to Egypt in all fronts of its national resistance, also sent diplomatic notes to Britain, France and Israel threatening to crush the aggressors and restore peace in the Middle East through the use of force if a swift consensus was not reached.

¹³⁷ Islam and Empire in Russia and Central Asia; *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2008)

¹³⁸ Islam in Russia: (*Bolshevik Appeal of 1917 to Muslims*)

¹³⁹ Serge Zenkovsky, Pan-Turkism and Islam in Russia (*Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1967*), p. 161

In a broader context, the Soviet Union's primary goal, after World War II and until the late 1980s, was to diminish and contain the Western and European influences in the region. To fulfill this objective, the USSR, along with its Eastern European allies, not only endorsed the Arab cause towards political, social and economic development, but also supported them in their national liberation movements against Western interventions. Syria, Iraq, South Yemen, Libya and Palestine were among the anti-western Arab states that each enjoyed generous diplomatic, economic, social and political relations with the USSR.

During the second half of the 1980s, the Gorbachev marked a dramatic reversal of Soviet foreign policy toward the Middle East. In an attempt to bring an end to the detrimental Cold War and to restore the troubled Soviet economy, Gorbachev put forward policies to build up new relations with Israel and minimized the extent of its aid to previously supported Arab states, including the regimes of Iraq and Palestine. The Soviet Union not only overlooked its previous good relations and a treaty of friendship with Iraq, but even at some stage supported the U.S-led international military operations during Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis of 1990-1991.

Although the disintegration of the Soviet Union resulted in the escalation of a power vacuum in the Middle East that was subsequently filled by an extensive American political and military presence, the role of Russia in the region was nevertheless not underestimated, at least by a number of anti-western regimes that supported the preservation of a Russian presence in the Middle East that would preserve the balance of power in the region.

Russian Three-fold Interests in the Region

Russia has historically been an independent and influential player in the Middle East. The demise of the Soviet Union even brought about further opportunities for the Russian involvement in the Middle East. There are three fundamental reasons why Russia has been, and always will be, interested in this region, the scope of which may extend from Turkey to Iran, Israel, the rest of the Arab countries of the region, and even beyond.

Geo-political Interests

Russia has a deep-rooted geo-political interest in the Middle East. Central Asia and Transcaucasia which are considered as the "soft under-belly" of the Russian Federation hold an intimate geographical proximity with the Middle East. Any imminent threat posed by the presence of foreign armies, or domestic political turmoil, social disorder, civil wars and other acts of domestic violence, or any extensive insurgency such as the contemporary radicalism in this region can severely undermine Russian territorial integrity, especially given the harsh reality that the Russian frontiers are no longer protected by the

former defense installations in the constituent states that made up the Soviet Union earlier.

Economic Interests

Another strategic interest Russia holds in the region results from the fact that the collapse of the Soviet Union left its successor state, the Russian Federation, with a troubled and hard-to-restore economy. A consequential outcome for Russia to rebuild its shattered economy and retain its old economic strength is to spread its influence throughout the region by promoting good relations with virtually all Arab and non-Arab states in the region where great economic opportunities can be exploited.

Access to Warm Waters

Although Russia has historically craved access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, major obstructions stood in its way. Commentators have linked this voracious desire of finding a corridor to the warm waters with the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

A frequent presumption as to why Russia has historically longed for obtaining an inclusive access to the warm waters follows from the fact that Russia is so tightly constricted in frozen geographical setting that its surrounding vicinities in the East and the West leave it no room for expansion but to stretch downwards to the south. Another potential motive could be based on the fact that the Indian Ocean is of considerable geo-economic and geo-strategic importance, not only due to its emergence as a main avenue for international trade transportation, but also due to the bountiful discoveries of minerals, oil and natural gas. An extensive naval domination over these warm waters could help exploit this great volume of natural reserves and other resources that would fuel its industrial production for several decades.

But can Russia achieve access to the Indian Ocean given the historic precedence of its 1979 failed attempt in Afghanistan? Perhaps not. Russia's access to these warm waters in the contemporary situation is close to impossible for two fundamental reasons. Firstly, the only possible ground routes that can provide Russia a smooth passage to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean is either via Afghanistan and Pakistan or possibly Iran. However, the last decade of fundamentalist insurgency in Afghanistan, political turmoil in Pakistan, and Iran's defiance on the nuclear issue, have all made it practically difficult for Russia to even envision such an objective. Secondly, post-Soviet Russia has emerged in a significantly weakened economic and geo-political position.

Nonetheless, Russia has endeavored to pursue new alternatives to have a presence in the Indian Ocean area through a non-hostile strategy. As part of its latest efforts, for example, Moscow now

maintains diplomatic relations with all Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) states¹⁴⁰.

The Resurgence of Post-Soviet Russia

The Yeltsin Administration

After the breakdown of the former Soviet Union, its successor state, Russia, emerged in a weakened economic and geo-political position and, therefore, recognized an imperative need to reorient its foreign policy predominantly in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. Since Russia was particularly concerned about the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Trans-Caucasia which has been long considered as the "soft under-belly" of the Russian Federation, it focused its Middle East efforts mainly on Iran and Turkey, both of which had a significant amount of influence in the two regions.

As early as 1992, Boris Yeltsin built up a close strategic relationship with Iran which became a major purchaser of Russian nuclear reactors and military equipment. Russia began to reestablish its earlier lucrative arms sales with Iran by selling fighter aircraft, tanks, submarines, fighter-bombers, etc. In addition, both Russia and Iran pursued similar interests in restraining anti-Russian and anti-Iranian political struggles in Azerbaijan, and Iran used relations with Russia to offset United States-led international economic and political banishment on Iran. Starting in 1993, Moscow signed a number of contracts to build nuclear power plants and to share nuclear technology with Iran¹⁴¹. In 1995, Russia reached another agreement to build two additional reactors for Iran in the Persian Gulf. In spite of the United States criticism of what it considered as potential nuclear proliferation, Russia argued that the contract was legally binding and that it was permissible under the international law. Since then, this tactical alliance between Russia and Iran continues.

In addition to Iran, Yeltsin's renewed policy in the region was also based on the interest and prospect of arms sales and other trade with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states. For example, in December 1994, Russia signed a trade agreement with Egypt with the stated purpose of resuming Egypt's Soviet-era position as the most important trade partner in the Middle East. Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Algeria also made arms purchases in the early 1990s, as did Egypt and Syria. However, the level of Russian arms sales remained low compared with the previous decades of high Soviet visibility in the region.

¹⁴⁰ "Indian Ocean in the Globalizing World" - *Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol 1-No 4

¹⁴¹ Middle East Politics: The Military Dimension: Council on Foreign Relations, J.C. Hurewitz

As for relations with Iraq, Yeltsin tried to restore relations with Iraq and condemned United States air strikes against that country in January and June 1993. Among Russia's overtures for better relations was an appeal in the UN Security Council for easing international economic sanctions on Iraq which would help Russia collect its \$7 billion debt; a development that would strengthen the greatly troubled Russian economy. With regard to Turkey, Russia during the Yeltsin administration pursued a mixed relations choosing between confrontation and cooperation.

In a general sense, the overall Russian-Israeli trade and diplomatic relations were relatively normal during the first half of 1990s. Russian diplomats encouraged Arab participation in the Arab-Israeli peace talks that began in 1992, and Russians participated in talks between Israel and the PLO on the issue of PLO self-rule in Israeli-occupied territories. Among other reasons, Russia supported the peace process as a means of reducing the threat of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism. However, the relations between Russia and Israel depreciated during the second half of the decade as a strongly pro-Arab foreign minister, Primakov, launched shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East in April 1996 in an attempt to end the fighting in southern Lebanon. However, Russia's condemnation of Israeli attacks against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon led Israel to respond that it preferred the more "even-handed" diplomatic approach of the United States. Therefore, Russia was subsequently expelled from a multilateral force agreed upon by Israel, Lebanon, and Syria to monitor a US-brokered cease-fire in Lebanon.

Overall, Russia's foreign policy priorities during the Yeltsin administration were aimed at; strengthening trends for integrating the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) under Russian auspices; obtaining an equal partnership with the United States in the Middle East peace process; pursuing a colder policy towards Israel and to pay more attention towards Moscow's former Arab allies; to retain old positions, obtain new economic niches, and contain proliferation in the area.

However, there were also negative aspects of Russia's foreign policy during the Yeltsin Administration which adversely impacted its ties with a number of Arab states in the region. For instance, the apparently poor performance of Russian equipment during the Persian Gulf War discouraged many Middle East states from buying Russian arms. Another negative effect on Russia's ties with the Middle East was Russia's aggression against Chechen Muslims, and its stance favoring Serbia against Muslim Bosnia.

The Putin Administration

Vladimir Putin established a more assertive foreign policy in selective areas of the region despite all the persisting problems after and

during the chaotic transition period his entry into power. Putin extended a centralized control over foreign policy which stressed Russia's national interests in promoting Russia's renewed objectives in the Middle East.

At the center of President Putin's focus on the Middle East was a two-track policy which provided for a closer Russian-Israeli relationship while at the same time promoted alternative interests with the rest of the Arab states. This allowed Russia to reach numerous military, economic and diplomatic agreements with both Israel and other major Arab nations without significantly estranging either side. This renewed policy towards the Middle East has allowed Russia to recuperate a significant portion of the strategic, political and economic leverage it lost during and following the breakup of the Soviet Union throughout the 1990s. In strategic terms, the decline of Russia's power after the Soviet Union breakdown and the subsequent rise of Putin in Power brought about two major policy implications¹⁴² for Russia with regard to its priority objectives and interests in the wider Middle East region.

The first and perhaps most perceptible impact is the significant repositioning of Russia's geo-political interest in the region which is relatively distinct from that of the second half of the 20th Century. After World War II, the Soviet Union focused on the Arab Mediterranean countries to the south such as Syria, Libya, Algeria and Egypt, whereas post-Soviet Russia seemingly has a greater geo-political propensity toward the countries which are located closer to its borders, namely Turkey and Iran.

The second evident outcome is Russia's highly-favored reoriented policy toward Israel which is considered by many Russian leaders as the most attractive and strategic ally in the Middle East. For present day Russia, a closer relation and cooperation with Israel, seems much more lucrative than with any other ally in the region.

Since the region as a whole is of tremendous importance to Russia's economic and geo-political stability, it is indispensable to briefly look at Russia's current relations with major countries of the region and how these alignments will impact Russia's future foreign policy toward the Middle East.

Russia and Israel

Russian-Israeli relations have improved considerably under President Putin. From a Russian perspective, developing closer relations with Israel is distinctly productive for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is extensive trade between the two countries, which makes Israel Russia's second major trade partner after Turkey. Secondly, Russian-Israel military defense production firms are engaged in joint ventures for

¹⁴² The Geopolitics of Post-Soviet Russia and the Middle East: *Arab Studies Quarterly*

upgrading Russian military equipment with Israel hi-tech expertise and equipment. In other words, Russia believes that Israel is the only country in the region that has such an access to modern Western technology that could be exploited through good relations. Thirdly, the one million Russian-speaking Jews now living in Israel have led to very significant ties in the areas of cultural exchanges and tourism between the two nations. Fourthly, a strategic alliance with Israel can enable Russia to play an important role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. A most important interest perhaps is the idea that an extensive diplomatic and political cooperation with Israel can and will allow Russia to play the role of a balancer in the region in order to prevent unlimited American or Israeli dominion over the territories, which are closer to Russian borders and where it has long-standing strategic, geo-political and economic interests.

Equally lucrative for Israel is a better cooperation with Russia. On the economic front, Israel purchases 75 % of Russia's crude oil which alleviates its dependency on the Middle East oil. In addition, Israel reaps significant benefits from Russian influence with the Palestinians for restraining the radical elements. Israel could also hope that firm relations with Russia will prevent the export of nuclear materials to Israel's Middle East enemies, including Libya, Iran, and Iraq. Moreover, Israel has and will maintain the steady flow of immigration from Russia which provides Israel with a large number of scientists and engineers.

Nonetheless, although much progress is made during President Putin, major issues of contention still remain. To illustrate one, Jerusalem has been steadily infuriated with Russia's constant collaboration with the Iranian nuclear program, despite U.S., Israeli, and European expressions of concern.

Russia and Iran

Russia and Iran have been the closest strategic allies in the Middle East for the past two decades. In the historic context, the rapid escalation of Russian-Iranian relations date back to 1987-1989 when Russia overtly supported Iran against Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war, even though it concurrently shared military agreements with Baghdad. Iran's relations with Russia were enhanced further during the 1990-1991 Gulf War as Iran realized the need for sophisticated Russian weaponry and aircraft in an attempt to offset an increasing U.S military presence in the Persian Gulf.

From a Russian perspective, the relations with Iran had to be strengthened right after the demise of the Soviet Union, particularly in the view of fact that Iran had great influence and could play a major role in the stability of Central Asia and Transcaucasia; two regions of geo-political and strategic importance to the post-Soviet Russia. The Iranian

political propensity towards Russia to counterbalance the U.S presence in the Gulf, and Russia's recognition of Iran's influence in the areas near Russian borders were both crucial factors that encouraged Russia to supply Iran with modern weaponry, including submarines, nuclear reactors, aircrafts and advanced missile technology, despite sharp criticism from the United States and its European allies.

Another important aspect of Russian-Iranian relationship that developed in the later part of the decade was the Caspian Sea oil issue. Iran has been an ally for Russia in its efforts to limit the independent development of Caspian Sea oil and natural gas by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Iran has also cooperated with Moscow to organize tripartite projects the Central Asian states on the question of sovereign rights in the Caspian Sea.

The final and perhaps the most important element of Russian-Iranian military cooperation is in nuclear arrangements. Russia has been a major provider of nuclear reactors to Iran since 1993. This nuclear cooperation between Russia and Iran has now created enormous concern to the West despite United Nations' inspections, and the constant Iranian assurances that its nuclear program is purely a civil one. As long as the United States presence and regional aspirations in the Middle East and Central Asia continue, Russia and Iran are likely to continue cooperating in far-reaching dimensions.

Russia and Turkey

Unlike Iran, Russia's relations with Turkey have historically manifested a composition of conformity and disparity leaving the two countries to decide between cooperation and confrontation. On the positive side, it appears that Russia has had two key interests in pursuing good relations with Turkey. Firstly, Turkey remains Russia's leading trade partner in the region with a range of almost 15 billion dollars a year. Turkey is not only Russia's number one buyer of natural gas but also a major purchaser of Russian military equipment. Second, through the exploitation of good relations, Russia intends to contain Turkey's increased influence in areas close to Russian borders, and particularly, its "control" of the only exit out of the Black Sea.

On the other hand, there are major causes of concern for Russia in its relations with Turkey. For instance, Russia remains highly concerned with Turkey's intimidating regional ambitions for the control of the Central Asia and Transcaucasia; two areas of considerable strategic importance to present day Russia. Russia's fear is, however, not groundless in the view of the Russia's claim that Turkey was actively supporting the Chechen uprising in the mid-1990s, which was ultimately aimed at undermining the Russian influence in the Caucasus.

Nonetheless, Russia chose to focus more on the positive side of the relations rather than on the incongruity. Russia's military support

for Turkey, for instance, helped Turkey contain its Kurdish rebellion of 1997. In addition, Gazprom of Russia supplies two-thirds of Turkey's natural gas requirements.¹⁴³

Russia and Syria

Russia historically holds an exceptionally warm bilateral relationship with Syria, the scope of which has extended to all spheres of their diplomatic, military, and economic. Perhaps the most important aspect of their relationship is reflected in their opposition to the western hegemony in the Middle East. On the military front, Russia has provided major military-political support to empower Syria's defense capabilities against its regional rivals. For instance, Russia has sold Syria high precision surface-to-air missiles and other advanced air defense capabilities. The sale of such weapons could allow Syria to challenge Israel's military superiority in the region. In addition, an increased number of Syrian officers have been trained in Russian military academies.

Russia's continued military support has enraged Israeli and American leaders who consider Syria a regional menace. In order to preserve its relations with Israel and the West, Putin has significantly condensed arms sales to Syria. This was because of two important reasons. Firstly, Russian-Israeli trade in absolute terms is far greater and lucrative than Russian-Syrian trade; so, it would be costly and detrimental for Russia to put the relations with Israel at risk. Secondly, it is evident that Syria has historically failed to repay debts owed to Russia for arms purchases. Providing more military equipment would therefore mean a net loss for Russia.

Despite the above, Russia intends to use its relations with Syria to offset any increased Israeli or western influence in the Middle East. This is evident in its landmark¹⁴⁴ naval cooperation with Syria, which represents an effort to establish a stronger foothold and influence in the Mediterranean.

Russia and Egypt

Egypt was beyond doubt one of the most desirable allies of Russia in the Middle East in 1950s, especially when Cairo sought protection and support from Moscow against the Tripartite Aggression of Britain, France and Israel during the Suez crisis of 1956. Its image and role in the Middle East region was, however, weakened as Egypt embraced the United States as its major political benefactor throughout the following decades.

With the rise of Putin in power, however, Russian foreign policy toward Egypt opened a new era of cooperation between the two

¹⁴³ Middle East Review of International Affairs: *Journal Volume 2, No.2*

¹⁴⁴ "Syria-Russian naval cooperation grows" - *Gulf News Publications: Associated Press*

countries. In particular, President Putin's visit to Egypt in 2005 signified some important realities. Firstly, since the last visit to Egypt was by the Russian president Khrushchev in 1964, President Putin's visit after four decades denoted an important new initiative. Secondly, with Egypt being an historic leader in the Arab world, Russia did not see any reason as to why relations could not be restored to fortify Russia's presence in the Mediterranean Sea area.

Russia's relations with Egypt further developed during the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's visit to Moscow in 2006. The visit proved highly productive for Mubarak as Moscow pledged to build nuclear power plants in Egypt. Whether this renewed cooperation with Russia will impede Egypt's relations with the United States remains an open question.

Conclusion

Russian interests in the Middle East will certainly grow as Russia itself recovers from the reverses of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It will deepen its presence in a region in which it has always had a compulsive interest. This will become all the more visible as and when the consequences of the US withdrawal from Iraq are felt by all.

THE SHIA-SUNNI DIVIDE

Introduction

Early in their history, the Muslims separated into two large groups, the Sunnis and the Shias. How did that happen? Who are these two groups? What are their differences? What are their theories? What is the relationship between them? Is it cordial or adversarial?

All these questions have suddenly come to the fore as a result of the war in Iraq, and the subsequent increase of Iranian influence in the region.

History

The Sunni Shia divide started almost immediately after the death of the Prophet Mohammad. The Prophet had not been just a religious leader, but also the temporal leader of the Muslim community. The question then was whether his successor should be chosen by public choice, or whether the successor should be from his own family only. The latter reference was to his son-in-law, Ali, who was much admired as an upright family member, and a competent general in the Muslim army.

The general agreement among the Muslim community was that the new Caliph should be chosen by the community itself, freely from among all individuals, and not limited to the family members alone. The supporters of Ali (Shiyyaan-e Ali) were unhappy with this decision, but went along with it. That was how the Prophet Mohammad was succeeded first by Abu Bakr, then by Omar, and then by Othman. It was only after the death of Othman, who was assassinated while reading the Quran, that Ali himself was finally chosen as the Fourth Caliph.

Divisions started immediately. The Syrian Muslims, under Muaviyah, did not accept Ali as the new Caliph, and would not follow him until the murderer of Ali had first been discovered and proceeded against. The majority of Muslims continued to support Ali, since had been chosen by the community itself in the style of his predecessors.

This then led to a war between the two groups. The war lasted for almost five years, and in the end, Muaviyah finally won. This, in turn, led to great injustices to Ali's family. Among these serious injustices was the incident in Kerbala, in which Ali's son, Hassan, and his children, were all killed. The separation between the Sunnis and the Shias had thus become pronounced and final.

The word Shia then means supporter or follower. It is used to refer to the followers of Ali. Even after the victory of Muaviyah, and the merger of the Muslim nation under a single Caliph, the Shias continued to considered Muaviyah as an illegal leader.

The Shias were later split themselves into different factions and groups. Among these different groups are the Ismaili, the Zaidi, the

Imami, the Athnashri, and the Rafidi. Some of these groups, like the Zaidis in Yemen, are almost Sunni today.

In the first century of the Muslim era, the majority of the Muslim community was known as the Al-Jamaat, or simply as “the community”. It was only later, after the appearance of Shia theory, they became known as the Sunni.

Commonalities and Differences

There are a lot of common points between Shia and Sunni beliefs and practices, but there are also major differences.

Both Shias and Sunnis observe the five pillars of Islam, namely, belief in God and in Mohammad as His prophet, the call to prayer five times a day, the payment of Zakat to the poor, the fasting during the month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in life if one has the capacity to do so. Both believe in the Quran as the word of God, as well as in the Torah and in the Bible as revealed books.

The major difference between the two sects lies really in their belief as to how the relationship between the individual and God is to be exercised.

For the Sunni, this relationship is personal and direct. Each individual has the obligation to advance his own understanding and interpretation of the message of God himself, and to seek constant self-improvement in that understanding.

For the Shia, there is the intercession of a “clergy” or religious hierarchy between the individual and God, and it is the duty of this intermediate religious hierarchy to advise the individual in his understanding of the message of God.

Sunnis do not believe in a religious hierarchy *stricto sensu*, but only that there are some people who may have studied religion better than others, without necessarily achieving the status of an “intermediary” between them and God.

Political Theory

For the Shias, there are “Imams”, who are the religious and temporal leaders of the community. These Imams draw their legitimacy from their link to the family of the Prophet, and because of that, they are infallible.

They consider Ali as the First Imam after the Prophet. Then came Hassan, the son of Ali as the Second Imam, then Hussain the grandson of Ali as the Third Imam, and so on, with each Imam being the eldest son of the previous Imam. The Eleventh Imam did not have any children, so Shias believe he had a “secret” child who was the Twelfth Imam, who ascended to heaven, and who will re-appear at the end of time. In his absence, there are Vice-Imams, who assure the

“regency” while waiting for the Twelfth Imam to re-appear. Ayatollah Khomeini was one of these Vice-Imams.

Sunni political theory is less clear. In deciding on who should be his successor, the Prophet deliberately refrained from naming one. This implies that the Prophet wanted the decision to be taken by the community itself. That is how the choice of the first four Caliphs was then made.

Sunni political theory also implies discipline and obedience on the members of the community once they have chosen their leader after discussion and consensus. In a way, this is similar to the concept of the “republican democracy” of today.

The question of legitimacy then brings up the question of how change in leadership is to be assured. In Shia political theory, the question of rebellion against the Imam or the Vice-Imam does not arise, as his legitimacy derives directly from his relationship to the family of the Prophet. In Sunni political theory, rebellion is permitted only if the leader becomes an unjust individual, or thus an unbeliever.

That still leaves open the question of the compatibility or otherwise of “hereditary monarchy” with the eminently democratic polity of Sunni political theory. It is this debate that underlies the tensions that exist in many of the Muslim countries today between their leaderships and their peoples.

The fact that the two political theories differ in significant elements does not mean that Shia-Sunni divisions have always been as clearly defined geographically as there are seen to be today. Muslim history has been a flux between Sunni and Shia governments and empires, and it has never been too easy to define their Shia or Sunni content.

For example, the empires of the Fatimids in North Africa, the Buyids in Iran and Iraq, the Hamdanids in Syria, the Qaramitids in eastern Arabia, and the Safavids in Iran, are all generally considered as Shia. On the other hand, the empires of the Abbasids in Iraq, and the Ottomans in Turkey, are considered Sunni. In either case, there is no evidence to indicate any coercion in belief, and none in political methodology.

In regions where Shias and Sunnis co-exist in close proximity, and that is the case in several Muslim countries, the conflicts between the two communities are not so much a question of religious differences as of local grudges and tribal loyalties.

Most of these conflicts have economic causes, or are rooted in power-sharing, or even in mere prejudices. The motives are not based on belief, but rather on grudges or in revenge.

Conclusion

That being said, the question then is whether the new “discovery” of the Shia-Sunni divide as a result of the Iraq operation

represents a new reality and a growing trend. Some believe that this divide is now irreversible, and that it will presage a new era of Shia Sunni conflict. That would be a return to a situation that the Muslim world has not seen for almost a thousand years, and this would be sad indeed.

For most Muslims, the differences between the Shias and the Sunnis, are no more than simple political divisions, or the subject of theoretical debates. They are certainly not deep enough to constitute a justification for confrontation or conflict.

And yet, the effort among the political pundits of the West, and in the media remains to see division, and to sow discord. Much of this is in the region of the Gulf, which is the focus of all attention due to its large oil reserves. The more divisions that can be created in the region, the easier it would perhaps become to maintain control.

So the question remains: Is the Shia Sunni divide a true reality in the Muslim world, or is it no more than the manifestation of a repressed desire of external foreign policies, formulated to divide and rule?

THE BA'ATH AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Introduction

Modern Arab nationalism has its roots in the Mashriq (the Arabs lands east of Egypt), all of which were part of the Ottoman Empire until the First World War. The political orientation of Arab nationalists in the years prior to the war was generally moderate. Their demands were of a reformist nature, limited in general to autonomy within the Ottoman Empire, greater use of Arabic in education, and local service in peacetime for Arab conscripts to the Ottoman army. Some radicalization followed the 1908 Ottoman revolution and the Turkicisation program imposed by the new Committee of Union and Progress (CUP, often known as the Young Turks government). However, Arab nationalism was not yet a mass movement, even in Syria where it was strongest. One of the key elements of early Arab nationalism was the desire for a united and independent Sham or "Greater Syria" incorporating Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Jordan. Many Arabs gave their primary loyalty to their religion or sect, their tribe, or their own particular governments. The ideologies of Ottomanism and Pan-Islamism were strong competitors of Arab nationalism.

In 1913, intellectuals and politicians from the Arab Mashriq met in Paris at the first Arab Congress. They produced a set of demands for greater autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. They also requested that Arab conscripts to the Ottoman army not be required to serve in other regions except in time of war.

Nationalist sentiments became more prominent during the collapse of Ottoman authority. The brutal repression of the secret societies in Damascus and Beirut by Jamal Pasha, who executed patriotic intellectuals in 1915 and 1916, strengthened anti-Ottoman feeling, while the British, for their part, incited the Sharif of Mecca to launch the Arab Revolt during the First World War. The Ottomans were defeated and the rebel forces, loyal to the Sharif's son Faysal ibn al-Husayn entered Damascus in 1918. Arab unity then saw its first failed attempt with the establishment of the short-lived Kingdom of Syria under Faysal.

During the war the British had been a major sponsor of Arab nationalist thought and ideology, as a weapon to use against the power of the Ottoman Empire. However, the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain and France provided for the division of the much of the Arab Mashriq between the two imperial powers. During the inter-war years and the British Mandate period, when Arab lands were under

French and British control, Arab nationalism became an important anti-imperial opposition movement against British rule.

In 1928, six Egyptian workers employed by British military camps in Ismailiyya, in the Suez Canal Zone in Egypt, visited Hassan al-Banna, a young schoolteacher who they had heard preach in mosques and coffee-houses on the need for an Islamic renewal. "Arabs and Muslims have no status and no dignity," they said. "They are no more than mere hirelings belonging to the foreigners.... We are unable to perceive the road to action as you perceive it...." They therefore asked him to become their leader; he accepted, founding the Society of the Muslim Brothers, or *Ikhwan-ul Muslimeen*.

After the Second World War, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of Egypt, was a significant player in the rise of Arab nationalism. Opposed to the British control of the Suez Canal Zone and concerned at Egypt becoming a Cold War battleground Nasser pushed for a collective Arab security pact within the framework of the Arab League. A key aspect of this was the need for economic aid that was not dependent on peace with Israel and the establishment of U.S. or British military bases within Arab countries.

The Ba'ath Party

History

The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party was founded in Damascus in the 1940s by Michel Aflaq, a Syrian intellectual, as the original secular Arab nationalist movement to unify all Arab countries in one State and to combat the Western colonial rule that dominated the Arab region at that time. In Arabic, *Ba'ath* means renaissance or resurrection. It functioned as a pan-Arab party with branches in different Arab countries, but was strongest in Syria and Iraq, coming to power in both countries in 1963. In 1966 a coup d'état by the military against the historical leadership of Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar led the Syrian and Iraqi parties to split into rival organizations – the Qotri (or Regionalist) Syria-based party being aligned with the Soviet Union while the Qawmi (or Nationalist) Iraq-based party adopted a generally more centrist stance.¹⁴⁵ Both Ba'ath parties retained the same name and maintain parallel structures in the Arab world. Aflaq left for Brazil as a consequence of that coup.

The Ba'ath Party came to power in Syria on 8 March 1963 and has held a monopoly on political power since. Later that same year, the Ba'athists gained control of Iraq and ran the country on two separate occasions, briefly in 1963 and then for a longer period lasting from July 1968 until 2003. After the *de facto* deposition of President Saddam

¹⁴⁵ van Dam, Nikolaos (1979). "The Struggle for Power in Syria: Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics". I B Tauris.

Hussein's Ba'athist regime in the course of the 2003 Iraq War, the Coalition Provisional Authority banned the Iraqi Ba'ath Party in May 2003.

Political Philosophy

The Ba'ath party and the Arabian national movement have been influenced by 19th Century mainland European thinkers, notably conservative German philosophers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte of the Konigsberg University Kantian school¹⁴⁶ and center-left French "Positivists" such as Auguste Comte and professor Ernest Renan of the Collège de France in Paris¹⁴⁷. Tellingly, Baath party co-founders Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Bitar both studied at the Sorbonne in the early 1930s, at a time when center-left Positivism was still the dominant ideology amongst France's academic elite.

The "Kulturnation" concept of Johann Gottfried Herder and the Grimm Brothers had a certain impact. Kulturnation defines a nationality more by a common cultural tradition and popular folklore than by national, political or religious boundaries and was considered by some as being more suitable for the German, Arab or Ottoman and Turkic countries.

The Ba'ath party also had a significant number of Christian Arabs among its founding members. For them, most prominently Michel Aflaq, a resolutely nationalist and secular political framework was a suitable way to evade faith-based minority status and to get full acknowledgement as citizens. Also, during General Rashid Ali al-Gaylani's short-lived anti-British military coup in 1941, Iraq-based Arab nationalists (Sunni Muslims as well as Chaldean Christians) asked the Nazi German government to support them against British colonial rule.

After 1945, the traditional Arab Muslim elite failed to prevent the foundation of Israel and was unable to provide welfare and administrative standards comparable to the western world. The secular and highly disciplined Ba'ath movement was seen as less corrupt and better organized. In multi-ethnic, multi-faith and highly divergent countries like Iraq and Syria, the Ba'ath concept allowed non-Muslims, as well as secular-minded Sunni and Shia Muslims to work under one common roof. Their socialist stance also allowed as well for a closer cooperation with the Soviet Union after 1945.

Structure

The Ba'ath Party was created as a cell-based organization, with an emphasis on withstanding government repression and infiltration. Hierarchical lines of command ran from top to bottom, and members

¹⁴⁶ Germany and the Middle East 1871-1945, ed. Schwanitz, Wolfgang G., Frankfurt, Vervuert Verlag 2004 ISBN 3-86527-157-X

¹⁴⁷ Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, *The Ideas of Arab Nationalism*, p. 76; Youssef M. Choueiri, *Arab Nationalism: A History: Nation and State in the Arab World*, p. 123.

were forbidden to initiate contacts between groups on the same level of organization; all contacts had to pass through a higher command level. This made the party somewhat unwieldy, but helped prevent the formation of factions and cordoned off members from each other, making the party very difficult to infiltrate.

A peculiarity stemming from its Arab unity ideology is the fact that it has always been intended to operate on a pan-Arab level, joined together by a supreme National Command, which is to serve as a party leadership for branches throughout the Arab world.

From its lowest organizational level, the cell, to the highest, the National Command, the party is structured thus:

- *The Party Cell or Circle*, composed of three to seven members, constitutes the basic organizational unit of the Ba'ath Party. There are two sorts of Cells: Member Cells and Supporter Cells. The latter consist of candidate members, who are being gradually introduced into Party work without being allowed membership privileges or knowledge of the party apparatus; at the same time, they are expected to follow all orders passed down to them by the full member that acts as the contact for their Cell. This serves both to prevent infiltration and to train and screen Party cadres. Cells functioned at the neighborhood, workplace or village level, where members would meet to discuss and execute party directives introduced from above.
- *A Party Division* comprises two to seven Cells, controlled by a Division Commander. Such Ba'athist groups occur throughout the bureaucracy and the military, where they function as the Party's watchdog, an effective form of covert surveillance within a public administration.
- *A Party Section*, which comprises two to five Divisions, functions at the level of a large city quarter, a town, or a rural district. The Branch comes above the Sections; it comprises at least two sections, and operates at the provincial level and also, at least in Syria, with one Branch each in the country's four universities.
- *The Regional Congress*, which combines all the branches, was set up to elect the Regional Command as the core of the Party leadership and top decision-making mechanism, even if this later changed to an appointive procedure in Syria. A "Region" in Ba'athist parlance, is an Arab state, such as Syria or Iraq or Lebanon, reflecting the Party's refusal to acknowledge them as nation-states.

The National Command of the Ba'ath Party ranked over the Regional Commands. Until the 1960s, it formed the highest policy-making and coordinating council for the Ba'ath movement throughout

the Arab world at large in both theory and practice. However, from 1966, there has existed two rival National Commands for the Ba'ath Party, both largely ceremonial, after the Iraqi and Syrian Regional Commands entered into conflict and set up puppet National Commands in order to further their rival claims to represent the original party.

The Ba'ath in Syria and Iraq

In February 1963, the Iraqi Ba'ath took power after violently overthrowing Abd al-Karim Qasim and quashing communist-led resistance.

That same year, the Syrian party's military committee succeeded in persuading Nasserist and independent officers to make common cause with it, and they successfully carried out a military coup on 8 March. A National Revolutionary Command Council took control and assigned itself legislative power; it appointed Salah-al-Din al-Bitar as head of a "national front" government. The Ba'ath participated in this government along with the Arab Nationalist Movement, the United Arab Front and the Socialist Unity Movement.

As historian Hanna Batatu notes, this took place without the fundamental disagreement over immediate or "considered" reunification having been resolved. The Ba'ath moved to consolidate its power within the new regime, purging Nasserist officers in April. Subsequent disturbances led to the fall of the al-Bitar government, and in the aftermath of Jasim Alwan's failed Nasserist coup in July, the Ba'ath monopolized power.

The Ba'ath outside Syria

Through its Damascus-based National Command, the Syrian Ba'ath Party has branches in Lebanon, Yemen, Jordan, Sudan, Iraq (currently split into two factions), etc., although none of the non-Syrian branches have any major strength. Among the Palestinians, as-Sa'iqa, a member organization of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is the Syrian Ba'ath party branch.

The Ba'athists first came to power in the coup of February 1963, when Abd al-Salam Arif became president. Interference from the historic leadership around Aflaq and disputes between the moderates and extremists, culminating in an attempted coup by the latter in November 1963, served to discredit the party. After Arif's takeover in November 1963, the moderate military Ba'athist officers initially retained some influence but were gradually eased out of power over the following months.

In July 1968, a bloodless coup brought to power the Ba'athist general Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. Wranglings within the party continued, and the government periodically purged its dissident members. Emerging as a party strongman, Saddam Hussein eventually used his

growing power to push al-Bakr aside in 1979 and ruled Iraq until 2003. Although almost all the Ba'athist leadership had no military background, under Hussein the party changed dramatically and became heavily militarized, with its leading members frequently appearing in uniform.

In Lebanon, the party is led by former Sunni MP for Tripoli Abdul-Majeed Al-Rafei and Nicola Y. Firzli, Beirut-based real estate entrepreneur and scion of a prominent Greek Orthodox Christian family that fought against Ottoman Turkish rule.

In Yemen, the "Qawmi", pro-Saddam branch of the Ba'ath party is led by Dr Qasim Sallam (former MP for the district of Ta'izz), a US-educated philosopher author of "The Baath and the Arab Homeland".

The party works amongst the Palestinians directly through the Arab Liberation Front (known as ALF or *Jabhat al-Tahrir al-'Arabiyah*) founded by Zeid Heidar, and indirectly through the relatively small pro-Iraqi wing of Fatah formerly led by Khaled Yashruti. ALF formed the major Palestinian political faction in Iraq during the Saddam years. It is numerically small, but gained some prominence due to the support given to it by the Iraqi government. It is a member organization of PLO.

In Bahrain, Rasul al-Jeshy leads the local pro-Saddam faction of the Ba'ath Party, the secular Nationalist Democratic Rally Society (*Jami'at al-Tajammu' al-Qawmi al-Dimuqrati*), which in an alliance with Shi'ite Islamists opposes the Bahrain government's economic policies.

The Muslim Brotherhood

History

The Muslim Brothers is a transnational Sunni movement and the largest political opposition organization in many Arab states, particularly Egypt.¹⁴⁸ The world's oldest and largest Islamic political group was founded by the Egyptian schoolteacher Hassan al-Banna in 1928. The Brotherhood's stated goal is to instill the Qur'an and Sunnah as the "sole reference point for ... ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community ... and state".¹⁴⁹ Since its inception in 1928 the movement has officially opposed violent means to achieve its goals, with some exceptions such as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or to overthrow secular Ba'athist rule in Syria. This position has been questioned, particularly by the Egyptian government, which accused the group of a campaign of killings after World War II.

¹⁴⁸ The Moderate Muslim Brotherhood, Robert S. Leiken & Steven Brooke, *Foreign Affairs Magazine*

¹⁴⁹ "Principles of the Muslim Brotherhood".

<http://www.ikhwanweb.com/Home.asp?zPage=Systems&System=PressR&Press=Show&Lang=E&ID=4584>.

Among the Brotherhood's more influential members was Sayyid Qutb. Qutb was the author of one of Islamism's most important books, *Milestones*, which called for the restoration of Islam by re-establishing the Sharia and by using "physical power and Jihad for abolishing the organizations and authorities of the Jahili system,"¹⁵⁰ which he believed to include the entire Muslim world.

While studying at university, Osama bin Laden claimed to have been influenced by the religious and political ideas of several professors with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood including both Sayyid Qutb and his brother Muhammad Qutb.

Ideology

These groups are dedicated to the credo: *Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.*

The Brotherhood's stated goal is to instill the Qur'an and Sunnah as the "sole reference point for ordering the life of the Muslim family, individual, community and state".

Structure

From transcripts¹⁵¹ the following hierarchical organization structure can be derived:

- *The General Organizational Conference* is the highest body of the Brotherhood, with each "base" electing one or two deputies according to its numbers.
- *The Shura Council* has the duties of planning, charting general policies and programs that achieve the goal of the Brotherhood. Its resolutions are binding and only the General Organisational Conference can modify or annul them. The Shura Office has also the right to modify or annul resolutions of the Executive Office. It directs the Executive Office and it forms dedicated branch committees to assist in that objective.¹⁵²
- *The Executive Office* (Guidance Office) with its leader the General Masul (General Guide) and its members, both appointed by the Shura Office, has to follow up and guide the activities of the General Organisation. It submits a periodical report to the Shura Council about its work and of the activity of the domestic bodies and the general organisations. It distributes duties to its members according to the internal bylaws.

¹⁵⁰ Qutb, Sayyid, *Milestones*, (1981) p.55, 62

¹⁵¹ Zeid al-Noman, "Ikhwan in America", p. 15-16

¹⁵² The West and Islam", By Mishal Fahm Sulami

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt

Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in the city of Ismailia in March 1928 along with six workers of the Suez Canal Company. Al-Banna called for the return to an original Islam and followed Islamic reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. In November 1948 police seized an automobile containing the documents and plans of what was thought to be the Brotherhood's "secret apparatus" with names of its members. The seizure was preceded by an assortment of bombings and assassination attempts by the apparatus. Subsequently 32 of its leaders were arrested and its offices raided. The next month the Egyptian Prime Minister of Egypt, Mahmud Fahmi Nokrashi, ordered the dissolution of the Brotherhood.

In what is thought to be retaliation for these acts, a member of the Brotherhood, veterinary student Abdel Meguid Ahmed Hassan, assassinated the Prime Minister in December 1948.

A month and half later Al-Banna himself was killed in Cairo by men believed to be government agents and/or supporters of the murdered premier.

Ideological Differences between Ba'ath and Muslim Brotherhood

Despite the difference between the Baath party and the Muslim Brotherhood in ideology, both of them were born as the result of the western colonization of the Arabic region. Socialism (not Marxism) was quickly adopted as the Baath party's economic dogma: "Unity [Arab], Freedom [from colonialism], and Socialism" are still the watchwords. From its earliest development, the motivation behind Ba'athist political thought and its leading supporters was the need to produce a means of reasserting the Arab spirit in the face of foreign domination. Moral and cultural deterioration, it was felt, had so weakened the Arabs that Western supremacy spread throughout the Middle East. Arabs needed a regeneration of the common heritage of people in the region to drive off debilitating external influences.

On the other hand, the Muslim Brotherhood called for the return to an original Islam and followed Islamic reformers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. According to him, contemporary Islam had lost its social dominance, because most Muslims had been corrupted by Western influences. Sharia law based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah were seen as laws passed down by Allah that should be applied to all parts of life, including the organization of the government and the handling of everyday problems. The Brotherhood also saw itself as a political and social movement. Al-Banna strived to be a populist. The Muslim Brotherhood claimed to want to protect the workers against the tyranny of foreign and monopolist companies.

There are various reasons that led to the altitude of the Islamic movements especially the Muslim Brotherhood in the second half of the 20th Century. Among these reasons are the following:

Deteriorating Economy. Among the many reasons for that are the deteriorating economic conditions in the Arab world in 1928 following a terrible economic recession and global economic collapse in 1929.

Persecution of Islamic groups. One of the reasons that led to the emergence of political Islam was the prosecution of Islamic groups by the Republicans and the clash between them in the Arab world at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. They also had the sympathy of Arab public opinion when some of these Islamic groups suffered torture, persecution, exile and murder at the hands of dictators in different parts of the Arab world. In 1955 the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood were hanged in bulk in 1955. As Sayid Qutb was hanged in 1966, Saleh Sariah in 1974, Shukri Mustafa in 1977, and Mohamed Abdel-Salam Faraj, the leader of the "Jihad", thousands of Muslim Brotherhood were killed in Aleppo and Hama incidents in 1982 in Syria.

Divisions inside the two Movements

The challenges of building a Ba'athist state led to considerable ideological discussion and internal struggle in the party. The Iraqi party was increasingly dominated by Ali Salih al-Sa'di, who took a hard-line leftist approach, declaring himself a Marxist. He gained support in this from Syrian regional secretary Mahmud al-Shufi and from Yasin al-Hafiz, one of the party's few ideological theorists. Some members of the secret military committee also sympathized with this line.

The far-left tendency gained control at the party's Sixth National Congress of 1963, where hardliners from the dominant Syrian and Iraqi regional parties joined forces to impose a hard left line, calling for "socialist planning", "collective farms run by peasants", "workers' democratic control of the means of production", a party based on workers and peasants, and other demands reflecting a certain emulation of Soviet-style socialism. In a coded attack on Aflaq, the congress also condemned "ideological notability" within the party. Aflaq, bitterly angry at this transformation of his party, retained a nominal leadership role, but the National Command as a whole came under the control of the radicals.

The volte-face was received with anger by elements in the Iraqi party, which suffered considerable internal division. The Nationalist Guard, a paramilitary unit which had been extremely effective, and extremely brutal, in suppressing opposition to the new regime, supported al-Sa'di, as did the Ba'athist Federation of Students, the Union of Workers, and most party members. Most of its members among the military officer corps were opposed, as was President Abd al-Salam Arif. Coup and counter-coup ensued within the party, whose

factions did not shrink from employing the military in settling their internal differences. This eventually allowed Arif to take control and eliminate Ba'athist power in Iraq for some time.

After disposing of its Nasserite rivals in 1963, the Ba'ath functioned as the only officially recognized Syrian political party, but factionalism and splintering within the party led to a succession of governments and new constitutions. On 23 February 1966, a military junta led by Salah Jadid took power, and set out on a more radical line. Although they had not been supporters of the victorious far-left line at the Sixth Party Congress, they had now moved to adopt its positions and displaced the more moderate wing in power, purging from the party its original founders, Aflaq and al-Bitar.

The Syrian Ba'ath and the Iraqi Ba'ath were by now two separate parties, each maintaining that it was the genuine party and electing a National Command to take charge of the party across the Arab world. However, in Syria, the Regional Command was the real centre of party power, and the membership of the National Command was a largely honorary position, often the destination of figures being eased out of the leadership.

At this juncture, the Syrian Ba'ath party split into two factions: the "progressive" faction, led by President and Regional Secretary Nureddin al-Atassi gave priority to the radical Marxist-influenced line the Ba'ath was pursuing, but was closely linked to the security forces of Deputy Secretary Salah Jadid, the country's strongman from 1966. This faction was strongly preoccupied with what it termed the "Socialist transformation" in Syria, ordering large-scale nationalization of economic assets and agrarian reform. It favored an equally radical approach in external affairs, and condemned "reactionary" Arab regimes while preaching "people's war" against Israel; this led to Syria's virtual isolation even within the Arab world. The other faction, which came to dominate the armed forces, was headed by Defense Minister Hafez al-Assad. He took a more pragmatic political line, viewing reconciliation with the conservative Arab states, notably Egypt and Saudi Arabia, as essential for Syria's strategic position regardless of their political color. He also called for reversing some of the socialist economic measures and for allowing a limited role for non-Ba'athist political parties in state and society.

With Gamal Abdel Nasser's revolutionary seizure of power in 1954, the Brotherhood split into two factions. One, led by Hasan al-Hudaybi, favored working with the government to gradually move the country toward Islam. A more radical faction, led by the writer and ideologue Sayyid Qutb, advocated armed revolution against corrupt Middle Eastern regimes and more broadly against unbelievers in the Western world. Dividing the world into the "Party of Allah and the

Party of Satan", Qutb declared that Egyptian society under Nasser was contrary to Islam, that it would have been opposed by the Prophet Muhammad, and that Muslims therefore had both a right and an obligation to resist it. A direct challenge to the views of mainstream Sunni theologians, who extolled the Islamic tradition of deference to the state and ruler, Qutb's writings are now cited by many scholars as one of the first formulations of political Islam. A corollary of Qutb's fundamentalist critique of Egyptian society was his abiding contempt for Western society, especially the United States, which he regarded as spiritually vacant, decadent, idolatrous and fundamentally hostile to Islamic piety. Executed in 1966 on charges of plotting to overthrow the Egyptian Government, Qutb nonetheless inspired a widespread following within the Brotherhood.

Conclusion

Although the two movements have different ideologies, both of them were born as the result of the western colonization of the Arabic region.

Arab nationalism emerged as a result of the Arabic ambition to overthrow the Ottoman Empire and as a reaction to the western colonization after World War 1. The movement gained its popularity after the first and the Second World War and its popularity continued to grow until the end of the sixties.

The stand still in the Palestinian cause for more than half a century already, and the inability of the Arabs to build an Arab deterrent force has helped to strengthen the trend of political Islam. The Israeli army remains the most powerful army in the Middle East, and Arab countries can do nothing beyond holding conferences and issuing statements of protest against the Israeli oppression of the Palestinians.

There is no doubt that the rise of Islamic groups in several Arab countries, such as Jordan and Algeria, with surprisingly positive results in legislative and municipal elections, has had a major impact in the emergence of political Islam in the Arab street.

There appear to be four main parts of the Islamic movement and each of them have their own political system:

- The Salafi Islamic Reformist Movement, which calls for renouncing all forms of the modern state of the Constitution of the issue of elections and legislative assemblies of the people and other mechanisms, and the adoption of the manifestations and mechanisms of the State of the Prophet and the Caliphs in the Madina. Advocates of this current are descendants of Sheikh Mohammad Abdel Wahab in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The right-wing extremist movement in the Muslim Brotherhood (Sayyid Qutb), most of the Egyptian and Algerian Islamic groups. According to the Egyptian thinker

Fuad Zakaria that the slogan "Islam is the religion and the state" advocated by these groups, which is the basis for dispute with existing systems of governance in stark contrast with the practices of these Islamic groups themselves.

- The moderate Salafi movement, which calls for linking of the state and religion, but at the same time ready to accept the modern state mechanisms such as a "constitution" provided that it is in strict accordance with the provisions of Islamic Sharia, and "elections" as a means of creating advisory bodies or "shuras". Advocates of this trend are the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic groups in Tunisia and Jordan.
- The Shiite movement, which calls for extending the state of religion in the state, as exemplified by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. They are calling for a theocratic state, or a Wilayat-e-Faqih. They have a constitution strictly in accordance with the Islamic Sharia, along with legislative elections, but do not allow any opposition parties. Among the advocates of this trend are "Hezbollah" and "Amal" in Lebanon, with both groups having strong adepts in many parts of the Arabic world.
- The last one is the trend of religious nationalism, which calls for a less strict, and perhaps more modern application of the Islamic Sharia in a state that is not looking for pan-Islamic or pan-Arab or pan-African unity. The advocates of this trend are many.

DEMOCRATIC TRADITIONS

Introduction

Controversial arguments demanding democratic reforms are always raised in the Middle East and around the world in the wake of any major conflicts taking place in the Middle East. The facile argument that is frequently advanced is that Islam is not compatible with democracy, and that external intervention is thus necessary in order to insert democratic traditions into this non-democratic entity.

The current focus on the Middle East thus makes it all the more necessary to examine the intrinsic democratic traditions of the Middle East, and their relationship with Western models of democracy.

Western Concepts of Democracy

The term democracy is of Greek origin and consists of two parts: “demos” which means the people or the tribe, and “kratia” which means the rule or authority. The combination of the two terms implies the rule of people, or the power of the people.¹⁵³

The rule of democracy was first applied by the Greeks in the cities of Athens and Sparta during the 4th and 5th Centuries BC. Each city had a government where all men of the city (only free men, and no women) met and participated in its rule.

Legislative, executive and judicial roles were distributed between the General Assembly, the Parliament and the Courts.¹⁵⁴ Exercising democracy in this manner was easy due to the small numbers of the population, and the relative simplicity of life.

Democracy in Plato

No discussion of democracy, or of its Western development, is possible without delving into the writings of Plato, and of his description of its theory in *The Republic*. In fact, Western civilization has frequently been described as a “footnote to Plato”.

Plato’s description of democracy follows from an examination of three good forms of government, benevolent monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, and of their three perversions, tyranny, oligarchy, and mobocracy. He reaches the conclusion that, while democracy may be the least good form of government, its advantage is that in its perverted form, it still remains the least bad form of government. Least good, but least bad also.

Having established his choice, Plato goes on to explain that the objective of statecraft is “justice”, or the achievement of balance and harmony in the population. This needed statesmanship in the leadership, through training in the furthering of critical thought. This

¹⁵³ See Democracy in Islam, Esama Anas Al Zeftawy P4 , www.googlepages.com .

¹⁵⁴See Aethnic democracy, A.H.M.Jones, Dr.Abdulmohehn Khashab interpretation .

leadership in a just state can only be provided by “philosophers” who are committed to public welfare, and who can devote themselves to public service.¹⁵⁵

The Social Contract

Modern Europe developed the theory of democracy in a slow and painful process, starting from Magna Carta in 1215 AD, then the Act of Habeas Corpus in 1675, and finally in the Age of Reason in the 18th Century, with Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau. The essence of this theory was the “social contract”, namely the mutual rights and obligations of the leaders and the followers. According to this precept, all authority was based on the will of the people¹⁵⁶. The theory then led to the glorious revolutions in the United States and in France.

Fundamental Principles

The fundamental principles of Western democracy were thus based on individual freedoms and rights, equality among all, rule of law, the separation of powers between the executive the legislature and the courts, and above all, the principle of the sovereignty of the people, with this sovereignty being exercised only through periodic and genuine elections.

Traditional Democracy in Islam

Democracy in any civilization evolves from within and flows from the values and principle of that civilization. Democracy is not new to Islam. In fact, the foundation of the first government in the history of Islam was laid on democracy. *“That Muslims attach great significance to their organization as a political community can be seen in the fact that their calendar is dated neither from the birth nor the death of the Prophet, but from the establishment of the first Muslim polity in the city-state of Madinah in 622 AD”*.¹⁵⁷

It is important to note that Islam is not just a religion, but a social and political way of life, with complete temporal details and injunctions. The concept of the state is thus a fundamental part of Islam itself.

Fundamental Principles

Shura (Consultation)

Shura, which means the act of consultation, is one of the major constitutional principles of Islam and Islamic rule. There are numerous evidences in the Holy Qur’an and the Hadith that Prophet Muhammad was urged by God to consult with his own people before taking any

¹⁵⁵,see The Republic; Book VIII.” *The Internet Classics Archive | The Republic by Plato*,trans.

¹⁵⁶ Contemporary intellectual trend ,P120 , the fact of democracy by Mohammed Shakir al Sharif P23.

¹⁵⁷ See “ On the American Constitution from the perspective of the Quran and Madinah Covenant”by Ahmad Imad ad-dean (1997).

decisions such as the decision relating to the site of Badr battle. The senior companions of Prophet Mohammed and his successors also followed the same principle of consultation and used to consult their people before taking any important decisions.¹⁵⁸

Freedom

Islam freed mankind from the darkness of polytheism, slavery, and injustice. It opened the doors to moral and social reform, and created an atmosphere of security and safety in which man was free to think, invent, and seek the road to perfection. This freedom is based on commitment and responsibility without which there can be no true freedom. Freedom without restraints leads only to nihilism, the consequence of which is the complete breakdown of the moral and social order.

The irresponsible concept of freedom expounded by existentialism, democracy and modern theories of freedom of expression, lead only to corruption and immorality since they are not tied to any concept higher moral values or self control. For Islam, freedom lies in commitment and responsibility. There is no freedom of choice without responsibility; and no responsibility without freedom.¹⁵⁹

Equality

One basic element in the value system of Islam is the principle of equality or, better yet, equity. This value of equality is not to be mistaken for or confused with identicalness. Islam teaches that all men are equal, but they are not necessarily identical. There are differences of abilities, potentials, ambitions, wealth and so on. Yet none of these differences can by itself establish a status of superiority of one man or race to another. The stock of man, the color of his skin, the amount of wealth that he has, and the degree of prestige he enjoys, have no bearing on the character and personality of the individual. The only distinction that is recognized is the distinction in piety, and the only criterion which is applied is the criterion of goodness and spiritual excellence. The Quran says: *Verily the most honored of you in the sight of God is the most righteous*).

Rule of Law

There have been many examples of the strict application of rule of law Islamic history. One of these examples took place during the time of Caliph Omar Ibn Al-Khattab, who received a complaint from a Christian citizen of Egypt which was under Islamic rule. The Egyptian citizen mentioned that he was beaten by the son of the Governor of Egypt, Amr Ibn El-Aas, who had claimed to be "the son of the Governor". Caliph Omar Ibn Al Khattab called the Governor of Egypt and his son and ordered the Christian citizen to beat the son of the

¹⁵⁸ Democracy in Islam, Esam Anas El Zeftawy , P107 , 116 , www.googlepages.com .
¹⁵⁹ . The Concept of Freedom in Islam, Presented by AL-BALAGH Foundation . home.swipnet.se

Governor saying to him “I now beat the son of the Governor”. He was then ordered to beat the Governor himself because his son would not have beaten the citizen if he were not the son of the Governor.

The traditions and the biography of Prophet Mohammed stated that we are all equal and there’s no difference or distinction between Arabs and non Arabs in the sight of God except for integrity, righteousness and piety.

Independence of the Legislature

The independence of the legislative branch of the Government limits the authority of the Government. For example, the Caliph is not granted free rein, and is governed by the Islamic legislation which is based on the Quran and Sunnah; these are considered the main sources of the Islamic legislation (Sharia), and thus rank above the Caliph.

Separation of Powers

The principle of separation of powers is the basis of governance in Islam, in particular with regard to the legislative branch, which is totally independent from the governance of the Caliph. As for the judicial authority, although it falls within the competence of the Caliphs who have the power to appoint judges, religious scholars have decided that the mandate of judges do not expire with the death of the Caliph. Caliphs do not have judicial authority over judges and cannot interfere in the judicial work. The independence of the judicial system is also reflected in a rule of law under which the Caliph is himself subjected to the scrutiny of the judiciary.

The Nation represents Divine Will

The nation embodies the collective will, and not the will of Caliph or the ruler. This collective is almost divine, hence the great importance accorded to “ijmaa” or collective will as a representation of God’s will. There have been occasions in the history of Islam when the principle of “ijmaa” has even been used to temporarily suspend the injunctions of the Quran and Sunnah itself.

The Responsibility of the Ruler

The responsibility of the ruler (the guardian) is one of the constitutional principles of Islam. The ruler takes responsibility for all his deeds. Such responsibility is dual because the ruler is accountable to the nation and to God at the same time, and if he is found guilty the nation has the right to overthrow him.¹⁶⁰

The Constitution

The first constitution during the Prophet’s life was the Charter of Medina, drafted by Prophet Muhammad 600 years before Magna Carta. It laid out a federal role over the tribes. It was a pact signed by the

¹⁶⁰ See Democracy in Islam, Esam Anas El Zeftawy , P72 , 73 , 74 , www.googlepages.com

Prophet with the main non-Muslim tribes, some pagans, some Christians, but mostly Jews. This Charter became a way of life for the citizens of Medina. It established a number of important principles:

- a) Right to equality before law. It established equality, in which all citizens of Medina were equal.
- b) Due process of law. No punishment by guilt of association.
- c) Minority Rights. No advantage to influential persons.
- d) Freedom of speech. People were free to provide consultation and criticism through “ijtihād” or personal interpretation.
- e) Bill of Rights. Hilf-ul-Fudool or a covenant signed by Prophet Muhammad to protect those who were weak and to make sure that business dealings were conducted in all fairness.
- f) Right to vote. Women had the right to vote, and women of Medina voted for the Prophet as a Caliph.
- g) A socio-economic structure was developed to maintain a “zakat” or charity system where 2.5% of the total savings had to be paid to help the needy and to improve the standard of living for all.
- h) Right to religious freedom. The Jewish tribes were allowed to live according to their own rules and were not required to follow the rules of Islam.

Convergences and Divergences

The most important differences between modern Western democracy and Islam are as follows:

- The word “people” or “nation” in a modern democracy means people who live within recognized geographical boundaries and have ties of blood, sex, language and common customs. In Islam, however, the concept of people or nation is not limited to such geographical limits, which are considered secondary, but it rather a fundamental bond among people and their common faith in Islam regardless of color, sex or country. They are all members of the state of Islam, or of the Islamic “ummah” or nation or community.
- The goals of modern democracy appear to be materialistic, and include the achievement of happiness through the increase of wealth, rising wages or winning wars. However, the objectives of Islam or Islamic democracy are aimed at welfare more than wealth, and include providing a good life for Muslims, with sympathy and affection for others, following the teachings of Islam, and being prepared for the next life with good deeds.
- Democracy assumes that people themselves decide what is good for them, therefore all authority to legislate must be left to people. However, Islam is primarily based on the divine

Sharia (Quran and Hadith), and only in a secondary place on the will of the people.

The Democratic Experience of Kuwait

Kuwait is one of the very few states in the Middle East with a written constitution, separation of powers, rights of free speech, fair elections, and a parliament with a genuinely popular mandate. If democracy is an active peaceful engagement of debate through channels safeguarded by a constitution accepted and adhered to by all, then Kuwait is a democratic society with a democratic government. Though the idea of Western-style democracy is supported by a number of people and groups in Kuwait, important factors limit the growth of full-fledged Western democracy in Kuwait.

Until the 1950s, Kuwait was a traditional Gulf society with a small population and very limited resources. While the country's oil potential was recognized towards the end of World War II, the influx of oil money did not come until the time of independence from Great Britain in 1961. However small Kuwait's population (around 1.2 million today), the country contains a complex fabric of religious, tribal, family, and ideological interest groups. Democracy emerged in Kuwait not so much because of merchant family involvement in politics, but due to such factors as the country's geographical location, the enlightenment of its rulers, its oil wealth, and its accepting the ideas of Arab naturalism. Kuwait's formal experience with democracy began with two primitive assemblies, one convened in 1920, and the other in 1938. Neither of these early experiences with representative government lasted very long but they established a model, and they have in turn become a part of Kuwait's democratic tradition. In particular, they influenced the 1962 constitution, one of the most democratic in spirit to be found in the Middle East. This constitution combines popular and royal authority; it provides for a freely elected National Assembly with broad legislative powers, while giving the Emir some legislative authority too. The National Assembly's real authority means that Kuwait is not an absolute monarchy. The 1962 constitution remains in force today, an indication of its suitability to Kuwait.

Kuwait has twenty-five election districts, each of which elects two members. Thus, the National Assembly has fifty elected members. In addition, it has between eleven and sixteen other members, or cabinet ministers, who serve ex-officio in the National Assembly. The constitution does not allude to the creation of political parties, neither approving of nor prohibiting them. In theory, the government does not allow them to exist, though political "groups" with overt political views do exist and fulfill the role of parties elsewhere.

Kuwait's first parliamentary election took place in 1963, and its most recent occurred in October 1992. All of the seven general

elections have been ruled free and fair, with the possible exception of one election in 1967. Not only does the Emir not determine election results in advance, but government-endorsed candidates very frequently lose.¹⁶¹

The Democratic Experience of Iran

The history of democracy in Iran began in 1906, when the Iranian constitutionalists pushed the government to follow modernity and democracy. For the first time, the government formed a parliament and recognized freedom of speech. But the attempt to establish democracy in Iran was faced with military action when Mohammad Ali Shah used canons to bombard the Iranian Parliament. Therefore, that government was the first barrier to democracy in Iran. Although Reza Khan and his son, Reza Shah, promoted modernity in Iran, they could never tolerate democracy. They believed modernity could not be achieved without imperialism. The struggle between tradition and modernity was the second barrier against democracy in Iran, because tradition allowed the clergymen to interpret religious tenets to their advantage.

The number of groups opposing the Shah gradually increased and a large social movement emerged. All the opposition groups, secular, democratic, religious, communist, and the student movement, then formed a coalition under Ayatollah Khomeini. At that time, Khomeini supported democracy and believed that the clerics should not take power as a government.

He had emphasized that there should be checks and balances between the leader and the people in the Islamic republic. After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Khomeini went to Qom, where he had lived before he went to Paris. Contrary to his previous agreement, Khomeini assumed the seat of power and assumed all political power. Although the constitutional structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be a democracy, the regime has never implemented it, except in the choice of the President through elections. Even here, the participating candidates are “vetted” by the clerical regime. The role of the Supreme Leader in this regime is far stronger than that of the Shah.

Officially, the Supreme Leader is the most powerful person in the Islamic Republic of Iran, followed by the President. Article 113 of the Iranian Constitution states: After the office of Leadership, the President is the highest official in the country. He is responsible for implementing the Constitution and acting as the head of the executive, except in matters decided by the Leadership.

The legislature (the Iranian Parliament, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council), the judiciary, and the other governmental

¹⁶¹ See Kuwait Oasis of liberalism , Mohammed Al Rumaihi , Al – Qabas, Feb,20 , 1994 .

organizations, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) are the other powers in Iran that work under the Supreme Leader. In reality, no unit of the power in Iran can act without coordination with the Supreme Leader. He is the only true power in Iran. But it is important to know that he does not make decisions alone, but that he is advised by an inner group of clerical advisers.

The Democratic Experience of Turkey

The electoral history of the Republic of Turkey throughout the fifty years after its establishment has had very mixed results for its democratic identity. The first period, 1923 to 1946, was known as a single-party period, where Turkish politics were only discussed in the framework of Ataturk's party. From 1946 to the present, additional political parties were allowed; however this period's democratic identity has been marred by three military-driven *coups d'etat* (1960, 1971 and 1980). The roots of each of these coups can arguably be traced to social movements and the resulting political developments that appeared to be in contrast to the strictly secular, pro-Western vision of Ataturk. In each of these cases, civilian rule was restored within two years; however, there remained an underlying cognizance among the Turkish political class that veering too far away from the military's view of what Turkey should be could have very disastrous results.

Many would argue that the Ataturk himself would support these tactics in maintaining a democratic national vision. Most recently, the development of mildly Islamic political identity has caused a furor among many in Turkey. There is the case in point of the aborted coup or "soft coup" that took place in the 1990's where a mildly Islamist prime minister was democratically elected and then forced out of office. Even as result as the election of President Abdullah Gül in 2007 there have been issues of peaceful transition of power.¹⁶²

Gül is of a similar political bend to some of leaders in the past who have strayed too far from the military's views. While he was able to take office, it was only after a series of massive demonstrations, threats of military action and a potential return to the days of the coups. His inauguration as Turkey's new president has provoked a great deal of discussion, and anxiety, about the rise to power of a man who is an observant Muslim with a background in Islamic politics .

Instead of anxiety, the world should be celebrating his election as the greatest breakthrough in the history of Turkish democracy, and a sign of hope for Muslim nations all over the world. In recent elections, Gul's Justice and Development Party (AKP in Turkey) won 47 percent of the popular vote and came to power without having to form a

¹⁶² See Grasping at Democracy, Turkey: Democratic Manipulation, C.J Hobson , March 13 , 2009.

coalition. But the main message to the military and secular elites who have run Turkey for so long was not about religion. It was about reforming Turkey's government. Gul's election can be seen as a broad Turkish mandate for this democracy.

The support for the Justice and Development Party was motivated by a widespread sentiment that Turkey's state institutions were in need of a fundamental overhaul, even to the point of rewriting the Constitution. During the last four years, the Justice and Development Party has made great strides in advancing democratization and the liberalization of Turkey's political culture. It succeeded in making serious constitutional and legal changes, promoted Turkey's accession process to the European Union, enlarged individual liberties by cancelling many restrictions, and invested in infrastructure improvements. There has been no evidence of an Islamic agenda.¹⁶³

The Democratic Experience of the United Arab Emirates:

The Democratic Experience of the UAE started in 2006 with the first partial elections conducted for selecting half of the members of the Federal National Council which consists of 40 members. The President of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al-Nayhan, said that these elections will be the starting point for more efforts aiming at expanding public participation in the decision-making process and in enhancing responsibility. Women in the UAE were also allowed to vote and nominate for elections, though no specific number of seats was allocated for them in the Federal National Council to ensure their presence. The recent elections resulted in electing one woman for the Federal National Council.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

As traditional and modern democracies are the product of cultural and civilizational values and principles, therefore, the application of Western models of democracy is not necessarily applicable to Middle East society. However, we can adapt the values and principles in a manner that does not contravene the cultural and religious heritage of Middle East societies. There is no doubt that modern democratic institutions in Middle East societies, and the political developments that have taken place there, including the organization of elections, the transition of authority and the achievement of economic and social development based on consensual laws developed by all segments of the society, will all contribute to building a model of democracy which has its own characteristics.

¹⁶³ See Islam, Democracy and Turkey, by Bilal Sambur .Ph.D, University in Isparta Turkey.

¹⁶⁴ See UAE elections , A transitional step towards to political participation .

TERRORISM AND EXTREMISM

Introduction

Extremism is not a new phenomenon. Throughout history one has seen instances of extremism where extreme or disproportionate actions have been unleashed to alter the state of affairs within and across states. Despite the display of acts of extremism the international community has been unable to agree on a definition. Such is the case for terrorism, one can identify it but the causes and perspectives of the various groups vary greatly, such that it becomes difficult to define. This difficulty is at times attributable to the exercise of the right by peoples to self determination, for territory and self governance.

The precursors of terrorism to modern day terrorism – the Zealots or Sicarii, the Assassins and the Thugs - have existed as early as the first Century with the Zealots, the Assassins of medieval times and the Thugs from India of medieval to modern times. In the 20th Century this has existed throughout the world, the IRA of Ireland, the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka or the FARC of Columbia and is not attributable to one race, religion or region. In the 21st Century the events of 9/11 on American soil have generated responses to the deeds of extremists and their causes. One such reaction has been the War on Terror declared by the President Bush of the United States. In this war they have set the Middle East as their frontier, and since then two wars have been unleashed in the region.

Extremism does not exist in a social or political vacuum. This paper will first examine the dynamics of extremism and secondly, the motivations for such extremism. In the final analysis it would be argued that acts of extremism that have occurred in the Middle East are by products of fundamental injustices of the legacy of colonialism in the region, the undemocratic alliances that were forged between Middle Eastern rulers and the Western powers, and to some extent some forms of counter-reaction giving rise to extremism and its prevalence. Once the root of the problem has been addressed, it would then be feasible to consider strategies to overcome these problems.

Terrorism

One of the forms of extremism which has manifested is terrorism. To date the international community has been unable to come to an acceptably agreed definition on terrorism. The label terrorism refers to an extremely complex and diverse phenomenon. Whether we are considering - right-wing ideologues, nationalist-separatist movements, social revolutionary groups or religious fundamentalists – who espouse extreme ideologies and tactics that differ markedly in the way they advance their causes and perspectives. There is not one size that fits all.

The search for the definition is especially difficult because of the right to self-determination. The right to self-determination embodies the right to struggle from foreign occupation and to self-governance. This right to self-determination is enshrined in Article 1 paragraph 2 of the United Nations (UN) Charter of 1945 as one of its purposes ‘to develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace.’

Despite the UN Charter of 1945, the momentum for decolonization did not gain ground until the 1960’s with the adoption of the milestone Resolution 1514 entitled Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. This declaration stated that all people have a right to self-determination and proclaimed that colonialism should be brought to a speedy and unconditional end.¹⁶⁵

For those territories that have realized the right to self-determination, and struggled for freedom from foreign occupation and domination, the label of freedom fighters and terrorists was dependent on who won. That is why a freedom fighter to one is a terrorist for another. The fighters in the name of freedom and self-governance of ones territories were deemed freedom fighter for the peoples of that territory but perceived as terrorist to the foreign occupying power whose sole goal was to remain in control of state power and not relinquish power to any other. The winner then wrote the history. As summarized by Chris Patten¹⁶⁶ the victors usually wrote the authorized version of what had happened and terrorism melded into freedom fighting when the side backed by terrorism came on top.

This difficulty of identifying the limits of freedom fighting and the beginning of terrorist actions or vice versa and ultimately differentiating between the freedom fighter and a terrorist posed a dilemma that President Arafat leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) spoke to, in the United Nations General Assembly on November 13, 1974:

The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and colonialists cannot possibly be called terrorist, otherwise the American people in their struggle for liberation from the British colonialists would have been terrorists; the European resistance against the Nazis would be terrorism, the struggle of the Asian, African Latin American peoples would be terrorism, and many of you who are in this Assembly hall were considered terrorists...As to those who fight against

¹⁶⁵ UN and Decolonization – History

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpi/decolonization/history.htm>

¹⁶⁶ What Next? Surviving the 21st Century, Chris Patten, Penguin Group, 2008 p88

just causes, those who wage war to occupy, colonize and oppress other people, those are the terrorists. Those are the people whose actions should be condemned who should be called war criminals; for the justice of the cause determines the right to struggle.

The simpler common denominator the international community can agree on the nature and definition of terrorism is the “killing of innocent civilians”.¹⁶⁷ If this be the case, then it is states and agents of states who become most guilty of terrorist actions, otherwise euphemistically termed as “collateral damage”.¹⁶⁸

Despite the lack of a definition of terrorism, the need for the international community to counter acts of terrorism which affect innocent civilians has not diminished. Even though there is no consensus on the definition of terrorism in general, it is relatively easy to identify specific “terrorist acts”. Hence the international community has identified several acts of terrorism. These acts of terrorism have been adopted in the form of 13 universal conventions¹⁶⁹ (and 3 amendments) by the United Nations, each one relating to the prevention and suppression of specific individual terrorist acts.

A “comprehensive convention” continues to defy consensus so far. At the 2005 World Summit member states of the United Nations agreed for the first time on a condemnation of terrorism “in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever, wherever and for whatever purposes, as it constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security”.¹⁷⁰ They also stressed that efforts be made for agreement on a finalized and comprehensive convention on combating international terrorism. This convention would complement the existing framework of international anti-terrorism instruments and would build on key guiding principles already present in recent anti-terrorist conventions.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ The Psychology of Terrorism Ahmad Kamal, World Federation of Scientist Papers, Erice 2002 p2

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ International instruments to counter terrorism

<http://www.un.org/terrorism/instruments.shtml> These conventions range from the unlawful acts aboard aircrafts, seizure of aircrafts, safety of civil aviation, prevention and punishment of crimes against the internationally protected persons, taking of hostages, physical use of nuclear material, violence at airports, safety of maritime navigation, safety of fixed platforms located on the continental shelf, marking of plastic explosives, suppression of terrorist bombing, and financing of terrorism to acts of nuclear terrorism.

¹⁷⁰ 2005 World Summit Outcome UNGA Resolution paragraph 81

<http://www.un.org/summit2005/documents.html>

¹⁷¹ <http://www.un.org/terrorism/instruments.shtml>. Such as: the importance of criminalization of terrorist offences, making them punishable by law and calling for prosecution or extradition of the perpetrators; the need to eliminate legislation which establishes exceptions to such criminalization on political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or similar grounds, etc.

Responding to a call in the 2005 Outcome Document, the UN Secretary General then refined the approach in a report aimed at making a comprehensive inventory of the response to terrorism. This report was entitled “Uniting against Terrorism: Recommendations for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy”.¹⁷² The Report identified practical means for the United Nations to help improve the individual and collective capacity to fight terrorism. This resulted in a unique consensus agreement the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy¹⁷³ adopted in September 2006.

However this strategy did not include a definition of terrorism such as to distinguish it from the right to self determination, and the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism has still not been concluded.

While no international consensus has been reached as to the definition of terrorism, some individual member states of the United Nations have drawn the parameters and defined international terrorism legislation in their respective legal codes. Section 2656 f(d) of Title 22 of the United States Code thus states as follows:

- *the term ‘international terrorism’ means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country;*
- *the term ‘terrorism’ means premeditated politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents; and*
- *the term ‘terrorist group’ means any group practicing or which has significant subgroups which practice international terrorism.*

The inclusion of sub national groups as perpetrators of terrorism in the US code circumvents the issue of state-sponsored terrorism. “*This is obviously a loaded statement...the emphasis on ‘sub-national groups’ is meant to eliminate any application of this definition to the excesses by agents of state whether in uniform or otherwise*”.¹⁷⁴

It is important to note that for the innocent victims of terrorism it really makes no difference as to whether the perpetrators are with or without uniforms. The Non-Aligned Movement¹⁷⁵ examined this issue in the 1990’s and agreed that terrorist actions by agents of state, or state sponsored terrorism, constituted the “worst form of terrorism”.

¹⁷² Uniting against Terrorism: recommendations for a Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy - A/60/825.

¹⁷³ UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy A/RES/60/288 or <http://www.un.org/terrorism/strategy-counter-terrorism.shtml>

¹⁷⁴ The Psychology of Terrorism, Ahmad Kamal, World Federation of Scientists Papers, Erice 2002

¹⁷⁵ NAM Cartagena Declaration in Columbia 18-20 Oct 1995 Chapter IV paragraph 366. A/50/752

The philosopher Igor Primoratz¹⁷⁶ stated that “*all terrorism is prima facie extremely morally wrong. But not everything that is extremely morally wrong is wrong in the same degree. State terrorism can be said to be morally worse than terrorism by non-state agencies*” and he provides four reasons why. Firstly, due to the nature of the state the ‘amount and variety of resources’ that it has at its disposal can claim larger numbers of victims. Secondly, as ‘state terrorism is bound to be compounded by secrecy deception and hypocrisy’ they are able to act and disclaim any involvement. Thirdly, is the existence of international codes regulating the conduct of war of states to which a non-state actor is not party to and not subject to. Fourthly, is the fine line that exists for non-state actors in the fight for liberation. On the other hand Louise Richardson¹⁷⁷ argues that by definition terrorism is the behaviour of substate groups, and Patten states that ‘terrorist groups are not usually state organizations’¹⁷⁸ Thus, there remains debate as to whether terrorism can be attributed to state sponsorship.

The term “state sponsored terrorism” is employed by the United States, outside the gambit of the definition of terrorism and rather as a tool and a discretionary policy of interest. There are several countries that have been determined by the Secretary of State to have repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism and against whom sanctions were imposed. The current list includes Cuba, Iran, Sudan and Syria.

Richardson¹⁷⁹ correctly identifies that it is often a political judgment as to who is, or is not, a state sponsor of terrorism and who does, or does not, use terrorism as an international instrument of foreign policy. This can also be the reverse case for the United States and she lists examples of other countries that could so judge them - Contras in Nicaragua, the American support for the mujahideen Afghanistan, support for local groups trying to overthrow President Castro in Cuba and President Allende in Chile by the United States.

The Motivations for Terrorism

At first glance, poverty has been attributed as the motivation for terrorism. Patten¹⁸⁰ concludes that a smart answer discounts deprivation, arguing that if poverty accounted for terrorist activity, most of it would have its roots in sub-Saharan Africa, but this has not been the case. Poverty rather is a risk factor, not the initial cause.

¹⁷⁶ State Terrorism and Counter terrorism, Igor Primoratz in the book *Terrorism The Philosophical Issues* Edited by Igor Primoratz, Pelgrave Mcmillan 2004 p113-127 or <http://www.tamilnation.org/terrorism/igor.htm>

¹⁷⁷ *What Terrorists Want -Understanding the Enemy containing the Threat*, Louise Richardson, Random House 2006 p50

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid* Patten p90

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid* Richardson p51

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid* p95

Richardson¹⁸¹ believes that the three over-riding motivations for most terrorists are: revenge, renown and reaction. That is, when terrorists act they are seeking to exact revenge, to acquire glory and to force their adversary into a reaction. The counter-reaction and its consequences are such that they advance the goal of attracting further sympathy to the cause.

Colonialism

Great Britain's¹⁸² first sustained intervention in the Islamic Middle East commenced in 1882 when its forces invaded and occupied Egypt, which in theory was part of the Ottoman Empire. Earlier, however, it was from France¹⁸³ that for the first time since the Crusades, a military expedition led by Napoleon Bonaparte was launched into Egypt. The Turks turned to the British to repel the invaders, which they did, and Egypt returned to Muslim rule. The arrival of the French showed that a small expeditionary force from a Western power could conquer and occupy easily and their departure suggested that only another Western power could get them out. This "*portentous double lesson*"¹⁸⁴ would fracture and dominate the region, ultimately affecting its constituents.

The presence and rivalry of the colonial powers would impact upon leaders of the region to exploit and be exploited in its course. The brief French occupation¹⁸⁵ opened the way for an Albanian warlord, Mohammed Ali, who neither spoke nor learned Arabic, but was to found a dynasty that at first ruled and later reigned in Cairo until his great-great-grandson Farouk was deposed in 1952. Recognizing the rivalry between the colonial powers Ali opportunely played the French and British against each other.

Ali's immediate successor leaned towards the British who in 1851 completed the Alexandria-Cairo railroad while his son Said was an unabashed Francophile. He turned to European rulers to finance public works and awarded the concession for constructing the Suez Canal to the French. These ingredients-Egypt's growing autonomy, the new canal, the leap in borrowing, the spread of European ideas, and growing concern in London and Paris of the spread of an expanding foreign colony – played a catalytic part in the very first Suez crisis.

The rivalries between the colonial powers would dominate the region and add to the sum of stability in the region. Lewis¹⁸⁶

¹⁸¹ Ibid Richardson p80

¹⁸² Kingmakers Inventions of the Modern Middle East, Karl E Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac W.W. Norton and Company 2008, p19

¹⁸³ The Middle East -A Brief History of the last 2000 years, Bernard Lewis, Scribner 1995, p283

¹⁸⁴ Ibid p284

¹⁸⁵ Ibid Meyer and Brysac p9

¹⁸⁶ Ibid Lewis 1995 p283

summarises that for the first half of the 19th Century the countries of Western Europe continued to be concerned mainly with commerce and diplomacy in the Middle East, and more particularly with their rivalries among themselves. In 1830, the French invaded and annexed Algeria, then ruled by an autonomous dynasty under the Ottomans. Meanwhile the British were establishing themselves around Arabia, and in 1839 occupied Aden for it was a useful coaling station on the route to India.

In parallel the expansion of the Western powers continued with the occupation by the French of Tunisia in 1881 followed by British of Egypt in 1882. In both these places the indigenous monarchies and political systems were preserved more or less intact but subject to military occupation and overall political and economic control. This tenuous relationship between colonial powers and leaders would cause disaffection in the region as destiny was no longer in one's own hands.

A new dynamic to the Middle East was the rise in power of Germany which added to the rivalry between the colonial powers. The British, keenly aware of the mounting German interaction with the Ottoman Empire perceived them as a threat. This perceived threat was one of the main considerations which determined Britain to maintain the occupation of Egypt, at first meant to be temporary. Similar concerns led to the conclusion of an agreement with Russia in 1907, dividing Iran into Russian and British spheres of influence.

A century and half of Western influence and domination of the Middle East, from the end of the 18th Century to the middle of the 20th Century, brought immense changes on every level. The shattering of the age-old conviction of superiority¹⁸⁷ by the impact of Western arms engendered a deep malaise in Islamic society. This found its first expression in the reform movements, aiming at the modernization of the Muslim army and hence of Muslim state and the adoption of certain products of Western civilization in what was intended to be the limited area of technology. The political bodies were seeking reform and as early as beginning of 19th Century Turkey and Egypt convened advisory councils on agriculture education and taxes.

The strategic location of the Middle East and in particular the Suez Canal which significantly reduced the trip to India meant that British foreign policy in the Middle East initially was to preserve, and then to destroy, the integrity and independence of the Ottoman Empire as a shield against foreign threats to this important road to India.

During World War I, the Arabs saw an opportunity to overthrow Ottoman rule and achieve national independence. This independence could only be achieved with the help of the European

¹⁸⁷ Ibid Lewis,1995 p310

powers which were now the Sultan's enemies. The alliance was formed in 1915 when Sir Henry McMahon, a senior official in Cairo opened conversation with Sharif Hussein. McMahon¹⁸⁸ promised that if the Arabs rose against the British they would have British assistance, and independence. The Arab Revolt was then launched by Sharif Hussein of the Hashemite tribe.

Then came the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 1916 for the division of the lands of the Ottoman Empire between the French and British, with the acquiescence of Russia. In the drawing of arbitrary lines for division of lands, the region would still continue to be under foreign occupation, and the realization of rights of self determination would be permitted only to some but not to all. That is why the resulting monarchies are perceived by major parts of the local populations as arbitrary creations of the West.

Similarly, the idea of the creation of the state of Israel gathered momentum as a result of the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The Balfour Declaration stated that the British government viewed with favour the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, provided that this did not prejudice the civil and religious rights of other inhabitants of the country. The inhabitants of this region view their rights as continuing to be violated. According to Lewis¹⁸⁹ the local discourse continues to portray Israel as an illegitimate invader.

The perceived unequivocal support of the West to the state of Israel in May 1948, just hours prior to the completion of the UN British Mandate in Palestine, was characterized as the establishment of a "Fort in the Wild West" of the Middle East, with increasing military strength and capabilities. Wright¹⁹⁰ concludes that this startling rise to military dominance completely unsettled Arab identity.

Elsewhere, the discovery, exploitation and use of oil increased the focus of the western powers in their control of the region. The first concession was granted in Iraq to a British businessman William Knox d'Arcy¹⁹¹, which was subsequently acquired by the Anglo-Persian, later renamed the Anglo-Persian Oil Company. This was the first of a series of similar arrangements whereby the oil of the Middle East was exploited by concessionary companies, most of them British, French, Dutch, and American, under royalty agreements with the Middle Eastern governments.

¹⁸⁸ Paris 1919, Margaret Mcmillan, Random House 2003 p387

¹⁸⁹ Free at Last the Arab World in the 21st Century, Bernard Lewis, Foreign Affairs, Mar/Apr 2009, Volume 88, No 2 p80

¹⁹⁰ The Looming Tower, Al Qaeda and the road to 9/11, Lawrence Wright, Random House 2006 p46

¹⁹¹ Ibid Lewis 1995 p352

Colonialism has therefore contributed to the rise of extremism in the Middle East, because it was a repressive and divisive system fomented from abroad, that ignored the desires of the people of the region, and left them feeling disenfranchised.

Non Democratic Alliances

The footprint of colonization of the region would leave its indelible mark on the ideology or conduct of governance of the rulers of the Middle East. In the name of alliances between the powers of the West and the Middle East, interests were formed and maintained. Foreign interests were clothed as friends or allies. These forms of government preserved the nature and conduct of Western policies for the purposes of control, whether for economic or political benefit. However, the regimes with which the democratic West was forming alliances were those who had established monarchial or dictatorial regimes. These regimes were not necessarily representative of the voices of the peoples and would engage disaffection against the regimes, and this disaffection would ultimately be directed against the West which was perceived to be backing these undemocratic regimes.

Lewis¹⁹² summarizes that most Arab regimes belong to one of two categories: those that depend on people loyalty and those that depend on obedience. He states that for much of the 20th Century, two imported Western ideologies dominated the Arab world: socialism and nationalism; however both had in effect accomplished the reverse of their declared aims. Whereas socialist plans and projects were put in place, they did not bring prosperity; national independence was achieved but it did not bring freedom; rather it allowed foreign overlords to be replaced with domestic tyrants who were less inhibited and more intimate in their tyranny. He continued that another imported European model, the one-party ideological dictatorship, brought neither prosperity nor dignity-only tyranny sustained by indoctrination and repression.

The loyalty was due to ethnic, tribal, regional or some combination of these. The most obvious examples of systems that rely on loyalty are the older monarchies, such as those of Morocco and the Arabian Peninsula. On the other hand the regimes that depended on obedience were European style dictatorships that used techniques of control and enforcement derived from fascist and communist models. These regimes had little or no claim to the loyalty of their people and depended for survival on diversion and repression: directing the anger of their people toward some external enemy, such as Israel. In those Arab countries where the government depends on force rather than loyalty, there he concluded is clear evidence of deep and widespread discontent, directed primarily against the regime and then inevitably

¹⁹² Ibid Lewis 2009 p86-87

against those that are seen to support it. Lewis also identified an interesting paradox in that *“the countries with pro-Western regimes usually have anti-Western population, whereas the populations of countries with the anti-Western regimes tend to look to the West for liberation”*.¹⁹³

It is important to note that “to be moderate, or to counsel caution is now considered to be unpatriotic in many parts of the world”.¹⁹⁴ The growing democratic opposition forces of Hamas and Hezbollah have demonstrated that opposition parties could fare very well when their critiques were cast in religious rather than political terms. Central is the importance of the mosque and its inherent access to communication networks and therefore tools to disseminate propaganda-unparalleled in any other sector of the community. A further advantage, compares with secular democratic opposition groups is that whereas the latter are required by their own ideology to tolerate the propaganda of their opponents, the religious parties have no such obligation. Rather it is their sacred duty to suppress and crush what they see as antireligious, anti-Islamic movements. Defenders of the existing regime argue, not implausibly, that loosening the reins of authority would lead to a takeover by radical Islamist forces.¹⁹⁵ Democracy has been worked to their advantage.

In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood formed by Hasan al Banna created their own hospitals, schools, factories and welfare societies, combating the resulting poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and disease that were growing recklessly out of control. The fact that the Brothers provided the only organized effective resistance to British occupation ensured their legitimacy in the eyes of the members of the Egypt's lower-middle class. Banna's idea was to challenge the Western model of secular democratic government which contradicted his notion of universal Islamic rule.

In Saudi Arabia, the US airbase established in the 1990's was cause for disaffection in the population. The presence of American forces there has long been an irritant for Saudi rulers, facing strong anti-American sentiment among a growing and increasingly restive population. The deployment of US forces there was seen as a historic betrayal by many Islamists, notably Osama Bin Laden.

The Paradox of the Counter-Reaction

The goal of any counter-reaction to acts of terrorism is to minimize the future occurrence of the action. Terrorism is frequently played out to multiple audiences and is usually aimed at ideologies rather than against the direct victims themselves. As summarized by Stohl:

¹⁹³ Lewis 2009 p87

¹⁹⁴ Terrorism an international perspective, Ahmad Kamal, World Federation of Scientist Papers, Erice 2004

¹⁹⁵ Lewis 2009 p87

*“Terrorism is designed to have direct and indirect victims and thus it is crucial to understand the reaction of the audience and the instrumental victims who are its direct casualties. Therefore, counterterrorism policy must address not only the violence of the terrorist actor but also the multiple audiences of the violence which may be local, national regional or global”.*¹⁹⁶

The reaction to terrorist acts tests any government’s political skills, especially in an open democracy. Do too little, and a government may both appear weak and fail to prevent an escalation of violence. Crack down too hard, and the result may be early success on the security front at the cost of longer-term encouragement of the forces that help sustain terrorism. Herein lies the paradox that the counter reaction does not increase and engage sympathies for the cause of the terrorist, and instead of serving the purpose of minimizing terrorism it encourages it.

Unlike the West, the end of the Cold War had a two-fold reaction in the Middle East. Some saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as loss of a patron that was difficult to replace and some symbolized the defeat of an enemy and victory of Muslim warriors who had forced the Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan. The latter group would view the millennial struggle between the true believers and the unbelievers who had gone through many stages where the Muslims were led by various lines of caliphs, and the unbelievers by various infidel empires. The fall of the Soviet Union the more dangerous and fiercer of the two super rivals during the Cold War and the victory of Muslim holy warriors in Afghanistan, meant there remained only one other infidel power, namely, the US. This is despite the reality that the enormous support given by the US and others to the Afghan Mujahedeen was the main reason why the Russians had withdrawn.¹⁹⁷

The two US interventions in Iraq were perceived in the eyes of the Islamist radicals as constituting humiliating defeats. This point was made with particular emphasis by Osama bin Laden who had played a significant role in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan and who subsequently emerged as the head of Al-Qaeda.¹⁹⁸

The amalgamation of the minority who practice a religion as a front for violence and extremism, does not define the majority who practice these religions and actively rebuke these practices. After 9/11, most of the West defined Islam the religion of extremists or terrorists. This has

¹⁹⁶Counterterrorism and Repression, Michael Stohl in the book *The Roots of Terrorism*, Edited By Louise Richardson, Routledge 2006 p58

¹⁹⁷ This is described in the George Crile 2003 *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History* He is best known for leading Congress into supporting Operation Cyclone, the largest-ever CIA covert operation, which supplied the Afghan Mujahedeen during the Afghanistan. The campaign for Operation Cyclone is the subject of the movie *Charlie Wilson's War*.

¹⁹⁸ Lewis 2009 p87

led to harmful forms of retaliation locally and internationally. This is not the best strategy in addressing the problem. The work of a few cannot be attributed to the many. In the analysis for foreign policy one must separate the moderate from the radical; those who practice the peaceful and tolerant teachings of the Koran from those few who use it for violence. Particularly one must separate the fundamentalist from the extremist, those who practice strict and traditional teachings from those who use it for violence. Therefore we must de-link the Taliban of Afghanistan from the Al-Qaida.

A comprehensive understanding of the reactions and counter-reactions to instances of extremism and the consequences that emanate from them is essential to addressing the problem, so that our policy responses do not serve to merely exacerbate the problem.

The Way Forward

Among the current efforts to engage different actors in a dialogue to find out as to how best to resolve the problem include the Alliance of Civilizations and the Inter-faith Dialogue.

The Alliance of Civilizations was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. It aims at improving understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. The High Level Group¹⁹⁹ were mandated to report on exploring the roots of polarization between cultures and societies worldwide and proposed practical recommendations in the areas of Education, Youth, Migration and Media. For Education it was the promotion of cross-cultural and human rights education to ensure students everywhere develop an understanding of other cultures and religions; for the Youth to implement a broad-based youth employment initiative in countries where unemployment, alienation and extremism are major problems; for the Media to develop joint ventures to produce films and television programmes showing diversity as a normal feature of society; work to sensitize audiences on culturally divisive issues; and for Migration to develop social networks that support the integration of immigrant communities and cross-cultural dialogue. The Alliance focus on concrete initiatives was reinforced and consolidated at the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum convened in Madrid in January 2008.

The Inter-faith Dialogue Initiative by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia in Madrid July 2008, aimed at promoting dialogue among religions and cultures in order to strengthen world peace and security. In his opening address King Abdullah told the 300 attendees, mostly

¹⁹⁹ Alliance of Civilizations High Level Group Report 13 November 2006
<http://www.unaoc.org/content/view/64/94/lang,english/>

Muslim, Christian and Jewish clergy, that the world's major religions had to turn their backs on extremism and embrace "constructive dialogue".²⁰⁰ The conference itself decided to set up a working group to look closely at what it is that causes members of different faiths to misunderstand and fear each other and thus lead to the bigotry and violence that has underpinned terrorism by all faiths.

Conclusion

The western desire to invade and dominate the Middle East is a recurring theme which gained currency after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. Rivalry between the colonial powers for resources, land and hegemony and its inherent divisive and repressive nature has affected the peoples of the Middle East leaving them disenfranchised. The internal agitation that occurs within the countries of the Middle East is mainly due to perception of Western support for the perceived oppressive regimes they are fighting against. The paradox of counter-reaction is that the sequencing of events of response and its consequences is only exacerbating the problem.

The recognition of the need for a comprehensive response based on the participation of all related actors is gaining momentum. The 2005 Alliance of Civilization and the 2008 Inter-faith Dialogue initiatives are examples of this movement.

²⁰⁰ Dialogue for Understanding July 19 2008 - <http://www.saudi-us-relations.org/articles/2008/loi/080719-editorial-dialogue.html>

MINORITIES

Introduction

The Middle East is often conveniently defined as a tightly-knit collection of countries that fervently share and promote the same language and religion. Yet this view fails to recognize the great richness and complexity of the region. Only in recent years has the West become familiar with the notions of Sunni and Shia Islam, or the challenges faced by the Kurds in Iraq, Turkey and Syria, or by the Copts in Egypt, or by the Berbers in the Maghreb.

There is another side to this coin, however. There has been a tendency on the part of the modern Middle East states to equate nationalism with religious unity under Islam. The predominance of Islam in turns means the predominance of the Arabic language. Yet there are minorities who speak Arabic and who practice Islam who are still not accepted as full equals in their hosting states. The actions of the modern Middle East states in either the ghettoization or forced integration of the minorities is an indication of the Middle East sense of self-identity and the importance to that identity of race, language and religion.

Definitions

Defining a minority is always a difficult topic. In a region with the political and religious complexity such as the Middle East, definitions become much trickier. The majority of the peoples of the Middle East are Muslim, yet even within Islam strains and sub-strains have formed and created conflicts. Thus, the minorities of the Middle East can be broadly broken down into ethnic minorities, religious minorities within the broader context of Islam, religious non-Islamic minorities, political minorities, immigrant communities, and what is referred to by one author as majoritarian minorities or those minorities which form a majority in number in the population of the country, but who still have minority status within the state.

Ethnic Minorities

Ethnic minorities can be defined as distinct peoples who live alongside their Arab counterparts, sometimes peacefully and sometimes not. Examples of such peoples are the Kurds of Turkey, Iran and Iraq, the Armenians, the Circassians of Turkish descent now inhabiting areas in Syria and Jordan, the Druze, who also qualify as a religious minority and who currently reside in Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan, the Assyrians or Chaldeans, who live in Iraq, Syria, Iran Turkey, the Berbers of Morocco and Algeria, the Turkomen of Turkmanistan, Afghanistan and Iran. One would also have to consider the Arabs who live in Israel,

as well as, the Hebrews themselves in the larger context of the Middle East.

Some of the minorities such as the Berbers of Northern Africa are pre-Arab and pre-Islamic and have become a minority after occupation by the Arabs. Others are the product of immigration to the region in the post-Islamic era, the Jews being the best-known example. Others, such as the Druze, have unclear origins. Though their faith is Islamic-based, their ethnic heritage is obscure.

Religious Islamic Minorities

Sunni Islam is recognized as the predominant religion of the Middle East. Many of the conflicts of the region have occurred between Sunni and non-Sunni Muslims, the most predominant of these between the Sunni and Shia after the death of the Prophet Mohammad. Islamic religious minorities include the Shia (except in Iran where they predominate); the Alawis, who aside from being a religious sect became a predominant political force in the modern state of Syria; the Druze, already mentioned above as an ethnic minority can lay claim to being a distinctly religious minority within Islam; the Bahais, a Shia sect which grew out of Iran and created its own diaspora in the West; the Ahmadiyahs, a revivalist Islamic movement dating since the turn of the century and headquartered in London with representation in 190 countries throughout the world; and the Ismailis, a prominent sect within the Shia sect of Islam who trace their history back to the death of Mohammad.

Religious Non-Islamic Minorities

The non-Islamic religious minorities of the Middle East include the Jews, the Christian Coptic sect of Egypt, the Greek Orthodox, the Greek Catholics, the Maronites of Lebanon who date back to the 5th Century and who form a majority of the Lebanese population, and the Christians of Southern Sudan. The above-mentioned Assyrians, also known as Chaldeans, are a Christian people who trace their lineage back to the 7th Century, and the ancient city of Nineveh. Protestant communities also exist. Within the state of Israel, the Arabs, who may be Christian or Muslim, form a minority themselves.

Political Minorities

The Shia of Saudi Arabia and the Sunnis of Iran may also be counted as political minorities. While divided by religion, the proximity of the Shia minority to oil-rich territory makes them an important political force in Saudi Arabia

Majoritarian Minorities

Certain minorities represent a paradox: while forming the majority of the population, they are a minority in the eyes of the state,

and the political power they represent is not commensurate with their numbers. Despite their majority in numbers, the Shia of Iraq were long considered the largest single minority of the country, and they, along with the ethnic Kurdish minority of Iraq, were politically marginalized by the Sunni state.²⁰¹ Similarly, the Shia of Bahrain form 70% of the population, yet it is the Sunnis who are recognized as the “majority” population as they constitute the country’s elite and its ruling class.²⁰² Syria faces the opposite dilemma. The Shia constitute only 14% of the population of Syria, yet are the dominant political force.²⁰³

The diaspora of Palestinians who left their native land after the formation and continued expansion of the state of Israel led to their becoming one of the more notable majoritarian minorities in the Middle East. In the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan they are the demographic majority, yet they continue to hold minority status.

Immigrant communities

Lastly there are those minorities who have been drawn into the region by welcoming economies. This has been particularly evident in the cases of the oil-rich countries which form the Gulf Cooperation Council (namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) which employ an extremely high percentage of non-national labor.

The trend towards using foreign labor was present in the early years of the 20th Century for the pearl and fishing industries, but only on a seasonal basis. As the region’s oil-based wealth grew through the 1960s and into the 1970’s, their dependence on foreign labor grew and, according to one estimate, foreign labor accounted for more than half the total population by the 1980s.²⁰⁴

It has been particularly evident in the last 10 years as the states have adopted an open policy of hiring foreigners in lieu of hiring lower-skilled nationals with little experience and great expectations.²⁰⁵

By the years 2001-2002, the UAE and Qatar had an extremely percentage of foreigners in its workforce, reaching 90% for the UAE, where foreign residents amounted to 80% of the overall population.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹Bucher, Henry, Jr., *The Third World: Middle East*, The Dushkin Publishing Group, Guilford, Connecticut, 1984

²⁰² Chaleb, Mounira, *Young in the Arab World: Bahrain*, BBC News, BBC Arabic Service, 22 February 2005

²⁰³ Stratford Global Intelligence, *Syria: Al Assad, the Sunnis, and the Islamist Trend*, www.stratfor.com, 21 December 2004

²⁰⁴ Baldwin-Edwards, Martin, *Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean*, Global Commission on International Migration, September 2005, pp. 4-5

²⁰⁵ Baldwin-Edwards, op. cit., p. 5

²⁰⁶ Baldwin-Edwards, op.cit, p. 6

A Closer Look

It is not within the scope of this paper to cover all the distinct groups and sub-groups listed above in detail. Select samples of each, however, can shed light on the challenges faced by all.

Two ethnic minorities, the Kurds from the heart of the Mesopotamian region and the Berbers of the Maghreb faced similar struggles in their attempts to maintain their own culture and to, at times, establish their own state. In both cases, their struggle for statehood shaped the political history of the region.

The Kurds

The territory of the Kurds stretches from the Taurus Mountains, including Mount Ararat, to the flat plains of Iran, an area frequently described as “Kurdish land”.²⁰⁷ The land encompasses parts of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The borders of the Kurdish land were undefined during the Ottoman Empire and their lands were of little interest until oil was discovered in the province of Mosul.²⁰⁸ The Iraqi part of their territory contains active oil-fields, particularly in the region of Kirkuk.²⁰⁹ On modern maps, no “Kurdistan” exists, though a province in Iran bears the name “Kordistan”. The Kurds receive little support in their territorial claims.

Language and Culture

The Kurds speak a language which is unlike any of the languages which surround them though loosely related to the Persian language²¹⁰, yet their internal diversity is striking enough that the dialect of Kurds at one end of their territory is incomprehensible to Kurds at the other.²¹¹ Their music, dance and customs are different from those of their neighbors, and gender relations are lax by comparison with the surrounding Muslim societies.²¹²

History

The Kurds, once known as the Medians, trace their history back four thousand years and yet have maintained their distinct identity and unique language despite being bordered on both sides by strong empires: the Greeks in the West and the Persians in the East.²¹³ While the actual origins of the Kurds are unclear, they are considered “one of

²⁰⁷ Nisan, op. cit., p. 33

²⁰⁸ Lawrence, Quil, *Invisible Nation: How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East*, Walker and Company, New York, 2008, p. 12

²⁰⁹ Ciment, James, *The Kurds: State and Minority in Turkey, Iraq and Iran*, Facts on File, Inc., An InfoBase Holdings Company, 1996, p. 75

²¹⁰ Nisan, op. cit., p. 33

²¹¹ Ciment, op.cit., p. 78

²¹² Ciment, op. cit., p. 78

²¹³ Nisan, Mordechai, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression*, McFarland and Company, Jefferson, North Carolina and London, 2002, p. 33

the oldest living cultures in the world today”.²¹⁴ The pre-Islamic era was one of continuous struggle with the surrounding civilizations and the gradual development of Kurdish cultural unity.

As Kurds converted to Islam, they began to join the Islamic armies, rising in cases to the level of generals. One Kurd in particular, Saladin, is credited with changing the course of history when he reconquered Jerusalem from Richard the Lion-Hearted.

The end of the 19th Century saw the beginnings of the Kurdish claims of independent statehood with Kurdish Sheikh Ubeidullah writing to the British consul that the Kurdish people were “a people apart”. President Wilson supported the Turkish cause and Articles 62 and 64 of the Treaty of Sèvres made explicit reference to the Kurdish right to independence. Unfortunately, as the United States did not take part in the League of Nations, that early promise fell through.²¹⁵

The Kurdish question arose again with the ascension of the Iraqi Ba’ath Party in 1968. Michel Aflaq, the party’s theoretician and himself the member of a minority group, envisioned a process of integration of the Kurds into Iraqi society under the party’s leadership, and the two peoples would peacefully co-exist in a modern Iraq. Yet, the implementation took a different form. The Kurdish population was evicted to the South and the Arabs occupied the North. Barzani, the leader of the Kurds, fought for the Kurdish claim to Kirkuk, but the Iraqis rejected the demand.

With the Algiers Accord between Iran and Iraq, the Kurds lost the allies they had in Iran. A later inter-state agreement between Turkey and Syria in 1987 prevented aid from either country towards the Kurdish population. After the American liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991, the area north of the 36th parallel was declared Kurdish territory by United Nations resolutions.

In the end, the Kurds failed to achieve their national goals, a failure ascribed partly to their reliance on foreign aid and intervention, and partly to the unsettling influence of Islam. Islamic nationalism recognizes no ethnic minority.²¹⁶

The Berbers

The Berbers are the indigenous peoples of the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) who have lived there for thousands of years. Their ethnic background is possibly related to the Phoenicians or the Carthaginians and they remain a distinct Mediterranean race “of lighter skin color, more European-looking than Arabians from the

²¹⁴ Ciment, *op. cit.*, p. 36

²¹⁵ Nisan, *op. cit.*, p. 37-38

²¹⁶ Jabar, Faleh A., *Arab Nationalism vs. Kurdish Nationalism: Reflections on Structural Parallels and Discontinuities*, in *The Kurds: Nationalism and Politics*, Jabar and Dawood, editors, Saqi, London, San Francisco and Beirut, 2006

desert.”²¹⁷ Like the Kurds, they are primarily a mountain people, and Berber areas are described as “mountainous islands in a vast Arab sea”²¹⁸ While Berbers can be found in the Western desert of Egypt and the southern part of Libya and in areas of Tunisia, they predominate more in the coastal chain of mountains running from Tunisia to Morocco and in Kabylia in particular. In Algeria they constitute 20 percent of the population and in Morocco, 40 percent.²¹⁹

Language and Culture

Berbers are marked as a unique group not only by their race, having more in common with Sicilians, Spaniards and Egyptians than with Saudi Arabians, Ethiopians or Nigerians, but also by their language. The Berber language is quite distinct from the language of any neighboring peoples. It is, like the Kurdish language, composed of different dialects, and Berbers of different regions can understand each other with difficulty.²²⁰ The arrival of Islam to the Maghreb saw the spread of Arabic as the lingua franca, yet the Berber tongue continued, especially in non-metropolitan areas and in the non-literate Berbers.²²¹

The society, like that of the Kurds, is organized in tribes and extended families, which formed cantons known as “laffs” (in Morocco) and “saffs” (in Algeria), a structure that helped insure their survival without ensuring their national unity.²²²

History

Under the seven centuries of rule by the Roman Empire, Berber tribal leaders continued to lead their tribes but transferred their loyalty to the over-arching empire, and were often granted citizenship as compensation.

With the arrival of the Byzantines in 530 AD, the relationship between conqueror and conquered changed. The Byzantines destroyed their cities, and there are no traces of a Berber aristocracy from the Byzantine period onwards. The tribal chiefs once again became the organizing element of Berber society.

With the arrival of the Arab-speaking Islamic conquerors the relation between the indigenous peoples and the conquerors changed yet again. The Arabs were driven by a sense of being a chosen people of a new religion. The population of North Africa, including the Berbers, was both Christian and pagan. Christians were recognized as “peoples of the book” by the Arab conquerors and were allowed to continue to

²¹⁷ Nisan, op. cit., p. 54

²¹⁸ Brent, Michael and Elizabeth Fentress, *The Berbers*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, Oxford, UK and Victoria, Australia, 1996

²¹⁹ Brent, op. cit., p. 1-3

²²⁰ Brent, op. cit., p. 4

²²¹ Brett, op. cit., p. 124

²²² Nisan, op. cit., p. 54-55

practice their religion as long as they paid a poll tax. Pagans were not as easily tolerated and were expected to submit to the will of the conquerors and once having done so became part of the Islamic community.

This was the fate of the majority of the Berbers. They were also heavily recruited into the Arabic army and helped in the conquest of Spain. However, once the Iberian Peninsula had been effectively conquered, the relations between the Berbers and the Arabs developed frictions which were ultimately expressed in the spontaneous revolt of 750 AD.²²³ Later centuries saw the establishment of Berber-run empires in North Africa.²²⁴

Struggle for Statehood

The French colonization of Algeria and Northern Africa brought with it disease, famines, the seizure of land from the native populations and the ultimate impoverishment of the Algerian Arabs in general and the Berbers in particular. The Berbers revolted in 1859, 1871 and 1879 and their revolt was marked by being more a Berber phenomenon than an Algerian phenomenon.

It was during the years of French and Spanish colonization that the Berber sense of statehood came to the fore. In the 1920s, the Berbers established the Riffian state which survived until 1927.²²⁵ The cause of its demise lay in the continued strain of maintaining tribal unity while battling a more powerful enemy.²²⁶

Relations with the State and the Question of Language

The Berbers lived side by side with the Algerians under French occupation. The final overthrow of the French from Algeria in 1962, in which the Berbers provided much of the necessary military might.

Under the leadership of the new Algerian state, dominated by the Front de Liberation National, the Berbers found themselves once again a minority in a new state which they had helped establish. The Arab-dominated state continued the propagation of Arabicization at all levels of Algerian education. The discontent of the Berber people found its expression in a renaissance led by the Berber poet Mouloud Mammeri, which gained momentum in the 1970's and 1980's. When the governor of Kabilya cancelled a lecture on Berber poetry to be given in the 80% Berber city of Tizi Ouzou, there were protests throughout the region.

The experiences of the Moroccan Berbers roughly paralleled those of the Berbers of Algeria. The Berbers were exploited for their military might by the colonizing French against the Arab population and

²²³ Brett, op. cit., pp. 50-87

²²⁴ Nisan, op. cit., pp. 59-60

²²⁵ Nisan, op. cit., pp. 59-61

²²⁶ Brett, op. cit., pp. 188-189

then by the Arabs themselves against the colonial powers. In the independent era, under the rule of Hassan II, the recording of names in the Amazigh (Berber) tongue was forbidden, Berber cities were re-named, and the Berbers were forcibly moved to the southern part of the country. The Berbers of Morocco, like their cousins in Algeria, gave rise to a Berber renaissance during the 1990's which hoped to bring awareness of the existence and longevity of the people and language to the outside world.²²⁷

The Berbers, unlike the Kurds, have not sought separatism from the state, but recognition as a people with a distinct culture and language.

The transformation of the Berber language into the chief means of expression of a literate culture could lead to the emergence of political nationalism. Language has thus become a means of resistance. The enforced Arabization of the Berber peoples gave rise to the distinct sense of separation and led in turn to a resistance to the cohesion of the state.

The Druze

The Druze live in regions of modern-day Syria, Israel, Jordan and Lebanon. They are chiefly associated with Jabal Druze, an area in the south-eastern part of Syria close to the border with Israel and Jordan. In Syria, the Druze number 42,000 and constitute 4% of the Syrian population.²²⁸ About 20,000 Druze make their home in the Golan Heights area between Israel and Syria.

While the Druze speak Arabic, their ethnic origins remain disputed. Philip K. Hitti in his seminal study of the Druze: *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion* published in 1928, traced the historical references to the Druze to as far back as 1165 AD without resolving the issue of their origins. His contemporaries used anthropological measures to dispute the alleged Arabic origins of the Druze, and Hitti himself favored an Iraqi and Persian explanation of their origin based on their religious vocabulary and the nationality of their missionaries.²²⁹ The Druze themselves tend to claim an Arabic heritage, but Hitti was quick to suggest that this is due to the general Druze tendency of dissimulation or *taqiyyah*.²³⁰ The question remains unanswered.

Religious Identity

Whether the Druze are truly an ethnic minority is therefore open to dispute. They do, however, qualify as a religious minority. The

²²⁷ Nisan, *op. cit.* pp.69-75

²²⁸ *Localities and Population by District, Sub-District, Religion and Population Growth, Statistical Analysis of Palestine, 2006*, as quoted in Wikipedia

²²⁹ Hitti, Philip K., *The Origins of the Druze People and Religion*, Saqi, London, 2007

²³⁰ Hitti, *ibid.*, p. 42

Druze religion, like the Druze ethnicity, is difficult to pin down. It is a seeming amalgam of a diversity of religions, but the general agreement is that their religion is an offshoot of the Ismailiyyah sect of orthodox Shia Islam.²³¹ Yet their religion was considered so diverse from Islam as to lead to their being rejected as unfit for inclusion within the Islamic community in the fatwa of Ibn Taimiyah of 1300 AD.

The religion of the Druze is a mixture of wisdoms drawn from a variety of faiths. Their canon includes the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, the Koran and works by Socrates, Plato and Eastern religions. Their self-contained existence is buoyed by certain fundamental beliefs in their faith. The Druze believes that upon death the soul of the departed is reborn in another newly-born Druze body.²³² Communal unity, mutual self-help and collective self-defense is central to their moral code.²³³

History and Co-existence

Druze presence has been recorded as far back as 1165 AD, and they share with the Kurds and the Berbers a predilection for life in mountainous regions of their homeland. (In fact "jabal" literally means mountain.) Their history as well as their faith seemed to have been shaped by the inviolate features of their homeland. Like the above-mentioned Kurds and Berbers they developed a military might, which was later to prove useful to their adoptive states, and were able to resist penetration from the European Christians and the Ottoman Turks.

Despite their similarities to the Berbers and Kurds in certain features, the Druze developed a unique form of resistance and co-existence with the neighboring peoples. One of the fundamental tenets of the Druze cultural code is "taqqiyah", an acceptable form of dissimulation which allowed them to survive. Taqqiyah allowed the Druze to conceal their identity when they felt under threat. Dissimulation, the masking of their true identity to outsiders, and their faith in the unstoppable history of their culture thanks to the reincarnation mentioned above, has been one of the keys to their continued existence and the particular nature of their co-existence with surrounding states.

Under French rule in Syria, the Druze had an Etat Druze but lived among a people who were largely Arab-speaking Sunni Muslims; their "taqqiya" practice led them to feign an Islamic identity. When French rule ceased in 1946, the new nationalist feeling of Syria led to the incorporation of the Druze within the Syrian state. The new nationalist secular political party of Syria, the Ba'ath party, followed a philosophy

²³¹ Hitti, op. cit, p. 5

²³² Ibid, p. 96

²³³ Nisan, op. cit., p. 96

of incorporating minority groups into the life of the state, including their involvement in state politics and participation in the armed forces.

The dominant Baath party of Syria encourages the assimilation of the minorities into the larger Syrian state, including involvement in the politics of the state and participation in the armed forces. The supposed secularism of the new Syrian state was put to the test by the incorporation of this distinct religious minority and their integration into the new Syrian society was made all the easier.

The Druze of the state of Israel had a different fate. The four small Druze villages of the former Palestine were granted them separate religious status in 1957 as well as their own court system. More interestingly, they were recruited to fight in the war of 1948 against the Arabs, and as conscripts in the Israeli army in 1956.²³⁴

The clever use of their dissimulating “taqqiya”, along with their evident military skills, have made the Druze into a valuable minority in the states in which they reside. Their self-identity remains intact and their chameleon-like quality has allowed their absorption and acquiescence in their host nations.

The Copts

The Coptic Christians residing in the modern Arab state of Egypt are among the oldest known inhabitants of the Middle East. Their presence in the region dates back to the introduction of Christianity two thousand years ago. Disagreements with the Byzantines over matters of Christian doctrine led to their persecution in later centuries, and the Copts welcomed the arrival of Islam under whose edicts they would enjoy religious tolerance.

The modern era sees an uneasy alliance between the Coptic Christian and Arab populations of Egypt. Language is an issue. The Copts are native Arab speakers, though they also have a language of their own. The sentiment among the Moslems was that non-Moslems were ill-equipped to master the language of the Koran and Christians were forbidden from entering the department of Arabic literature at Cairo University. Under Sadat they found themselves in a state of siege. They were discriminated against from the government and faced violent attacks. When Sadat himself addressed the Egyptian people on the topic of interfaith existence, he offered the Copts security but counseled them to maintain a low profile.²³⁵

The brutal treatment of the Copts by the Islamic state which they helped found, and the unlikelihood of their establishing a state in their own right, leaves their future open to question. They are bound by a common religion, but their identification with this religion has only

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 110-111

²³⁵ Nisan, op. cit, p. 147-149

served to hurt them in modern Egypt. In their folklore, Egypt is their legacy and they are the true and original Egyptians, but their continued existence in Egypt is precarious. The answers will lie in the hands of the powers that be, those that hold the reins of the modern Egyptian state. Author Nisan posits that a major Arab-Israeli war with an Egyptian loss “might constitute an opening for the Copts”.²³⁶

The Palestinians

The Palestinians constitute a numerically large majority in the modern state of Jordan. Following the dispersal of Palestinians from their homeland after the establishment of the state of Israel, the neighboring Arab Islamic state of Jordan became a natural destination. Jordan gained its independence from the British in 1946 and assisted the Palestinian nationals who were resistant to the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948. After the war of 1967, the Palestinian population of Jordan doubled.

As for its relations with the Palestinian community, Jordan is one of signers the League of Arab States Protocol for the Treatment of the Palestinians in Arab States (also known as the Casablanca Protocol) which seeks to guarantee fairness in employment and the free right of entry and exit and visitation with other signing member states.²³⁷ An investigation by the Conference of Supervisors of Palestinian Affairs found that compliance with the Casablanca Protocol was poor, and the League of Arab States signed an agreement with UNHCR and UNRWA on periodic consultations and exchange of information.²³⁸

Tensions between the Palestinians erupted in September 1970 when an attempted seizure of control of Jordan by Palestinian fedayeen resulted in the massacre and mass expulsion of Palestinians from the state of Jordan.²³⁹

What is the current status of Palestinians in Jordan? Sources indicate that within the larger category of Jordanian Palestinians, there is a sub-category of refugees. According to the former Chief Attorney of the United Nations Relief Works Agency for Palestinians, James Lindsay, the majority of the Palestinians in Jordan have been fully absorbed into the Jordanian state and only 167,000 would now qualify as refugees.²⁴⁰ Conditions in the refugee camps are dire. While UNRWA tries to provide education, health care and other social services to the refugees, the camps suffer from overcrowding.²⁴¹ Jordan does not offer citizenship status to Palestinians from the Gaza Strip, a part of Israel

²³⁶ Ibid, p. 155

²³⁷ UNHCR, Refworld, Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States

²³⁸ Badil.org, The League of Arab States

²³⁹ Eretz Yisroel.org, Black September: The PLO's attempt to take over Jordan in 1970

²⁴⁰ Jerusalem Post, UNRWA Staff not Tested for Terror Ties, January 31, 2009

²⁴¹ Answers.com, Middle East and North Africa, Palestinian Refugee

over which Jordan never claimed sovereignty. These Palestinians are given a stamp indicating that they are from Gaza and they are not allowed to vote or hold public office.²⁴²

Central to the minority status of the Palestinians in Jordan is the definition of “refugee” which cannot be settled without settling the question of the proper ownership of the land of Israel. Jordan’s uncomfortable geographic and historic position leave it somewhat at the beck and call of the international community.

Immigrant Communities

Oil was discovered in 1966 in the Gulf states, and with its discovery came economic expansion and a demand for labor at a pace which outstripped its relatively small population. This led to an influx of foreign workers and foreigners soon outnumbered nationals by a ratio of 7 to 1.²⁴³ While these foreign workers have assisted the new nations in building their wealth, their status as non-immigrants who have no chance of ever being granted citizenship remains affirmed. Immigrants are hired on a contractual status only, thus circumventing any immigration privileges they might claim; and the Gulf countries have explored the setting of caps on the length of time foreign workers can stay.²⁴⁴ The foreign workers do receive compensation of an order they would not be able to secure in their own countries and many have risked illegal residence in order to continue receiving the benefits.²⁴⁵ The Gulf states have thus felt the impact of a globalized economy more than many nations. Threats to a sense of national identity have risen and many have recently called for a continued sense of tolerance, mutual respect and openness.

Conclusion

Demographics and history tell one story and state lines and borders can often tell another. The term “minorities” can seem a misnomer. Who are the true minorities, and who are the rightful citizens and whose task is it to decide? As human rights groups become involved in issues which many states would claim are their sovereign concern, the minority groups themselves can become political objects whose cause is taken up as much for territorial and economic reasons as for humanitarian issues. The potential for upset exists and settling the question of minorities in the Middle East and their integration into the larger community will stabilize relations within the region and with the West.

²⁴² USCRI, www.refugees.org, About Refugees

²⁴³ Author Unknown, Dubai’s Demographic Profile, (credits datadubai.com as source)

²⁴⁴ Bowman, Joel, UAE Flatly Rejects Citizenship for Foreign Workers, *Arabian Business.com*, 12 December, 2007

²⁴⁵ Roberts, Lynne, UAE Pledges Crackdown as Amnesty Ends, *arabianbusiness.com*, November, 2007

THE RED SEA

Introduction

The Red Sea is a semi-enclosed tropical body of water located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, and is bordered by Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea and Djibouti on the west, and Yemen and Saudi Arabia on the east. It is known for its natural beauty, with extensive coral reefs. The Red Sea is also associated with the Biblical story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

The significance of the Red Sea region in geopolitical economic terms is its strategic importance as a vital route for the transportation of oil through the Bab al-Mandeb in the south to the Suez Canal in the north. It is also a relatively inexpensive route for the shipment of Western industrial products to Asia and Africa. Approximately 10 per cent of the world's maritime cargo passes through these waters. The Red Sea therefore, is perhaps the world's most vital strategic waterway along with the Arab Gulf itself.

Geographic Characteristics

The Red Sea is blessed with natural beauty and astounding biological diversity. Coral reefs, mangrove forests, sea grass beds, salt marshes and salt-pans are distributed throughout the region. These unique habitats support a diverse range of marine life, including sea turtles, dugongs, dolphins, and many endangered fish species. Coral reefs, with abundant and varied marine life, fringe most coastal areas. There are also numerous islands, especially in the south.²⁴⁶

The southern half of the Red Sea is thickly beset with reefs extending far out on both sides and leaving only a relatively narrow but deep passage in the middle, clear for navigation. The most important point of this narrow, deep, navigable channel is the Strait of Bab al-Mandab which lies 120-160 kilometers south east of the islands of Hanish and Zugar. It is the narrowest part of the navigable channel which joins the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Conflict within the vicinity of the Strait of Bab al-Mandab is, therefore, of great concern to maritime nations across the globe.²⁴⁷

In the north, the sea divides into two narrow arms that flank the Sinai Peninsula. They are the Gulf of Suez, which is connected to the Mediterranean Sea by the Suez Canal, and the Gulf of Aqaba. The Suez Canal, Egypt, was opened in November 1869. The canal has been widened twice. By 2010, the Egyptian government hopes to have widened and deepened the Suez Canal enough to accommodate the passage of very large crude carriers (VLCCs) and ultra large crude

²⁴⁶ <http://www.emecs.or.jp/guidebook/eng/pdf/16redsea.pdf>

²⁴⁷ Physical and Chemical Oceanography of the Red Sea, Oceanographic and Marine Biology Annual Review, vol. 8, 1970, pp.77

carriers (ULCCs). The Suez Canal is considered a geographic “chokepoint” due to its influence in the world oil trade and because its narrow-width could be easily blocked, causing disruption to oil transport.²⁴⁸

Legal Status

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 introduces a law for freedom of innocent navigation through international straits. The regime of passage through straits used for international navigation established in the treaty does not affect the legal status of the waters forming such straits or the exercise by the States bordering the straits of their sovereignty or jurisdiction over such waters and their air space, bed and subsoil. Both Yemen and Djibouti are parties to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

All ships and aircraft enjoy the right of transit passage, which means the exercise of the freedom of navigation and over flight solely for the purpose of continuous and expeditious transit between one part of the high seas and another part of the high seas.²⁴⁹

Regional and International Developments

In the aftermath of the World War II, the Middle East retained its position of significant strategic importance to the superpowers as an extensive buffer zone between the USSR on the one hand and Europe and USA on the other. The Red Sea and the Suez Canal were vital for the functioning of the US-European allies but, above all, the significance of the Middle East to the US was amplified by the presence of oil.

The Arab-Israeli conflict

The Red Sea and the Arab-Israel conflict have been inextricably linked in the minds and actions of both adversaries.

Israel’s southern port of Eilat and the Gulf of Aqaba are of importance to the continued existence of the state of Israel because it grants its access to the Red Sea and the oceans beyond. This also depends upon the freedom of navigation within the Red Sea and the ability of Israeli shipping to pass through many choke points controlling access to and from secure its vital interests. Israel claimed that the closure of the Suez Canal and the strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping was the main cause of its aggressions against some Arab states in 1956, 1967, and 1973.²⁵⁰ The Arab-Israeli conflict suggests that the security of the Red Sea has been a prime Israel *casus belli*.

Somalia

Somalia has an important strategic location on maritime routes, it was invaded and controlled by Britain in the north, France in Djibouti and Italy in the south. Somalia was divided into five regions, with some

²⁴⁸ http://www.eoearth.org/article/Suez_Canal_Egypt

²⁴⁹ The United Nations Convention on the Law of the sea 1982, article 38

²⁵⁰ *ibid* 42

of them being given to Ethiopia and Kenya, and some gaining their independence. After the independence of Somalia and the establishment of a modern state, this country fought three wars against Ethiopia in 1963, 1964 and 1977 respectively.²⁵¹

Somalia has been without an effective central government since President Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991. Fighting between warlords and the failure of international intervention have left Somalia in a permanent state of civil war, combined with famine, illicit trade and human rights violations.

The current political conflict in Somalia is so complicated that 18 conferences have failed to achieve reconciliation among the different Somali factions, as loyalty to tribes is greater than to the nation. Reconciliation among the Somali factions can never happen without the participation of all factions.²⁵²

The world has largely ignored Somalia since the death of eighteen US troops in late 1993 which led to the pullout of US and UN peacekeepers. Now, the international community is preoccupied with a new symptom, the piracy phenomenon, which is diverting attention from the core of the crisis, namely, the need for a political settlement.

Eritrea

Eritrea emerged as an independent political entity in 1993 after 30 years of civil war. The Red Sea played an important role in the Eritrean drive for independence. After the emergence of the Marxist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam in Ethiopia in 1974, Arab support to Eritrea increased. This link between Eritrea and the Arab world declined in the late 1970s due to internal disputes within the Eritrean leadership.

Eritrea's independence resulted in a reality that Ethiopia became a land lock country, so Ethiopia no longer has a border along the Red Sea and therefore relies on going through other countries such as Eritrea in order to ship and trade goods along that line. This was the major reason for the recent conflict between both countries.

The Hanish Islands Dispute

The Hanish islands dispute seemed to be a small, localized conflict. However, the islands in this area have the potential to create and develop an international incident due to their strategic location. They lie at one of the critical "choke points" of world trade and western oil supply, guarding the route from the Arab Gulf to the Suez Canal. The archipelago is on the southern side of the Red Sea near Bab al-Mandeb, and had generally been regarded as part of Yemen.²⁵³

Yemen's arguments in this respect were based on the argument of historical right as these islands belonged to Yemen before the

251 <http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10016021.html>

252 *ibid*

253 http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Hanish_islands_crisis

Ottoman occupation, and the Ottoman administrative division of the Wilayet of Yemen had recognized these islands as being under the sovereignty of Yemen. Eritrea, the other party to the conflict, did not agree to these Yemeni arguments.

The two parties presented their case to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 1996. After a long trial, Yemen was granted full ownership of the larger islands while Eritrea was awarded the peripheral islands to the southwest of the larger islands.

Oil Reserves

The geo-strategic importance of the Middle East as a global crossroads has been overshadowed in recent years by oil reserves in the Gulf. The Red Sea becomes one of the main arteries by which Gulf oil reaches US and Western Europe. The closure of the Suez Canal between 1967 and 1974 forced the world to live without this route, and had to be diverted around the Cape of Good Hope.

If ships bound for Europe, or vice versa, were to be diverted in this fashion, a series of negative repercussions would ensue. Among those, the extra mileage to run — almost double that for a typical voyage from, say, Ras Tanura to Gibraltar; the prolongation of the same voyage by almost 12.5 days at a speed of 15 knots, thus delaying the replenishment of Europe and the Americas in energy stocks; the additional need for some 750 tons of fuel per ship and an additional volume of some 2,335 tons of carbon dioxide emitted by the additional fuel burnt; a potential increase in freight rates, which would initially more than double if all ships were diverted around the Cape, subsequently settling at about 25 to 30 per cent higher. All economies and the consumer would eventually be hurt.²⁵⁴

The Arabs and the Red Sea

The Red Sea is symbolically important to Arab because of the presence of the holy cities of Islam on its eastern shores. The presence of oil in the Gulf, combined with the waterway's natural global positioning at the crossroads of continents, has maintained and enhanced its position as a strategic waterway of paramount international significance.

The strategic importance of the Red Sea had been emphasized during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Egypt adopted a policy of Arabising the waterway. From 1973 to 1979, the Arabs convened several conferences for the purpose of protecting Red Sea security from external infiltration into the area. Among the most important resolutions to come out of these conferences were the one that declared the Red Sea an "Arab" sea that would remain independent

254 UN document S/PV.6020, Statement of Mr. Efthimios Mitropoulos, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, before the Security Council, November 20 2008.

from international conflicts, and another calling for cooperation among Red Sea Basin countries in the exploitation of its wealth for the benefit of the people of the region.

Israel Ambitions

David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, was the first to voice Israel's ambition to gain control over the Red Sea. In 1949 he said, "*We are surrounded on land... The sea is our only route of contact with the rest of the world. Developing Eilat will be a major goal towards which we will direct our steps.*" A commander of the Israeli navy said, "*Control over the Suez Canal only gives Egypt one key to the Red Sea. The second and more important key from the strategic point of view is the Bab al-Mandeb. This could fall into Israeli hands if it could develop its naval force in the Red Sea zone.*"²⁵⁵

In the face of this ambition, the Arab, especially the frontline states with Israel and those bordering the Mediterranean, became more aware of the threat of Israeli expansionism and the strategic importance of the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb in particular.

Israeli naval displays in the Red Sea between 1970 and 1973 drove home the point to such an extent that Yemen declared itself an immediate party to the Arab-Israeli conflict. During this period Yemen alerted the Arab League to Israeli activities on the Eritrean coast near Bab al-Mandeb. The League followed through on this alert and discovered that, indeed, Israel had rented several islands from Ethiopia. It further discovered an espionage network based on Barim Island in the centre of the Straits whose task was to gather intelligence on the area straddling the southern entrance to the Red Sea and to safeguard the passage of Israeli ships. By virtue of its strategic location, Yemen was perhaps foremost among the Arab countries to appreciate the dangers of Israeli ambitions in the region and to observe the Israeli drive to establish closer relations with African nations near the southern entrance to the Red Sea.²⁵⁶

In this context, Israel scored a significant victory in 1979. It is embodied in the Camp David Accords of 16 March 1979 in the form of the recognition of Israel's right to freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal. This enabled Israel to establish a greater presence and more powerful influence in the Red Sea area and to deploy these in ways inimical to Arab interests.

Since the 1960s, Israel has steadfastly sought to build relations in the Horn of Africa because of its highly critical crossroads between the Arab and African world and its fundamental effect on the security of the Red Sea. Certainly, since 1990 the political climate has been even more conducive to Israel's ends. With the help of its strategic alliance

255 Galal Nassar, Israel, piracy and the Red Sea, Al-Ahram Weekly, Issue No. 926, 18 - 24 December 2008

256 ibid

with the US and its overall military superiority, Israel has succeeded in strengthening its political, economic and military ties with Red Sea African nations.

Alliance with Ethiopia

Israeli alliance with Ethiopia can be traced back to 1958 as part of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion's attempt to create an alliance of non-Arab countries peripheral to the Middle East. Ethiopian-Israeli relations were very close in the 1960s during Emperor Haile Sellasie's reign. The perception in Ethiopia at the time was that the Arab world supported Eritrean secession and the Somali threat against Ethiopia.

After the closure of the Red Sea to Israeli shipping in 1973, Ethiopia allowed Israel warships to refuel at the islands of Halib, Fatima, Dahlak in return for military supplies.

Alliance with Eritrea

The present relations between Israel and Eritrea are strong and this can be traced back to the era of Communist expansion in the region. The US primarily wished to address the rise of the pro-Soviet regime in Ethiopia under Mengistu, and to limit the expansion of similar forces in South of Yemen, Somalia, Mozambique, and Angola. This situation was addressed by encouraging Israel to support Eritrean opposition forces against Mengistu under the cover of the repatriation of Falasha Jews. It seems that Eritrea has inherited the legacy of Ethiopian-Israeli cooperation. This might be attributed to the fact that Ethiopia is now landlocked and cannot offer naval facilities in the Red Sea which were a vital aspect of Israel security.

Once independent, Eritrea turned to Israel for money and weapons. The official visit of Asyas Afourki to Tel Aviv in March 1993 resulted in signing an agreement with Yitzhak Rabin. It provided that Israel would supply Asmara with military and agricultural experts and build national infrastructure in exchange for permission to maintain a permanent and full Israeli presence in Eritrea. The agreement further obliged Asmara to refrain from engaging in any cooperative activities with Arab countries and to postpone the idea of joining the Arab League indefinitely. Following this agreement, Israel augmented its forces in Eritrea to 3,000 troops who took up station in military bases in areas near Sudan and Yemen. Of particular importance are the bases on Sorkin Mountain, overlooking Miyun Island near Bab al-Mandeb. On this island, located at the entrance to the Red Sea, Israel installed radars that monitor the ships that pass through the straits.²⁵⁷

Conflicts in the Horn of Africa

There is no doubt about the enormous global significance of the Horn of Africa, which is a strategic gateway to the Middle East, and

²⁵⁷ *ibid*

central and southern Africa. The Horn of Africa, was, and continues to be, Africa's most tumultuous region. Although the disparate countries which make up the Horn of Africa community have made enormous strides in terms of development and investment, it is the conflicts in the Horn of Africa which have focused international attention on the area.

The roots of conflicts in the Horn of Africa lie with the 1884 Conference of Berlin, which divided Africa into several states without considering ethnic realities. Recently, the competition over energy resources has caused border disputes between the states of the Horn of Africa, including civil wars.²⁵⁸

Piracy in the Red Sea

The traditional vision of the Red Sea security has been linked to the threats which might threaten navigation route in case of wars between the littoral states, including the closure of its straits or channels.

When there are no wars, the traditional problems of the Red Sea security have included a lot of marine disasters, or the pollution that sometime plague its waters, or the drug trade or transfer of weapons or illegal immigrants from one side to another, in addition to the problems that raised from time to time as a result of the international military presence in its water.

Old and New threats

The traditional definition of piracy, according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, is violence on the high seas, defined as beyond any state's 12-nautical-mile territorial waters. In addition, any politically motivated piracy, such as illegal acts directed against ships, their passengers, cargo, or crew, or against seaports with the intent of influencing a government or group of individuals, would be maritime terrorism. Though the definition of maritime terrorism is not codified under any law, the term typically refers to any violence undertaken with a political motive.²⁵⁹

Piracy off the coast of Somalia:

Although we equate pirates with history, maritime piracy remains a serious problem even today. In 2003, this phenomenon occurred off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden, ships and fishing vessels were being attacked by pirates. The frequency of this activity slowly increased. Shipping companies also started to become concerned when the pirates began to target commercial vessels.

The past year has seen unprecedented high levels of pirate activity in the Gulf of Aden, with more than 100 recorded attacks on ships, including over 40 successful seizures involving hostage taking and million-dollar ransoms.

258 *ibid* 13

259 <http://www.securitymanagement.com/library/001617.html>

Piracy disrupts critical humanitarian aid deliveries to Somalia, increases shipping insurance premiums along one of the world's most traveled routes to near-prohibitive levels, damages littoral economies by forcing the diversion of vessels around the Cape of Good Hope and raises the prospect of an environmental disaster as ships fall prey to hostile intent.

Piracy is symptomatic of the overall situation in Somalia, including the lack of security and rule of law, the prevalence of illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping off the coast of Somalia, which adversely affects the Somali economy and marine environment. As such, piracy issues must be kept in mind as one element of a larger challenge in Somalia.

The best possible way to confront piracy is to bring stability and to end the disorder that has swamped Somalia since the early 1990s with an acute and thus far unresolved political crisis.

Maritime terrorism

Maritime terrorism became evident way back in October 2000, when the Al Qaida carried out a suicide bombing against the US Navy destroyer USS Cole while it was harbored in the Yemeni port of Aden. Seventeen American sailors were killed. Intelligence report has time and again warned of further attacks by Al Qaeda to disrupt world trade. The string of daring hijacks by Somali pirates along the Gulf of Aden shows the vulnerability of merchant ships in high seas for terrorist attack.²⁶⁰

The formation of a terrorism-piracy nexus was, and still is, seen as a potentially alarming development. It is believed that, given the high rates of piracy seen in the region's waterways, coupled with the valuable knowledge and skills of the pirates, it will be only a matter of time before terrorists team up with pirates.²⁶¹

The recent rise of piracy off the coast of Somalia may be seized upon as legal and moral grounds for the internationalization of the security in those waterways.

The Red Sea as an "Arab" Lake

The Red Sea has been traditionally known as an "Arab" lake. This is for several reasons: the majority of states overlooking the Red Sea are Arab, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Sudan, Yemen, Djibouti and Somalia whereas, Eritrea and Israel are the only two non-Arab countries bordering it.

The length of the Arab coastlines accounts for 90 percent of the total coastline of the Red Sea. In addition, the Red Sea represents an important artery for the export of Arab oil from the Gulf, and this links and the Gulf area and the Red Sea strategically.

²⁶⁰ <http://www.zenews.com/zee-exclusive/2008-12-04/488177news.html#>, Anil K Satapathy, Maritime terrorism: A new challenge for Indian Navy

²⁶¹ *ibid*

The war against piracy and the recent international military build-up in the area have triggered fears and anxieties among regional players, as countries bordering the Red Sea fear the presence of foreign military forces on their sovereignty, security and strategic interests. Some analysts have also raised the possibility of the internationalization of the Red Sea area.²⁶²

The continued lack of a clear and cohesive collective Arab security policy for the Red Sea zone, the weak relations between some Arab and African states and, more importantly, inter-Arab tensions in that area in particular, all worked in favor of foreign presence and designs.

The proposal of building an Arab security force needs to be reviewed again due to current resurgence in piracy operations. The war against piracy could become an important cause for the formulation of a common security strategy among Arab countries. The problem requires political will for collective action and an understanding on the common threat it poses to these countries.

The non-formulation of an Arab position and political will for dealing with the menace of piracy would open the door to international forces in taking their own action, and thereby turn present nightmares into a reality deeply detrimental to Arab national security in the long term.²⁶³

Conclusion

The strategic importance of the Red Sea is not limited to its being a vital commercial route that links the three continents of Asia, Africa and Europe, but extends to the strategic and military dimensions that has turned it into a focus of attention, especially during the Cold War and the wars that broke out in the Middle East. This was particularly obvious in the first Gulf War of 1991 and the subsequent war in Iraq in 2003 and in the 1973 war. In addition to that, during the Iran-Iraq war, specifically in the year 1984, an Iranian vessel mined the shipping lane in the Red Sea, which reveals the close links between the Red Sea and Gulf oil.

The concept of the security of the Red Sea has changed since the last century. The main determinant of the content and dimensions of that security was to ensure Arab interests in the face of Israeli threats, where the two parties were in a state of open conflict. Although the conflict with Israel has not yet been resolved in a comprehensive manner, the tendency to reach a peaceful settlement, and the presence of direct and indirect negotiations between the parties, now reduce the impact of the Arab-Israel conflict on the issue of the security of the Red

262 <http://www.eassr.ac.ae/CDA/en/FeaturedTopics/DisplayTopic/0,1670,946-0-3,00.html>, Abdel Aziz Shady, Piracy: An Opportunity or an Obstacle for Arab National Security

263 *ibid*

Sea, and open the door to other sources of threats that are commensurate with the global and regional developments.

Recently, the instability of the Horn of Africa, the collapse of the state in Somalia, the wide spread of piracy off the coast of Somalia, and the short falls of the regional and international efforts to eliminate piracy are the most prominent sources of the new threats to the security of the Red Sea. The new sources of threat reveal the nature of changes that affect the concept of security of the Red Sea and illustrate, at the same time, the nature of the challenges to be dealt with by the littoral states.

Although piracy is an old menace that has always posed a threat to maritime navigation, its recent escalation around the Horn of Africa poses a grave new threat to the interests of the global economy. In this context, piracy might be seized upon as legal and moral grounds for the internationalization of the security in those waterways.

Piracy may be a marginal problem in itself. However, it is an aspect of a problem at sea that encourages maritime criminality and gives insurgents and terrorists the freedom to operate. It can thus open the door to connections between organized piracy and wider criminal networks.²⁶⁴

Piracy off the coast of Somalia is a symptom of a wider lack of security and rule of law in Somalia. It is clear that the starting point is to control the deteriorating situation in the Somalia, and later to re-build the institutions of this country.

The international mobilization against piracy have undoubtedly gained part of their impetus from the current state of Arab weakness and the inability of the Arabs to resolve the Somali problem, which is the source of the dramatic rise in piracy. Other actions would be necessary for developing an Arab vision for the preservation of the security of the Red Sea, and the proposal of building up an Arab security force needs to be reviewed again.

All this demonstrates that the security of the Red Sea and its region are inseparable. This means that the security of the Sea is mainly the responsibility of the bordering countries. It is to be hoped that these countries will realize the essential need for regional cooperation to preserve the safety and security of the Red Sea.

²⁶⁴ Martin N Murphy, *Contemporary Piracy and Maritime Terrorism: The Threat to International Security*, <http://www.routledge.com/books/Contemporary-Piracy-and-Maritime-Terrorism-isbn9780415452342>

WATER PROBLEMS

Introduction

Water is essential for human survival. It is the source of life. History records how ferociously tribes fought over places where water was abundant. The importance of water and its crucial link to life, combined to the various challenges and problems that this precious element is encountering make it on top of the world economic and political agendas.

Water problems are numerous and are becoming more acute by the day. Traditional problems such as scarcity, desertification, poor distribution and misuse of water, are heightened today by more global phenomena such as global warming, climate change and population growth.

These water problems and their sensitivity are reflected in the Middle East region more than in any other region of the world. This is for two main reasons: the first is the aridity of the Middle East region reinforced by very irregular rains, and the second is the tense political and historical conflictual relationship between the riparian states of the main water sources of the region.

Given these two main reasons, attention in the Middle East is not primarily focused on issues linking water and poverty, but is more associated with “water conflicts” and possible “water wars” that could result from tensions among countries generated by water scarce environments.

This conclusion, however, overlooks the danger of social and economic consequences that are generated by the increase in demography and poverty. In fact, water scarcity can present a clear and real danger to the internal stability of countries in the Middle East, when we think of scenarios where population growth and environmental change worsen the living conditions of populations that are already affected by poverty and underdevelopment.

Water Sources

Three main river basins constitute the main water sources of the Middle East - the Nile, the Tigris/Euphrates and the Jordan river basins. All three affect a number of countries whose populations are deeply dependant on their waters. All three have created tensions among the riparian states.

The Nile River Basin

The Nile is the world's longest river. It receives most of its discharge from precipitation falling well outside the Middle East on the upland plateau of East Africa and the highlands of Ethiopia. The Nile is the whole life of Egypt. The country owes its existence to the river,

which provides water for agriculture, industry, and domestic use. Cultivation is dependent on irrigation from the river.

The Nile is 6,690 km long, its basin covers approximately one-tenth of the African continent, with a catchment area of 3,007,000 km², which is shared by nine countries: Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Congo. Its main sources are found in Ethiopia and the countries around Lake Victoria. All along the Nile's course, people are affected to some extent by the river or its water.

The waters, however, do not flow in sufficient quantities to satisfy the future water requirements of all these nations. These countries are barely satisfied by what they now receive and it is foreseen that their needs will increase as populations rise, industrial growth takes place, and more land is irrigated with Nile water for agricultural use in countries, besides Egypt. The latter's cropland is already 100% irrigated, fostering an amazing reliance on the flow of the Nile.

Water stress is present when nations find themselves with less than 2000 cubic meters per person of renewable water supplies. By the end of the century at least five nations in the Nile basin expect themselves to be suffering from water stress. This figure does not include the water that would be needed to feed the citizens of the Nile countries. In addition, the environmental situation is further complicated by the problems surrounding the Aswan Dam, such as erosion along the banks of the Nile, caused by the use of chemical fertilizers and which could sweep much of the Nile Delta into the Mediterranean. The Nile is also bringing more salt to the fields of Egypt because of the increased evaporation which takes place in Lake Nasser.

The Tigris-Euphrates river basin

The Tigris-Euphrates basin lies primarily in three countries, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Both the Tigris and Euphrates rivers rise in the mountains of southern Turkey and flow south-eastwards; the Euphrates crossing Syria into Iraq, and the Tigris flowing directly into Iraq from Turkey.

The scarcity of water supplies in the river basin has long fed disagreement among neighboring nations. The Tigris and Euphrates are especially important to Syria and Iraq. Syria obtains approximately 85 percent of the renewable water supply while Iraq obtains 100 percent from the combination of both Rivers.

The Turks (and the Kurds who live in southeastern Turkey) are less dependent on the rivers, yet they still have plans for irrigation schemes to increase their utilization of both rivers. Along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, conflict arises from north to south. The downstream states of Iraq and Syria depend heavily on these two rivers for their water supply. Dams along the rivers installed by Turkey have prevented

some of the water from flowing downstream to these warmer, drier countries. All three countries (but mainly Turkey) have constructed dams on the rivers for purposes of agriculture, hydroelectric power, and industrialization.

Turkey and Syria have increased hostilities towards one another over the use of the Euphrates River. Turkey's plans to utilize its portion of the Euphrates have affected the share going to Syria for irrigation purposes. Hostilities between Syria and Iraq escalated due to the filling of Lake Assad by Syria, resulting to the reduction of downstream flow in the 1970's. Iraqis began accusing Syria of holding back water supplies. Among all three countries, the water supply conflict is an important part of their national security.

The Jordan River Basin

The Jordan River is the third largest perennial river in the Middle East, flowing southwards through Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan. Its largest tributary is the Yarmouk River, which forms the present boundary between Syria and Jordan before becoming the border between Israel and Jordan.

The lower reaches of the Jordan River border on part of the Israeli occupied West Bank to the west and Jordan to the east. The Jordan system delivers an average annual flow to the Dead Sea, equivalent to 2% of the annual flow of the Nile and 7% of the annual flow of the Euphrates. However, twenty-three per cent of this discharge originates in pre 1967 Israel.

Jordan and Israel are highly dependent upon the Jordan River. The need for water and the continuing hostility between Israel and the surrounding Arab States has placed the Jordan River as a central bargaining chip since Israel's establishment in 1948. The Israeli War of Independence was rooted in the fact that the Arab countries considered the State of Israel to be illegitimate. Connected to these declarations, the Arab states have persistently denounced the unilateral diversion of the Jordan River as completely illegal. The Israeli response has been that the surrounding Arab nations were never willing to let Israel exist in peace. These historical disagreements intertwine with the dispute between Israel and Jordan in which the Jordan River plays a main role.

Ground-Water Resources

It is possible to distinguish two major types of aquifers in the Middle East. Along river valleys and beneath alluvial fans and plains, there are shallow alluvial aquifers. These are generally unconfined, small in area, and have water tables that respond rapidly to local precipitation conditions. The second type is deep rock aquifers which store water that can in part be many thousands of years old. The deep rock aquifers often extend over many thousands of square kilometers in area and the natural water recharge depend of the rare rainfalls.

The potential for conventional water resources such as river water and renewable groundwater is extremely limited in the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa. Ground water resources in deep sandstone aquifers, such as the Nubian sandstone aquifers and equivalent formations, could have been conceived as a major source of water for development in the Middle East and North Africa. This ground-water in the deep sandstone aquifers is, however, non-renewable or "fossil" water which may offer an opportunity for short-term and emergency uses only.

Deep Sandstone Aquifers

Sandstone aquifers underlie most of the Arabian Peninsula and the Sahara, and represent one of the most extensive artesian ground-water basins of the world. The ground-water of the Sahara is to be found mainly in seven major basins: the Great Western Erg and Great Eastern Erg in the north, Fezzan and Tenezroft in the central region, the Western desert of Egypt in the east, and Chad and Niger in the south. A very large ground-water reservoir of fresh water is found in the Libyan part of the Sahara at a depth of approximately 3,000 m. The Nubian aquifer system of the north-eastern Sahara, which is one of the largest ground-water systems of the Sahara, covers an area of about 2 million square kilometers.

Despite the hyper-arid climate, huge reserves of fresh ground-water are contained in Nubian sandstone in several thousand metres of saturated rock. The average rainfall is less than 5 mm. per year, from which it is obvious that there has been no recent groundwater recharge in most of the system.

Saudi Arabia today is one of the world's leaders in the production of wheat for self-sufficiency in food. The production of wheat, however, is almost wholly dependent on the mining of non-renewable ground-water resources.²⁶⁵ This huge demand for water for agricultural use is based on the kingdom's policy of self-sufficiency in food. The wisdom of growing grain, which generally requires 2,000-3,000 tons of water per ton of grain, is constantly under discussion.

The quality of ground-water in the deep sandstone aquifers is generally fresh, with low salinity. This water is used mainly for growing wheat, with a total yield of 741,000 tons per year. The most commonly used method of irrigation in Saudi Arabia is the central-pivot sprinkler system, which loses a significant amount of water through evaporation.

²⁶⁵ According to the Fourth Development Plan (1985-1990) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Water, agricultural water demand in Saudi Arabia in 1985 amounted to 8×10^9 m³ per year, while the demand for water for urban, rural, and industrial use was 1.6×10^9 m³ per year (MAWSA 1985). It was estimated that the total annual demand would increase to 16.5×10^9 m³ by the year 2000, comprising an agricultural demand of 14×10^9 m³ and an M&I demand of 2.5×10^9 m³.

This has already caused a substantial depletion of non-renewable ground-water resources.

Desalinization of Sea Water

The rapid increase in demand for water in the Arabian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman, where conventional water resources such as fresh surface water and renewable groundwater are extremely limited, has hastened the search for other alternatives such as waste-water reclamation and desalination. These countries use non-renewable ground-water resources in large quantity, causing depletion of these valuable resources and deterioration in the quality of water. In some of the more arid parts of the Middle East, in particular the Gulf States, where good quality water is not available or is extremely limited, desalination of seawater has been commonly used to solve the problems of water supply for municipal and industrial uses²⁶⁶.

Saudi Arabia entered the desalinated water field much later than Kuwait. The first plant was commissioned in 1970. It has, however, gone in for an ambitious programmer of desalination plant construction on both the Red Sea and Gulf coasts²⁶⁷. In spite of the high cost of sea-water desalination, with unit water costs five to ten times as high as those of conventional water-resources development, a vast quantity has been produced to meet the increasing demand for domestic water. As in Kuwait, however, there is increasing government concern about the production cost of desalinated water, and every effort is being made to ensure that water use is as efficient as possible.

Water Power Asymmetries

Water ownership, management, and use are among the most critical problems confronting the Middle East. These water problems have become intertwined with political, demographic, economic, and even religious conflicts, making it difficult to resolve. Water, as a key issue in the overall political negotiations between states of the region, cannot but add to the existing regional tensions or inciting new ones in the absence of cooperative efforts among States that share mutual resources to reach agreements.

The inequity in water sharing is a result of the existing power asymmetries between upstream and downstream states of the Middle

²⁶⁶ Kuwait was the first state to adopt seawater desalination, linking electricity generation to desalination. The co-generation station, as it is called, re-uses low pressure steam from the generator to provide energy for the desalination process. As a result, both energy and costs are minimized. Kuwait began desalinated water production in 1957, when 3.1 million m³ were produced per year. By 1987 this figure had risen to 184 million m³ per year.

²⁶⁷ The Saline Water Conversion Corporation had installed 30 desalination plant projects by the end of the 1980s. The total production of desalinated water is estimated to be 2.16 million m³ (572 million [US] gal.) per day including a facility at Al-Jubail producing 1 million m³ per day, which is currently the world's largest distillation plant

East region. Indeed, the bilateral relations between riparian states and those who depend on them have proved to be tense because of this inequity. Past examples showed the impact of tensions over water between Middle Eastern countries on their political relations. For instance, Syrian, Jordanian, and Israeli disputes in the 1950s and 1960s, illustrate water was a primary source of conflict. Iraq's 1980 attack on Iran over the control of the Shatt al-Arab, a disputed boundary between the two countries since 1639, demonstrates the use of water as a surrogate issue.

The Jordan River

The Jordan, the Yarmuk river systems, and the West Bank and Gaza aquifers are subject to water flow diversion and ownership. The countries involved include Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians of the Occupied Territories. Israel and Jordan are at imminent risk. The situation is complicated by the occasional drought situations that exacerbate the resource problem.

The development project by Syria on the upper Yarmuk has led to increased salinity in the lower Yarmuk and Jordan rivers, lowered water levels in the Dead Sea, and has reduced irrigation water for Jordan's East Ghor. In addition, up to 40 percent of the Yarmuk's waters have been diverted. Jordan's access to the Yarmuk, one of its principal sources for irrigating the Jordan Valley, is threatened, as is Israel's downstream flow. Jordan faces a devastating crop failure as a result. Jordanian diplomatic protests, echoed by Israel, are ignored by Syria, which has threatened military action against Jordan in case its development plans suffer interference²⁶⁸.

The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers

The Tigris and Euphrates River systems are also subject to various problems, with Syria, Turkey, and Iraq playing roles in issues as diverse as reduced water flow, salinization, constraints on irrigation, and hydropower. In both Turkey and Syria, dam projects that will potentially increase the amount of cultivable land and increase electrical power capabilities, are underway.

In Syria, for example, the Euphrates dam project is directed toward the irrigation of a million additional acres of land on the arid eastern steppes of the country, while Turkey's Southeast Anatolia project, now nearing completion, is intended to revitalize the Harran Plain and generate 9 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year.

However, both projects are the cause of grave concern from neighboring states. Since there is no legally binding obligation for upstream nations to provide water downstream--although downstream nations can claim historical rights of use and press for fair treatment--

²⁶⁸ Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, Jan-Mar97, Vol. 20 Issue 1, p1, 13p.

states that are in uneasy relations with each other, or that are engaged in outright hostility, tend to perceive the withholding of water as either a weapon or a threat.

Based on memories of the past and apprehension of the future, suspicion among states runs deep in the Middle East. Proposals by the late President Turgut Ozal of Turkey to construct a "Peace Water Pipeline" running from Turkey to Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia were greeted with outright hostility by many Arab states, which saw Ozal's offer as a thinly veiled plot to reimpose Turkish power over the Arabs.

The deprivation of Euphrates water is the last straw for Iraq and Syria: They see Turkish dams, built to improve the Turkish economy, as a major security threat as well as an attempt by the West to use its ally, Turkey, as a weapon against Arabs. In addition, focus on Turkey serves internal purposes for both Syria and Iraq as a mean of solidifying internal support against an external enemy.

Thus, despite their mutual antagonism, Syria and Iraq used to form an uneasy alliance against Turkey. They pursued a series of diplomatic and military actions to isolate Turkey. There were even reports indicating that a joint Iraqi-Syrian force was planning an attack on Turkey's southernmost dams.

The Nile River

The Nile region, comprising nine countries, suffers diverse problems such as flooding, siltation, water flow, and diversion. Associated problems for all areas are pollution, especially for downstream riparians, water borne disease, and degradation of the soil through irrigation and fertilization. Egypt, as a downstream country but as the chief beneficiary of Nile waters is subject to potential risk from economic or political policy shifts in other riparian states. The Nile River provides the vast majority of water to irrigate the sliver of Egyptian land within the Nile Valley and the Delta region that can be farmed. Double and triple cropping of existing fields has brought Egypt to the limits of its farm production, even as it faces enormous population increases. Egypt is particularly at the mercy of Sudan, which controls the flow of the Nile into Egypt, and with whom political relations have steadily deteriorated with the ongoing fight over power in Sudan, and with the Egyptian fundamentalists increasingly challenging President Hosni Mubarak's regime.

In the past, Egypt had complained that Israeli engineers had assisted Ethiopia, Uganda, and Sudan in the design of new irrigation systems that could impede the flow of the Nile and imperil the Egyptian population. While these efforts have apparently ceased because of Sudan's internal turmoil, future political settlements in the

south of Sudan could conceivably work against Egypt's interests and again increase tensions over water use.

As far as Ethiopia's water development plans are concerned, it is said that they could, similarly, have a significant impact on both Egypt and Sudan. Ethiopia provides more than 82 percent of the Nile's water, with its own rapid population growth, increasing food demands, and soil erosion and desertification problems, changes in Ethiopian water policies seem inevitable. Indeed, the Ethiopian government has reportedly contemplated plans to reduce the discharge of the Blue Nile to Sudan and Egypt by as much as 4 billion cubic meters per year²⁶⁹.

At present, the only regulatory instrument among Nile riparians is a 1959 agreement between Egypt and Sudan. This agreement, drawn up after the building of the Aswan Dam, does not take into account either projected needs or the present political situation, and necessary cooperation among states seems unlikely in the current climate. Competition for Nile water is thus likely to increase, as is the potential for future conflict.

The Israeli Palestinian Conflict

In the early 50's, Israel created a National Water Carrier to transport water from the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee to the Negev desert. These new waterways permitted cultivation of additional desert land. However, in the eyes of Arab nations, the National Water Carrier became a symbol of Israel's expansionism. In reaction, in 1955, Syrian artillery units opened fire on the Israeli construction team. In an attempt to settle the water dispute, President Eisenhower appointed Eric Johnston as mediator. Negotiations between Arab States and Israel on regional water-sharing agreements continued for more than two years with no success beyond a cease fire.

The conflict flared, after 10 years of silent tensions, when the Syrian government attempted to divert one of the Jordan River's tributaries, the Banyas River. This was followed by Israeli army and air-force attacks on the site of the diversion. These incidents over water, led up to the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967, between Israel against Syria, Jordan, and Egypt. During that war, Israel occupied the Golan Heights and the site of the Banyas headwaters, which enabled it to prevent the diversion of the Banyas by the Syrians. Israel also gained control of the West-Bank, the Jordan River, as well as the northern bank of the Yarmouk.

For Israel, the West Bank valley became a key water source because of its underground flow of water and wells. In order to provide water to north and central parts of the country, Israel depends on the

²⁶⁹ Ethiopia, like Turkey, has maintained its sovereign right to develop any resources within its own borders. "The Environmental Origins of Conflict," *The Socialist Review*, Vol. 16, No. 6, 1985, p. 57

water that comes from the Golan Heights as well as this area. These water sources are key elements in Israel's strategy to hold onto the West Bank and the Golan Heights. Israel's main sources of water lie outside its pre-1967 borders in the Arab lands it now holds under military occupation. Thus, Israel cannot simply trade land for peace without receiving assurances of resource, as well as political, security.

Israel fears that the creation of a Palestinian State on the West Bank could lead to future water deprivation if the new state pursues a policy of deep pumping of aquifers, a practice now forbidden to both Jews and Arabs because water tables are so low.

Being essential to survival and development, water resources constitute a major issue to be agreed upon between Israel and the Palestinians in final negotiations over a Palestinian State. Israel, whose settlers in the West Bank use at least three times as much water per capita as Arab inhabitants, has insisted on retaining administrative control of water sources in the Occupied Territories, especially the ancient aquifers from which both Israel and the West Bank draw most of their water.

For its part, Lebanon has also long suspected Israel of designs on the Litani River, which originates in Lebanon's central mountains and flows into the sea 40 miles south of Beirut. Despite consistent Israeli denials of interest in the Litani because of the expense involved to successfully divert Litani waters into Israel, many Lebanese remain convinced that the Litani is the real reason for the continued Israeli interest in southern Lebanon.

Turkey, Syria, and Iraq

The intertwining of Israeli and Arab water needs is but one example of how water is a security as well as a resource problem in the Middle East. Syria and Iraq have a long history of enmity, much of it rooted in political differences manifested in conflicting claims to resources. One of the most serious disputes between the neighboring states occurred in 1974-1975, when Iraq accused Syria of reducing the Euphrates River's flow to a trickle, thereby endangering the lives of millions of Iraqi farmers.

This led Syria to close its airspace to all Iraqi aircraft, suspend Syrian flights to Baghdad, and transfer troops from the Israeli border to the Iraqi border. In return, the Iraqis threatened to bomb the Syrian dam at al-Tabqa. Saudi Arabia and Soviet intervention resulted in eventual mediation of the dispute, much of which was the consequence of the Iran-Iraq accord of 1975, which ended Iranian support for the Kurdish rebellion in Iraq and raised Syrian fears that rival ba'athists in Baghdad would promote unrest in Syria.

A second dispute over water between Syria and Iraq arose during the Gulf crisis and war of 1990-1991, when Iraq placed human

shields at the al-Thawra dam in northern Iraq to prevent potential Syrian sabotage.

For its part, Turkey has repeatedly rejected the demands of its downstream neighbors for a guaranteed share of water from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Because it considers itself owning the source, Turkey contended, it had the right to decide how much water its neighbors would receive. In addition to the amount of water received, Syrians and Iraqis also worry about the quality of the water, fearing that the used irrigation water that backwashes into the rivers may carry salts, fertilizers, and pesticides. Syria and Iraq face potential losses of the Euphrates water because of Turkey's ambitious Southeast Anatolia (GAP) project. In January 1990, for example, Turkey reduced the flow of the Euphrates to fill the Ataturk Dam, depriving Syria and Iraq of 500 cubic meters of water per second, leaving a trickle with which to irrigate land and generate power. It is believed that the water blockage by Turkey was to punish Syria and Iraq for supporting the separatist Kurdish Party (PKK).

Resolving Water Problems

No matter how deep and complicated water problems might be, water issues provide a potential opportunity for regional cooperation. For example, Egypt and Israel have discussed collaboration on a half-billion dollar desalinization plant on the border between the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. A potential Israeli-Jordanian joint venture would channel Red Sea water from near Aqaba to the Dead Sea, generating mutually beneficial electricity and using reverse osmosis to desalinate Red Sea water as it drops into the Dead Sea.²⁷⁰ Other regional efforts could include development of low cost desalinization and pumping techniques, expanded water recycling, development of salt resistant crops, improvement of drip irrigation processes using Israeli developed techniques, conservation of water, and repairs to existing water carrier systems.

Economies can also be restructured away from water intensive processes, such as agriculture, and existing water supplies can be supplemented by wastewater reclamation.

Suggested guidelines offered by various international bodies such as the International Law Association and the International Law Commission can also be put into effect. These guidelines, based on the principles of good neighborliness, include injunctions on the diversion of water by upstream states without consultation with other riparians,

²⁷⁰ John Kolars, "Trickle of Hope," *The Sciences*, November/December 1992, p. 21.

joint environmental monitoring, and the development of a body of international law to deal with issues of shared water resources²⁷¹.

The resolution of existing and potential water conflicts in the Middle East, however, depends on two critical factors: first, population growth must be contained to relieve future pressures on scarce resources. While this is absolutely essential, it must also be realized that population control, even if rigorously pursued from today onward, is a long term goal, and that it will not reduce the numbers of people currently stressing regional systems. A more immediate goal, is the reduction of regional political tensions and suspicions that impede cooperative efforts of states sharing mutual resources.

In this regard, the multilateral discussions on water that are part of the current arab-israeli peace talks, and especially the Jordanian-Israeli agreements on water sharing, can set a vitally important precedent for the region as a whole.

On the other hand, the stalemate in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, affects the prospect of resolving the water issue. The situation is dire when Palestinians are forced to live without access to clean water. At present, Israel uses 90 percent of trans-boundary water resources, and consumes 348 litres per-capita, per- day. The Palestinians are allotted the remaining 10 percent, and have a daily consumption of only 78 liters per day, compared to WHO recommendations of at least 100 liters a day.

The Palestinian Authority needs to gain statehood, in order to become party to the 1997 UN Pact on Water Supplies that cross international boundaries. This document - the Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses - requires a country that controls an aquifer or watershed that straddles an international boundary to ensure other parties have equitable use of the water. Only 16 countries have ratified the Convention so far; 35 are needed before it becomes international law.

One option worth considering is the Red Sea-Dead Sea Peace Conduit and Desalination Project. The project entails the transfer of seawater from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea via a 111-mile conveyance system. Given that the Dead Sea is 1,312 feet below sea level, the height difference can be utilized hydrostatically to desalinate the incoming

²⁷¹ Natasha Beschoner, "The Problem of Regional Rivalry," Middle East Economic Digest, January 29, 1993, p. 12.

seawater and to supply Jordan, Israel, and perhaps even the Palestinians with freshwater.

Israeli-Syrian talks regarding the Golan Heights over the years have largely failed over the inability to agree on access to Lake Tiberias²⁷²

Future talks would need to include one of two approaches.

In the first scenario, Syria would be encouraged to soften its negotiation position with regard to the Lake Tiberias in exchange for economic incentives. In this scenario, Turkey would be pivotal; it could release additional allocations of water from the Euphrates to compensate for any demands Syria would want to make from the lake.

A second scenario envisions Israel softening its negotiating position. In this case, the United States, together with the international community, could guarantee funds for creating additional water through desalination and wastewater reclamation.

Conclusion

Despite political, religious, and cultural interconnections in the Middle East, water problems can be the incentive for further divisions between States. Current disputes over borders, religion, and ethnicity may pale in comparison to potential water conflicts. However, they can also be an impetus toward regional cooperation. The provision and protection of water is unquestionably a major challenge for middle-eastern governments. Decisions made today through peace negotiations or through region-wide agreements, or through their failures, will have a profound impact on future generations.

The preeminent role of water in survival, make political conflicts, over international water resources, particularly contentious. Water conflicts are especially bitter in the Middle East because of the aridity of the climate. It is also more complicated because of political confrontation between riparians of regional waterways and the population's increased water demand which is surpassing annual supply. Each of the three major waterways of the arid and volatile Middle East, the Nile, the Jordan, and the Tigris-Euphrates systems, have elements of all of these exacerbating factors. Scarce water resources have already been at the heart of much of the bitter, occasionally armed, conflict endemic to the region.

One fact is indisputable: the region is running out of water. And the people who have built their lives and livelihoods on a reliable source of fresh water are seeing the shortage of this vital resource impinge on all aspects of the tenuous relations that have developed over the years between nations, between economic sectors, and between individuals and their environment.

²⁷² Also known in Hebrew as the Kineret.

MIGRATION FLOWS

Introduction

Throughout human history, people have moved toward opportunity and away from poverty and oppression. As a result, a continuous movement of people has migrated to nearby and distant countries in search of a better future for themselves and their families. Due to instability in the field of politics, the economy and many other social issues it is estimated that there will be an increase in the push and pull factors in reference to migration trends.

The main reason for this phenomenon of increasing migration in the Middle East seems to be the fact that many people are migrating to the area, mainly to the oil rich countries, due to a high demand in workers and a variety of other pull factors.

Geographical facts

For the purposes of this paper it is necessary to define the geographical regions in discussion into three categories:

*The Maghreb*²⁷³ which in Arabic means “place of sunset” or “western”, is the region in North Africa which includes all of Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Tunisia. Partially isolated from the rest of the continent by the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara, the Maghreb has long been closely tied in terms of climate, landforms, population, economy, and history to the Mediterranean basin.

*The Mashriq*²⁷⁴ is the region of the Arabic-speaking countries to the east of Egypt and north of the Arabian Peninsula. It refers to a large area in the Middle East, bounded between the Mediterranean Sea and Iran. Egypt occupies an ambiguous position: while it has cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties to both the Mashriq and the Maghreb, it is unique and different from both. Thus, it is usually seen as being part of neither, however, when it is grouped with one or the other, it is generally considered part of the Mashriq on account of its closer ties to the Levant. This region also includes Iraq and Kuwait.

The GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) is a trade bloc involving the six Arab states of the Gulf. It comprises the Gulf states of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.²⁷⁵

Causes of migration

On the macro level, the causes of migration can be distilled into two main categories: the security dimension (natural disasters,

²⁷³ Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maghreb>)

²⁷⁴ Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mashriq>)

²⁷⁵ Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean, a Regional Study prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration by Martin Baldwin – Edwards (http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/news/Migration_in_the_Middle_East_and_Mediterranean.pdf)

conflicts, threats to individual safety, poor political prospects, etc.) and the economic dimension (poor economic situation, poor national markets, etc.).²⁷⁶

But, in general, there are the so-called 'push and pull' factors for which either forcefully or willingly people migrate from one place to another.

Push Factors

A push factor is a forceful factor and it is mainly related to the country of origin of the person who is migrating. In other words, a push factor includes all those problems, flaws and distresses that drive an individual away from a certain place/country. It is all these factors that compel a person, due to different reasons, to leave that place and go to some other place. For instance: natural disasters, death threats, slavery, pollution, poor medical care, political fear, primitive living conditions, unemployment, lack of opportunities, poor economic situation, not being able to practice religion, low productivity, and etc. All these reasons may compel people to leave their native place in search of better economic opportunities.

Push factors come in many forms. Sometimes these factors leave people with no choice but to leave their country of origin. Following are some examples of push factors driving people to emigrate from their home country.

- Lack of Jobs/Poverty: Economics provides the main reason behind migration. In some countries jobs simply do not exist for a great deal of the population. In others, the gap between the rewards of labor in the sending and receiving country are great enough so as to warrant a move.
- Civil Strife/War/Political and Religious Persecution: Some migrants are impelled to cross national borders by war or persecution at home. Some of these migrants end up in receiving countries as refugees or asylum seekers.
- Environmental Problems: Environmental problems and natural disasters often cause the loss of money, homes, and jobs.²⁷⁷

Pull Factors

On the other hand, a pull factor is related to the country to which people migrate, and all the benefits that attract them there. These benefits are usually in reference to: job opportunities, better living conditions, security, political freedom, education, better medical care, family links, religious freedom, and etc.

²⁷⁶ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_migration)

²⁷⁷ Pathfinder Science, Cultural Migration
(<http://pathfinderscience.net/culmig/cbackground.cfm>)

Pull factors refer to those factors, which attract the migrants to an area, such as, opportunities for better employment, higher, wages, better working conditions and amenities, etc. As rapid growth of industry, commerce and business takes place it leads to city-ward migration. In recent years, the high rate of migration of people from many developing countries to U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Europe, and the Middle East is due to the better employment opportunities, higher wages and the chances of attaining higher standard of living.²⁷⁸

Whereas push factors usually drive migrants out of their countries of origin, pull factors generally decide where these travelers end up. The positive aspects of some receiving countries serve to attract more migrants than others.

Forced Migration

A third somewhat specialized category of migration is the Forced Migration of trafficked persons. These are people who are being moved by deception or coercion for the purposes of exploitation. The profit in trafficking people comes not from their movement, but from the sale of their sexual services or labour in the country of destination. The trafficked person may be physically prevented from leaving, or be bound by debt or threat of violence to themselves or their family in their country of origin. Like smuggling, by its very clandestine nature, exact figures on the number of people being trafficked are extremely difficult to obtain.²⁷⁹

Effects of Migration

Migration has had a tremendous effect on world geography since it has contributed to the evolution and development of separate cultures, to the diffusion of cultures by interchange and communication, and to the complex mix of people and cultures found in different regions of the world today.

The economic effects of migration vary widely. Sending countries may experience both gains and losses in the short term but may stand to gain over the longer term. For receiving countries temporary programs help to address skills shortages but may decrease domestic wages and add to public welfare burden. While every mouth brings a pair of hands, these hands sometimes make more than they eat and sometimes less. Nevertheless, most commentators argue that the net effects of migration are generally positive. Loosening restrictions on labor migration would probably be one of the fastest ways to boost global economic growth, with positive effects significantly greater than removal of any trade barriers.

²⁷⁸ Push and Pull factors in labour migration (http://goliath.ecnext.com/coms2/gi_0198-526288/Pull-and-push-factors-in.html)

²⁷⁹ Pathfinder Science, Cultural Migration (<http://pathfinderscience.net/culmig/cbackground.cfm>)

For sending countries, the short-term economic benefit of emigration is found in remittances. These remittances worldwide are estimated at more than \$100 billion per year, larger than development aid given to poor countries. But at the same time, developing countries can suffer from "brain drain" - the loss of trained and educated individuals to emigration, and this is an example of the possible negative effects of emigration for developing countries.²⁸⁰

Immigration Flows

The GCC²⁸¹ area, the oil-rich Gulf States of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, has a recent history in terms of immigration flows. It was not until 1975 and the increase of the oil prices that the region became totally independent in foreign labor. A huge amount of migrants moved to the area occupying more than half of the total population by 1975. The GCC countries went through three major transitions in reference to the issue of migration in the area.

During the major influx in the 1970's and early 1980's, each GCC country was competing to attract US, European, Arab and some Asian workers. Great reliance was placed on recruiting Arab workers from Egypt, Yemen and Palestine. There was a period of austerity after the fall of oil prices in mid 1980s to mid 1990s. This led to an expected cut of costs in the public and private sector with the result of substituting the Arab workers with less skilled Asian workers. As a matter of fact during the Gulf Crisis the Asian presence led to the layoff of more than 2 million Arabs, from Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine. The external shocks of the two Gulf Wars, the low oil prices, the depleted foreign assets along with an expanding labor supply through population growth, all these led to an open unemployment of the nationals.

The Maghreb area has become throughout the years the main gateway to Europe. All major North African countries have been used as a transit route by migrants, mostly from the sub-Saharan region in order to reach across the European land. It is usually desperation that leads them to the need of taking this route. Many of these transit migrants have failed to reach their final destination due to migration and border policies. As a result they remain stuck and they are considered as 'transit immigrants' within the borders of the North African countries.

The Mashrik countries of Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen have a migratory history between them dating back to the end of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. However, the important period of emigration to the oil-rich GCC states

²⁸⁰ Pathfinder Science, Cultural Migration
(<http://pathfinderscience.net/culmig/cbackground.cfm>)

²⁸¹ Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

began in the 1970s. Indeed, it was not until 1971 that Egypt openly permitted emigration of its nationals, and then rapidly embarked on a policy of linking emigration policy with the country's economic development.

Current Situation

Due to much socio-economic and political instability around the world the pull factors in the greater area of the Middle East are expected to increase, at least in the near future. The geographic position of the Middle East is a key position for the surrounding countries of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe. The oil rich countries of the GCC and the variety of the job opportunities they have to offer it is a great magnet to attract massive numbers of migrants.

The Arab region has thus become a major destination for labour migrants. In 2005, the region hosted one in every ten international migrants in the world and one in every four migrants in the less developed regions. Six of every ten migrants in the Arab region are living in the GCC. Saudi Arabia alone accounts for one in every three migrants living in the region.

The top immigration countries, relative to population currently are Qatar (78 %), the United Arab Emirates (71 %), Kuwait (62 %), Israel (40 %), and Jordan (39 %).

As a matter of fact, the GCC economies continue to rely heavily on temporary workers from overseas. Over time, as the number of expatriates of Arab origin in GCC States decreased, workers have been recruited from more distant origins. In all GCC States, Arabs now constitute only a minority of the expatriate population: 38 % in Saudi Arabia, 46 % in Kuwait, 25 % in Qatar, 10 % in the UAE and less than five % in Oman, where non-Arabs account for 95.6 % of the non-national labour force in the public and private sectors combined. On the other hand, GCC States host 7.5 million Asians who account for 74 % of non-nationals residing on their territory.

Egypt and Jordan host very large numbers of refugees and Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are importers of low-skilled labour from Asia. These three countries also host large proportion refugees relative to the immigrant population. In particular the %ages are as follows: 81 % in Jordan, 61 % in Lebanon and 44 % in Syria.

The region is strongly affected by the presence of refugees and IDPs.²⁸² At mid-2005, Jordan was host to 1.8 million refugees. Most of them were Palestinians (on June 30th 2008, 1.93 million Palestinians refugees were registered in Jordan with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)²⁸³ constituting 31 % of the total population

²⁸² Internally displaced persons (IDP)

²⁸³ United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), (<http://www.un.org/unrwa>)

of the country (5.7 million), the highest ratio in any of UNRWA's operational regions. Syria also has a sizable Palestinian refugee population, estimated at 424,650 or 2.2 % of its total population in 2005²⁸⁴.

Estimates for the Arab Mashrik countries foresee an increase from 37 to 66 million over the future. Substantial labor market, economic and labor force policy reforms will be needed to respond to these major changes.²⁸⁵

Low labor force participation and especially of women, small population sizes, disinclination of nationals to work in the private sector, low literacy and educational levels and high degree of non-labor income for nationals are some of the reasons of this massive dependency on foreign workers.

Over the next two decades, the national labor force in the GCC and Arab Mashrik countries is expected to grow dramatically. Due to rapid demographic growth and rising labor market participation rates, especially of women, the labour force in GCC States is expected to increase from 11.6 million in 2000 to 20.7 million by 2020.

In Israel, the number of international migrants from 2000 to 2005 increased by about 20 % from 2.3 million in 2000 (37 % of the population), to 2.7 million in 2005 (40 % of the population). Persons of Jewish ancestry account for a large share of total immigration to Israel, facilitated by the "Law of Return" of 1950 and its subsequent amendments. Ethiopian Jews, or *Falasha*, constitute another important migrant group, estimated in 2005 by the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews to number around 85,000. The largest immigration flow of the last 20 years occurred in the wake of the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, when approximately 900,000 Soviet Jews settled in Israel.

In addition, non-Jewish and non-Palestinian temporary migrant workers have lately been accepted by Israel to support its prosperous economy. 2003 estimates put the number of migrant workers at about 189,000. They come mainly from Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe and are hired as low-skilled workers. The largest groups are from the Philippines (around 50,000) working mainly as home health carers, followed by Thai migrant workers (some 30,000) who work in agriculture, and Chinese (15,000) active in construction. Another approximately 65,000 foreign workers are from Eastern Europe (over half of whom are from Romania) working mainly in construction.

²⁸⁴ UN-DESA of 2005, (<http://www.un.org/esa/desa>)

²⁸⁵ Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean, a Regional Study prepared for the Global Commission on international Migration by Martin Baldwin – Edwards (http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/news/Migration_in_the_Middle_East_and_Mediterranean.pdf)

Women constitute around one-third of all migrants and are mainly employed in the 24-hour home healthcare sector.²⁸⁶

Emigration flows

On the other hand, millions of Middle Eastern emigrants are nowadays spread all over the globe. In USA alone, the total legal and illegal population from the Middle East reaches approximately the number of 1.5 million people.

Current Situation

Many countries of the Mashrik are currently both countries of origin and destination. North African countries have become gateways of irregular migration to Europe. Between 100,000 and 120,000 unauthorized migrants are estimated to cross the Mediterranean annually, about 35,000 of whom originate in sub-Saharan Africa, 55,000 in Northern Africa and 30,000 in other countries, mostly in Asia.

In 2005, the number of Egyptian emigrants reached 2,399,251 (3.2% of population). The top destination countries for Egyptian emigrants were: Saudi Arabia, Libya, United States, West Bank and Gaza, Italy, Canada, Oman, Australia.

All of the Mashriq States have seen extensive migration, both temporary and permanent, since the 1970s. Emigrants typically head to GCC countries or to other Mashrik States. Emigration further abroad has also been significant, especially from Lebanon. The large numbers of young people looking for work is a significant push factor.

Arab Mashrik countries are a source of both highly skilled and low-skilled migrants. The active migrant workforce originating from the Middle East Arab countries is predominantly low or semi-skilled, but some countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, also experience a high degree of highly skilled emigration. While migrants from Jordan, for instance, are predominantly hired as service workers (35%), lawyers and managers account for 33 % of migrants leaving the country.

Remittances

Besides the typical push factors relating to the lack of employment opportunities, poverty, and natural disasters, there are more important reasons for which people continue to migrate out of the Middle East. This is mainly due to the political crisis and instability as well as the lack of safety for the Levant area or the increase of the remittances received every year from the North African countries.

Arab Mashrik countries are important sources of remittances. The remittances sent from the Arab Mashrik countries were estimated at \$3.7 billion in 2007, with \$2.8 billion from Lebanon alone. Remittances sent to Egypt rose sharply from \$2.9 billion in 2000 to \$5.9

²⁸⁶ World Migration 2008, The Middle East
(http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/media/docs/wmr/regional_overviews/ro_middleeast.pdf)

billion in 2007. The total amount of remittances sent to Arab Mashrik countries reached \$17.2 billion in 2007.

Egypt and Lebanon alone, received almost \$6 billion each.²⁸⁷ According to World Bank data, Egypt and Lebanon, with \$5.9 billion and \$5.8 billion, respectively, were the two major recipients of remittances in 2007. In Lebanon and Jordan, remittances represent an important source of income. They increased, respectively, from \$1.58 and \$1.84 billion in 2000 to \$5.8 and \$2.9 billion in 2007 and, at 22.9 %, Lebanon received the highest share in relation to GDP in the Mediterranean region. In Jordan, net remittances accounted for 20.4 % of GDP (World Bank, 2008). Remittances have significantly improved Lebanon's creditworthiness and access to international capital markets.

Rich countries are the main source of remittances. The United States is by far the largest, with \$42 billion in recorded outward flows in 2006. Saudi Arabia ranks as the second largest, followed by Switzerland and Germany.²⁸⁸ The Mashrik subregion relies quite heavily on remittances. Yemen is at such a low level of economic development that its dependence on migrants' remittances is structurally problematic.

In 2004, the top 20 recipients of remittances in the world included two Arab countries: Morocco and Egypt. Egypt also came in the first place on the list of the top 10 remittance recipients. Recorded remittances sent home by Egyptian migrants reached \$5.9 billion in 2007, compared to \$5.3 billion in 2006. Egypt was followed by Morocco (\$5.7 billion), Lebanon (\$5.5 billion), Jordan (\$2.9 billion), Algeria (\$2.9 billion), Tunisia (\$1.7 billion), Yemen, Rep. (\$1.3 billion), Iran (\$1.1 billion), Syria (\$0.8 billion), West Bank and Gaza (\$0.6 billion).

Transit migration

An increasing number of migrants are in a situation of transit, whereby they stay provisionally in a country with the intention of reaching another destination they were initially bound for.

Restrictive new policies and legislations on immigration had tightened border controls in most major countries of destination, and as a result of that the number of transit migrants in the Middle East has risen dramatically. In other words, the intended destination cannot be reached by many migrants but they remain stuck at its gate.

From Morocco to Turkey and from Egypt to Yemen there are several groups signified as transit migrants. In particular, Sub-Saharan African migrants bound for Europe are in transit through the Maghreb countries, from Mauritania to Libya. There are large numbers of Sudanese and Somali refugees in search of a country of asylum who are

²⁸⁷ World Bank 2008

²⁸⁸The World Bank, Middle East & North Africa, Migration and Remittance, (<http://web.worldbank.org/wbsite/external/countries/menaext/0,,contentMDK:21860906~menuPK:2246554~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:256299,00.html>)

stuck in Egypt. In addition, Iraqi refugees have been stuck in Jordan and other countries of the Mashrik. Iraqi and other Middle Eastern migrants are transiting thorough Indonesia from where they are trying to reach Australia. Finally many people from countries of the former USSR, central Asia and Iran are in constant transit through Turkey. This phenomenon has brought up many socio-economic, security and other challenges to the governments of the receiving countries.

Feminisation of migration

An increasing part of the Asian labour force is female. The global trend towards the feminization of labour mobility, especially of Asian overseas workers, may therefore also be observed in the GCC states, where women constitute 30 % of the foreign labor force. Most female workers, however, are still concentrated in the domestic services sector.²⁸⁹

The Arab region stands out as having one of the lowest proportions of women among international migrants. Current estimates indicate that just 36 % of immigrants in the Arab region are women or girls. Increasing numbers of migrant women are employed in health care, care giving and domestic services, especially in the GCC. These jobs are filled by women from the developing countries of Asia, principally Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. Domestic work is the single most important occupation among migrant women employed in the GCC Member States, as well as in Jordan and Lebanon. The number of female migrant workers in the GCC countries, Jordan and Lebanon is likely to remain high as labour force participation increases among native women and the demand for caregivers and domestic workers to perform the tasks natives no longer have time for also increases.

The economic significance of female migration to the GCC is so high for some Asian governments that female labour export targets are included in their development strategies. In Bangladesh, for example, the remittances of women migrants are important not only for the survival of their families, but also for the economic stability of the country. In 2000, 67 % of Sri Lanka's overseas workers were women, and the majority of them worked in the Middle East. In that year, remittances from the region made up 63 % of Sri Lanka's total. In Jordan, as of August 2000, over 98 % of female migrants were domestic workers, mainly from Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Many were overqualified. For example, 36 % of Filipino women who migrated for

²⁸⁹ World Migration 2008, (http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/media/docs/wmr/regional_overviews/ro_middleeast.pdf)

domestic work were either college graduates or persons with some college education.²⁹⁰

Brain drain

Developing countries can suffer from "brain drain", the loss of trained and educated individuals due to emigration. It is one of the negative effects of emigration for developing countries. For example, there are currently more African scientists and engineers working in the United States than there in Africa itself, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

Brain drain is a significant problem for all Mashriq countries with some countries losing up to 30% or more of their university graduates. Although emigrants' remittances constitute important contributions to the economy of the sending country, against this has to be balanced the loss – potential or actual – of skilled scientists or younger workers.²⁹¹

Likely Future Scenarios

There are some common patterns about the likely future scenarios in terms of migration and the related issues in the Middle East.

According to a UN survey, with the exception of Israel which considers its level of immigration to be too low, eight countries consider their levels of immigration to be too high: these consist of four GCC countries [Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates], and three Mashrik countries [Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen] and Turkey. All of these, plus Egypt and Tunisia, wish to reduce the levels of immigration.

Most GCC countries wish to reduce their foreign labor stocks in order to provide employment for their young unemployed labor force. In the Mashrik region, Lebanon and Jordan also have Asian low-skilled migrants, whereas other countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen presumably refer to refugees and illegal transit migrants. Emigration is still viewed as an economic solution by Egypt, Jordan and Turkey, whereas Kuwait, Syria, Morocco and Saudi Arabia are clearly more concerned with 'brain drain'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can thus state that recently there has been a diversity of good and innovative practices by many countries in the Middle East.

²⁹⁰ Migration in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, (www.unfpa.org/swp/2006/presskit/docs/factsheet_middle-east.doc)

²⁹¹ Migration in the Middle East and Mediterranean, a Regional Study prepared for the Global Commission on International Migration by Martin Baldwin – Edwards (http://www.mmo.gr/pdf/news/Migration_in_the_Middle_East_and_Mediterranean.pdf);

For instance, Turkey, in support of its application for EU membership and due to the fact the phenomenon had increased the last decade, has undertaken a commitment to fighting illegal transit migration. Modernization and training of border and coast guards, and many other steps prove Turkey's rapid progress in migration management. Morocco passed a tough new immigration law in 2003 which basically aimed at controlling transit migration from Sub-Saharan Africa. The United Arab Emirates is one of the few Arab states to have made an effort to deal with trafficking in women and children with DNA testing for 'false parenthood' identification. In addition, Jordan was the first country in the region to address the problem of non-coverage of housekeepers under labor laws. Saudi Arabia will be the first Arab country to develop a policy on the integration of non-Arab immigrants; it has also approved the formation of the Saudi Human Rights Commission whose task is to investigate human rights violations against foreign workers from abusive employers.

Migration is one of the defining issues of the 21st Century. It is now an essential, inevitable and potentially beneficial component of the economic and social life of every country and region. The question is no longer whether to have migration, but rather how to manage migration effectively so as to enhance its positive and reduce its negative impacts. Well-informed choices by migrants, governments, home and host communities, civil society, and the private sector can help realize the positive potential of migration in social, economic and political terms.²⁹² Economic and political stability, justice and equality can also reduce the pressure to migrate.

²⁹²International Organization for Migration, the migration agency
(<http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/lang/en/pid/241>)

THE IMPACT OF OIL

Introduction

Oil is the most vital resource of our time. The discovery of crude oil in the Middle East in the 20th Century gave it new strategic and economic importance. Despite new discoveries of oil reserves in Central Asia and other places, the Middle East still has two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves, and its oil is still the cheapest to pump and produce. Oil will continue to play the most important role as energy supply sources in next several decades.

History

Oil has been known and used since the most ancient times and has been mentioned by most ancient historians since the time of Herodotus. It was used chiefly as a liniment or medicine, not as a fuel. The Bible refers to pitch being used for cementing walls and building purposes in Babylon.²⁹³

Oil is formed from the remains of plants and tiny animals that settled to the bottom of ancient oceans. These remains or sediments were buried by layers of mud and sand. Gradually, over millions of years, the weight of these accumulating layers built up great pressure and heat. The sediments packed together and became rock. The organic (once living) remains were changed into kerosene, a waxy substance that forms oil and natural gas.

The Middle East's petroleum industry was established by the 8th Century, when the streets of the newly constructed Baghdad were paved with tar, derived from petroleum that became accessible from natural fields in the region. Petroleum was distilled by the Persian alchemist Muhammad Ibn Zakariya Razi (Rhazes) in the 9th Century, producing chemicals such as kerosene in the alembic (*Al-Ambiq*), and which was mainly used for kerosene lamps. Arab and Persian chemists also distilled crude oil in order to produce flammable products for military purposes.²⁹⁴

In 1901, British businessman William D'Arcy convinced the Persian government to award him a concession for oil exploration, extraction, and sales, in exchange for £20,000 and 16% of profits over the next 60 years. The first major commercial oil discovery in the Middle East was made in May 1908 at Masjid-al-Salaman in southwest Persia.²⁹⁵

A few years later, the region's significant stocks of crude oil gave it new strategic and economic importance. Mass production of oil

²⁹³ http://www.bydesign.com/fossilfuels/links/html/oil/oil_history.html.

²⁹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oil_well

²⁹⁵ <http://www.bookrags.com/research/oil-is-discovered-in-the-middle-eas-scit-061>.

began around 1945, with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates having large quantities of oil. Estimated oil reserves, especially in Saudi Arabia and Iran, are some of the highest in the world. About 80% of the world's readily accessible reserves are located in the Middle East, with 62.5% coming from the Arab five : Saudi Arabia (12.5%), UAE, Iraq, Qatar and Kuwait.²⁹⁶

The international oil cartel OPEC is dominated by the Middle East countries. At the Baghdad Conference on September 10–14, 1960, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was created by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. The five Founding Members were later joined by nine other Members: Qatar (1961); Indonesia (1962); Socialist Peoples Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (1962); United Arab Emirates (1967); Algeria (1969); Nigeria (1971); Ecuador (1973)-suspended its membership from December 1992-October 2007; Angola (2007) and Gabon (1975–1994). OPEC had its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, during the first five years of its existence. This was moved to Vienna, Austria, in September 1965.

OPEC's objective is to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.

Positive Impacts

Political effects

There is no doubt that the oil is one of the elements of power for any country, and it can be used effectively to serve its interests.

During the past decades, oil was used by the Middle East countries as weapon to achieve their political objectives. In October 1973, the oil crisis started when the members of Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries or the OAPEC (consisting of the Arab members of OPEC plus Egypt and Syria) proclaimed an oil embargo "in response to the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military during the Yom Kippur war." OPEC then declared that it would no longer ship oil to the United States and other countries if they supported Israel in the conflict. It cut production of oil and placed an embargo on shipments of crude oil to the West, with the United States and the Netherlands specifically targeted. The shock produced chaos in the West. In the United States, the retail price of a gallon of gasoline rose from a national average of 39 cents to 55 cents within one month. A few months later, the crisis eased. The embargo was lifted in March 1974 after negotiations at the Washington Oil Summit, but the effects of the

296 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petroleum>.

energy crisis lingered on throughout the 1970s. Western Europe and Japan began switching from pro-Israel to more pro-Arab policies.²⁹⁷

Politics and economy are two inseparable factors that influence international relations and the prosperity of oil-producing countries, which can be attributed to the revenues of oil and natural gas, helps them to play a main role in the international arena.

As one of the largest economies and a key political player in the region, Saudi Arabia has a critical role in determining the future of the Middle East. Qatar's foreign policy has also emerged lately as an influential factor in many recent regional and Arab disputes. In this context, Qatar succeeded in mediating an end to the stalemate in which the Lebanese rival factions remained locked for around two years over the election of the new president, Colonel Michel Sulaiman.

Economic effects

Before the discovery of the oil most of the oil countries in the Middle East were among the poorest in the world. They had few natural resources and shared a harsh environment. After the discovery of oil, the countries have been going through an extensive and rapid change, transforming their traditional economies into modern ones. Standards of living have risen, and welfare programmes have been introduced, including massive improvements of infrastructure, providing housing, water, electricity and health care services, developing and expanding the educational system, and even building heavy industry.²⁹⁸

Middle East oil producers are investing billions of dollars at home, building industries, repairing roads and factories, and expanding social services. This has led regional elites and many in the international financial community to proclaim a new era in the Middle East - one in which the new oil revenues will diversify the region's economies, create jobs for everyone, and make the oil producing countries the world's economic superpower.²⁹⁹

The new generation of Gulf leaders already has announced plans to pump more capital into their own economies. Since 1993, GCC domestic investment rates have averaged 20% of gross domestic product. The funds that are not used for domestic purposes will flow into new investments in global capital markets through sovereign investment funds.³⁰⁰

In 2002, oil prices in the nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stood at \$25 a barrel. By July 2008, that number had jumped to \$147. The increase enabled the GCC's six member countries

297 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1973_oil_crisis

298 M. S. El Azhary, *The Impact of oil revenues on Arab Gulf development*, 1984, P1-4

299 http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0713_oil_pollack.aspx

300 http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/feb2008/gb2008025_051399.htm?chan=search

(Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates) to almost triple their gross domestic product - from \$350 billion to more than \$1 trillion.³⁰¹ While oil prices have now fallen to lower levels of under \$60 a barrel as a result of the current financial crisis, it should be noted that the effect has not been as serious in GCC countries as elsewhere. This is because these countries had all made their projections on the basis of oil prices at around \$65 a barrel.

With crude oil prices where they are, Gulf exporters have emerged as major players on the global financial stage, snapping up stakes in prominent Western retailers, stock markets and investment banks. But the coming oil windfall will dwarf anything we've seen yet, possibly boosting their earnings to three or four times the amount reaped in past years. The oil revenues of the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)-Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates-will collect up to \$6.2 trillion in profits over the next 14 years if crude prices remain around \$70 per barrel. That's more than triple the amount they earned over the last 14 years.³⁰²

Social effects

Oil-producing states (especially large producers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar) benefited directly in the form of high export earnings. Likewise, these states had many job opportunities available as a result of the booming economies of the Gulf. The non oil-producing Middle Eastern states also reaped some benefits from the oil-producing states. Many people who lived in the non oil-producing states went to the oil-producing states to earn money as teachers, construction workers, oil-field workers, etc. The money these workers sent home to their families was of tremendous importance as it boosted their national economies. During this period of economic growth these non oil-producing states also benefited from increased levels of foreign aid received from their oil-producing neighbors.³⁰³

In the 1970s and '80s, during the first great oil boom, the Middle Eastern producers largely squandered their wealth. Some did set up vast social-welfare networks that improved health care.

The families in the Gulf have benefited tremendously from economic transformations. Family living standards have risen, and technological household machines and tools have become widely available. Economic development enabled the family to increase

301 <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/papers/download/20090311middleeast-english.pdf>

302 http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/feb2008/gb2008025_051399.htm?chan=search

303 <http://www.cotf.edu/earthinfo/meast/MEeco.html>

consumption, reflected in housing patterns, costs of marriage, types of cars and other lifestyle aspects.³⁰⁴

As a result of this newfound wealth, enormous social achievements occurred in the Middle East. For example, infant mortality was halved, and life expectancy rose by more than ten years. School enrollment went up substantially, and adult literacy rose from 34% in 1970 to 53% in 1990.

According to the report of World Bank, Iran has exceeded the social gains of other countries in the Middle East. Iran's comprehensive social protection system includes the highest level of pensions, disability insurance, job training programs, unemployment insurance and disaster-relief programs. National subsidies make basic food, housing and energy affordable to all. Iran has made the most progress in eliminating gender disparities in education. Large numbers of increasingly well-educated women have entered the work force. More than half the university students in Iran are women, and more than a third of the doctors, two-thirds of civil servants and three-quarters of all teachers in Iran are women. Since 1990, Iran nearly halved the infant mortality rate and increased life expectancy by 10 years. Iranian pharmaceutical companies now produce 96 percent of the medicines on the market in Iran.³⁰⁵

Negative Impacts

Political effects

Oil was the black gold that motivated, and still motivates the West to constantly interfere in the Middle East. In fact, the British had recognized the importance of the region's oil wealth as early as 1916 when the British secretly signed the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement with France, calling for the division of the Ottoman Empire into a patchwork of states to be ruled by the British and French³⁰⁶. A year earlier, the oil factor had been officially recognized in the 1920 San Remo Treaty. In 1928, the Red Line Agreement was signed, which described the sharing of the oil wealth of former Ottoman territories by the British and French colonial governments, and how percentages of future oil production were to be allocated to British, French and American oil companies.³⁰⁷ The Anglo-American Petroleum Agreement of 1944 was based on negotiations between the United States and Britain over the control of Middle Eastern oil. In August 1944, the Anglo-American Petroleum Agreement was signed, dividing Middle Eastern oil between the United States and Britain. By the end of the

304 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications/mtelhaddad.pdf>

305 http://www.iacenter.org/iran/iran_oil-0507.

306 The secret agreement was exposed when the Soviet government retrieved a copy in 1921

307 http://india_resource.tripod.com/mideastoil.html

Second World War, the United States had come to consider the Middle East region as ‘the most strategically important area of the world’. and “one of the greatest material prizes in world history”.³⁰⁸

Oil was the reason behind several wars in the Middle East. The Iran–Iraq War lasting from September 1980 to August 1988 had to do with oil-fields and oil export routes.

Kuwait's large oil reserves were widely considered to be the main reason behind the Iraqi invasion in August 1990. In 1989, Iraq accused Kuwait of using “advanced drilling techniques” to exploit oil from its share of the Rumaila field. Iraq estimated that US\$2.4 billion worth of Iraqi oil was “stolen” by Kuwait and demanded compensation.³⁰⁹

The views of many opponents of the war on Iraq in 2003, and even some supporters, that the Iraq War was also all about oil.

In 1973 the Arab oil-exporting countries stunned the world by announcing that they were cutting oil production and placing an oil embargo on the United States and the Netherlands. Now, 35 years later, fears about the security of oil supplies are provoking concern that Iran or a similarly hostile country might have recourse to some form of the oil weapon again. The deterrent today against the use of the oil weapon by one or more Gulf countries is the significant US military presence in the region.

Prince Saud Al-Faisal, Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia, ruled out the use of oil as a weapon by Arab states to secure an end to the Israeli military onslaught in the Gaza Strip in December 2008. He told reporters on the sidelines of a Security Council debate on the Israeli offensive “Oil is not a weapon...you cannot reverse a conflict by using oil” Prince Saud said. Oil producers would be shooting themselves in the foot by heeding Tehran’s call to cut supplies to Israel’s backers, a move which he said would not help end any such conflict. “How can you do that? You stop producing oil in order to put pressure on people and you suffer as much as anybody else suffers,” Prince Saud noted. The oil producers “need their abilities to build their countries from this resource (oil)...If they are going to make themselves ready to face any actions against them, they need that resource to build their capabilities,” he added.³¹⁰

Oil has caused several problems within the states. For instance, there is a dispute between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the central government in Baghdad over control of Iraq’s oil resources. Moreover, in some oil countries in the Middle East tribes

308 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_intervention_in_the_Middle_East

309 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Kuwait

310 <http://www.saudiqazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.region&contentID=2009010826066>

Terrorist organizations have also been interested in targeting oil and gas facilities. They have striken at pipelines, tankers, refineries and oil fields in order to undermine the internal stability of the regimes they are fighting, and to weaken foreign powers with vested interests in their region. In the past decade alone, there have been scores of attacks against oil targets primarily in the Middle East.

Economic effects

Many oil-producing countries in the Middle East sent their oil money overseas, putting it in foreign real estate and Swiss bank accounts. This did little or nothing to develop or diversify their economies. So when the boom turned to bust in the 1990s, economic problems mushroomed. More oil money is being re-invested in the region, but it is not being spent where it is most needed. As a result, it is having little impact on what really matters, and is even creating problems. In addition, much of the money is being re-invested in projects intended to produce quick profits for investors rather than long-term political and economic gains. A great deal of it is going into non-productive sectors like real estate. Both the rise in energy prices and the flood of oil revenues have stoked inflation. Qatar's current rate is 14 percent, up from 2.6 percent in the 2002-2004 period. As always, inflation hits the middle and lower classes hardest, and in many Arab states it is destroying the middle class. That is pushing many into the arms of Islamist extremists seeking to overthrow the regimes.³¹¹

Some of the income was dispensed in the form of aid to other underdeveloped nations whose economies had been caught between higher prices of oil and lower prices for their own export commodities and raw materials amid shrinking western demand for their goods. But much was absorbed in massive arms purchases that exacerbated political tensions, particularly in the Middle East.³¹²

The current financial crisis has of course cut deeply into the growth rates of the GCC economies. Growth in the six Gulf Arab states would slow to 3.5 per cent from 6.8 per cent. For most of these countries, this deterioration is from a position of significant strength, and thus can comfortably be sustained by the large stock of reserves that these economies have built up.

Social effects

The discovery of oil led to the deep integration of Gulf society in the international capitalist market. That integration exposed Gulf society to the advent of ethnic, financial, technological, intellectual and

311 <http://www.ibt.com/articles/2008/07/14/opinion/edpollack.php>

312 <http://earthfirst.com/this-day-in-green-history-march-18th-1974-arab-nations-end-oil-embargo/>

ideological influences which led to radical changes in the social and economic life of society. The changes transformed most Gulf societies into urban societies. Urbanization rates peaked in most Gulf Countries, reaching 90% in Kuwait, 80% in Bahrain, 85% in Qatar and 70% in United Arab Emirates. The city became the unavoidable reality of life in the Gulf. It even became the only such reality in most Gulf countries (Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) with the majority of the population living in fast-growing cities. There is no doubt that the urbanization and modernization processes that swept traditional Gulf cities had an impact on family relations and family functions. Changes in these two areas could possibly be some of the most severe and complicated problems facing Arab Gulf societies at the present time.

Various studies have shown open disagreement over the nature of change in value systems. Some studies adopt a typical view of transition from traditional to modern values. They point to changes in family roles, including change in the role of the husband. The wife's role and her responsibilities also change with her leaving the house to work or to receive an education. The role of the elder generation is weakened, and the children gain more freedom and become less subordinate to the system of traditional authority. Authority within the family becomes more permissive, and responsibilities are allocated to family members in accordance with their contribution. Economic and social changes have also produced numerous individualistic values at the expense of collective values, thereby resulting in widening the social distance between couples and their children in particular.³¹³

Many of the factories being built with the new oil revenues will be heavily automated plants that will employ few people. The industries that create lots of new jobs, like tourism, agriculture and construction, import workers from southern and southeastern Asia rather than hire locals. Oil revenues are being used to expand educational systems but, with a few exceptions, not to reform them. Consequently, more students are being educated - and their expectations of a better life whetted - only to find out that they lack the skills to get the jobs they believe their schooling entitles them to. Across the region, youth unemployment averages at least 25 percent, close to double the global average.³¹⁴

On the other hand, the presence of oil has significant social and environmental impacts, from accidents and routine.

The Gulf War oil spill is regarded as the worst oil spill in history, resulting from actions taken during the Gulf War in 1991. It caused considerable damage to wildlife in the Gulf especially in areas

313 <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/Publications/mtelhaddad.pdf>

314 <http://www.ibt.com/articles/2008/07/14/opinion/edpollack.php>

surrounding Kuwait and Iraq. Estimates on the volume spilled range from 42 to 462 million gallons; the slick reached a maximum size of 101 by 42 miles and was 5 inches thick.³¹⁵ Doctors have reported a significant increase in patients with heart diseases, cancers, breathing problems and allergies, - and they say pollution from the war is the most likely cause.

The oil spill resulting from the bombings of the El-Jiyeh power plant by the Israeli Air Force on 13 and 15 July 2006 caused significant contamination of the Lebanese coastline. The seabed at El-Jiyeh was significantly affected by the oil spill. Clean-up operations by local and international organizations are continuing, but the safe disposal of oily waste from the work remains a serious concern. The marine oil spill resulted in the release of about 15,000 tons of fuel oil into the Mediterranean Sea, leading to the contamination of 150 km of coastline in Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. The oil spill had impact on human health, biodiversity, fisheries and tourism, as well as its implications for the livelihoods and the economy of Lebanon.³¹⁶

The Future of Oil

Oil provides 40% of the world's energy, and 96% of the world's transportation energy, and oil consumption will increase by 60% between now and 2020, propelled by rising demand in China and India.³¹⁷

Two-thirds of the world's oil reserves lie in the Middle East and increasing demand will have to be met with massive increases in supply from this region.

The 1973 energy crisis led to greater interest in renewable energy and spurred research in solar power and wind power. Oil-dependent nations are turning to renewable energy sources such as hydroelectric, solar and wind power to provide an alternative to oil but the likelihood of renewable sources providing enough energy is slim.

Oil is a limited resource, so it may eventually run out, although not for many years to come. At the rate of production in 2007, OPEC's oil reserves are sufficient to last for more than 80 years, while non-OPEC oil producers' reserves might last less than 20 years.

Most studies estimate that oil production will peak sometime between now and 2040, although many of these projections cover a wide range of time, including two studies for which the range extends into the next Century. The timing of the peak depends on multiple, uncertain factors that will influence how quickly the remaining oil is used, and future oil demand.

³¹⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gulf_War_oil_spill

³¹⁶ Report of the General Assembly of the United Nations No. A/62/343

³¹⁷ <http://www.foreignpolicydigest.org/2008/0922159/Middle-East/September-2008/future-of-saudi-oil.html>

The amount of oil remaining in the ground is highly uncertain, in part because the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) controls most of the estimated world oil reserves, but its estimates of reserves are not verified by independent auditors. In addition, many parts of the world have not yet been fully explored for oil. There is also great uncertainty about the amount of oil that will ultimately be produced, given the technological, cost, and environmental challenges. Other important sources of uncertainty about future oil production are potentially unfavorable political and investment conditions in countries where oil is located. For example, more than 60 percent of world oil reserves are in countries where relatively unstable political conditions could constrain oil exploration and production. Finally, future world demand for oil also is uncertain because it depends on economic growth and government policies throughout the world. For example, continued rapid economic growth in China and India could significantly increase world demand for oil, while environmental concerns, including oil's contribution to global warming, may spur conservation or adoption of alternative fuels that would reduce future demand for oil.

Conclusion

Based on what has been mentioned above we can say that oil has had both positive and negative impacts on the Middle East society.

Middle Eastern nations should invest more heavily than any other nations in inventing and supplying new alternative energy technologies. For example: hydrogen, solar, bio-fuels, zero point energy, magnetic power, and the many new emerging alternatives to fossil fuels.

The Middle East has another huge asset besides what is under the ground in what is above the ground - the sun and space itself. They have a lot of open space and a lot of sunlight annually. It is the perfect place to create enormous solar collection farms, and wind farms. It would also be an ideal location to position centers for receiving space-based solar power (via microwave transmission).

This search for new technologies is a huge opportunity for the Middle East, not only for economic reasons, but also because it may just be the key to bringing about long-term sustainable peace in the region. If the Middle East nations would annually invest hundreds of billions of dollars into research and development of alternative fuels and alternative energy technologies, they could definitely capture and lead the market in post-fossil-fuel energy technologies. The Middle East could then become a world center of excellence in alternative energy. That is really the future of the Middle East.

The Arab region led the world in science and mathematics in the past. They can surely try to recover that position again.

THE SEARCH FOR NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Introduction

New technologies define the modern world and its future. In the Middle East, new technologies are closely associated with the energy producing industry. Oil, and more largely fossil fuels, play a determinant role in the geostrategic development of the region. However, oil will some day run out as it is a non-renewable resource.

Acknowledging this reality, Gulf countries have embarked on a search for new technologies that must offset its consequences.

Historically, oil has always played a significant role in the Arab world, especially the lands that now comprise Kuwait, Iraq, and Iran, where oil upwellings and gas vents had been known since the beginning of time. The Mesopotamian people, who built some of the first civilizations, described crude oil as oozing from natural wells.

Arab records from the 10th Century show that the province of Faris, in Persia, paid an annual tribute of 90 metric tons of oil to light the palace of the caliph with oil lamps, and an early Muslim historian, Ibn Adam, wrote that Arab governors of northern Iraq refrained from taxing the oil producing industries in their districts as an incentive to boost production.³¹⁸

Throughout history, Muslim scientists have brought great contributions to scientific progress in mathematics, physics, philosophy, cartography and numerous other fields. By investing today in new technologies, the Muslim world is, in a sense, returning to its roots, but also breaking its relationship with an old friend, oil.

Economic Realities

In the Middle East, oil is mostly found in the Gulf countries, namely, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Iran and Iraq. Among them, they control close to a quarter of the world's oil production.

Saudi Arabia is often referred to as the central bank of oil, because of the vast amount of its proven reserves, estimated at 245 billion barrels. It is the world's largest oil producer, and extracts, on average, 10 million barrels per day. At this rate it is estimated that it will take 75 years to deplete its reserves completely.

Oil revenues provide 75 percent of the government's income, allowing for a generous welfare state. The oil industry comprises about 45% of Saudi Arabia's gross domestic product.³¹⁹

After Saudi Arabia, Iran is the second largest oil exporter of the Gulf. It has proven reserves of approximately 136 billion barrels of

³¹⁸ Muslims and the Oil Industries, (<http://www.cyberistan.org/islamic/islmoil1.html>)

³¹⁹ Wikipedia, Saudi Arabia

which 4 million are extracted each day. At this production rate, Iranian reserves should last almost one hundred years. Its economy is more diversified than that of Saudi Arabia, with the service sector providing the largest percentage of its GDP. Iran is also the most populous state of the region with 80 million inhabitants. Over the last few years, Iran has witnessed, with the assistance of increasing oil revenues, a steady economic growth. However, it is still plagued by high unemployment. It should also be remembered that the Iranian economy has been under United Nations sanctions for many years and remains economically isolated.

Kuwait is the most oil dependent country of the Gulf. Oil sales account for 80% of the revenues and for 95% of its exports. Kuwait has the fifth largest proven reserves of crude in the world with an estimated 105 billion barrels. Its extraction rate, relative to its size, is homologous to that of Iran and therefore its stock should last almost one hundred years. Having recognized that the 2008 rise in oil price was induced by a shortage on the supply side, it now intends to increase its production capacity. This will inevitably lead to a quicker depletion of its stock. In parallel, it has embarked on a massive project to transform Kuwait into a trading and tourism hub.³²⁰

Bahrain's economy also relies heavily on oil but has diversified to a greater extent its economy due to the oil crash of the early 1980's. It seized the opportunity to replace Lebanon which was going through a civil war during that period, to develop as a financial hub. Bahrain also had more limited oil reserves.

Top World Producers, 2006 (thousand barrels per day)		
Rank	Country	Production
1	Saudi Arabia	10,665
2	Russia	9,675
3	United States	8,331
4	Iran	4,149
5	China	3,856
6	Mexico	3,710
7	Canada	3,287
8	United Arab Emirates	2,945
9	Venezuela	2,806
10	Norway	2,786
11	Kuwait	2,678
12	Nigeria	2,443
13	Brazil	2,167
14	Algeria	2,122
15	Iraq	2,010
Source: US Energy Information Administration		

³²⁰ Wikipedia : Kuwait

Oman discovered its oil riches in the late 1970's. These discoveries had a profound effect on Oman's identity. The discoveries were however limited when compared to the previous states mentioned. Its current reserves are estimated at 5.5 billion barrels.³²¹ It will soon have to find new income sources.

The UAE is a federation with different revenue sources for each of its constituent states. Dubai has focused on economic development while Abu Dhabi still largely depends on oil revenues. The UAE has estimated oil reserves of 98 billion barrels with a production rate of 3 million bpd.³²² The UAE is the most forward looking State of the region with heavy investments in different promising fields.

Top World Consumers, 2006 (thousand barrels per day)		
Rank	Country	Consumption
1	United States	20,687
2	China	7,235
3	Japan	5,198
4	Russia	2,830
5	Germany	2,692
6	India	2,658
7	Canada	2,297
8	Brazil	2,255
9	Korea, South	2,180
10	Mexico	2,078
11	Saudi Arabia	2,070
12	France	1,981
13	United Kingdom	1,812
14	Italy	1,743
15	Iran	1,655
Source: US Energy Information Administration		

Like the UAE, Qatar is seeking to stimulate the private sector and develop a "knowledge economy". Qatar has the highest GDP per capita of the region. It is an oil and natural gas rich country and is often referred to as the Saudi Arabia of natural gas. Before the discovery of oil, Qatar's economy relied mostly on pearling and fishing.

Finally, Iraq is also one the countries that holds vast amounts of oil, estimated at approximately 115 billion barrels, placing it fourth after Saudi Arabia, Canada and Iran in terms of reserve size. However, Iraq is a country in transition and is currently focusing its efforts on reconstructing itself.

Future Trends

It is believed that oil consumption will stabilize or diminish in 2009 as a result of the global economic crisis. Although this crisis is

³²¹ US Energy Information Administration, Oman Country Analysis Brief (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Oman/NaturalGas.html>)

³²² US Energy Information Administration, UAE Country Analysis Brief (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/UAE/Oil.html>)

deep, the world economy will eventually recover, leading to a natural increase in fossil fuels demand.

The recovery will encompass developed countries as well, among others the “BRIC” (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries which are not oil producers but have large populations.

In 2006, Brazil consumed 2.2 million bpd, India 2.6 and China 7.2. Taking into consideration their population size, when their growth will pick up, demand for energy will increase and today’s production capacity will not suffice to quench their thirst.

Over the last thirty years, Gulf States have under-exploited their oil reserves. This under-exploitation has been counter-balanced by an over-exploitation in other states such as Mexico, Canada, Venezuela and Russia among others.

As the world’s reserves deplete and demand for fossil fuels increases focus will gradually shift towards the Middle East and states will be faced domestically with an increased economic importance of oil and, a higher rate of depletion.

The Oil Transition Dilemma

As we have seen, oil has always played a central role in the running of the Middle East countries and has been a main source of income. This reality will continue and will be exacerbated in the coming years with the ever growing world demand for this scarce resource.

The direct result of the increase in demand will be an increase in the price of the commodity. As price will rise, bringing in more revenues, it will be a strong economic incentive to search for more of it. As a result it will be ever more difficult for Gulf countries to break their dependence on oil revenues.

However, these extra revenues will offer new possibilities for investment and this track is already being taken by some as we will see.

A careful balance will have to be reached to offset exponential rise in value of oil and the shift away from it.

In the meantime, there is still plenty of oil which means that prices fluctuate greatly. In the 1970’s, the oil shock created a spike in prices which led, for the first time, to a vast increase of petrodollar revenues. However, after this euphoric period, production resumed and a glut of the commodity during the 1980s that led to crash in its price. This great fluctuation had a great impact of the local.

Lately, the same cycle repeated itself. In July 2008, the price of oil almost reached \$150 a barrel and in March 2009 it had fallen back to around \$45 a barrel. However, this time the price increase was caused by the incapacity of supply to meet the demand and partially by speculation. There was no disruption in the production of oil.

New Energy Technologies

With the threat of global warming and the price of oil rapidly rising, worldwide interest in alternative sources of energy has increased. In the Middle East, the recognition that stocks will run out has contributed more broadly to a spurt in investment into these new technologies.

Solar, wind, hydrogen and nuclear power are the most promising alternative sources of energy that can be substituted for fossil fuels.

Solar energy and wind energy

Solar and wind energy are the most common and readily available sources of renewable energy. Being an arid region, the Gulf is soaked in sunshine all year around, and this makes it a reliable producer by default.

Solar energy and wind power are the closest technologies to approach a comparative advantage when oil prices rise.

The current state of development of these clean energy producing technologies only provide a low output of energy when compared to fossil fuels. More importantly, the power produced cannot be easily exported as a commodity, like oil and natural gas are today. Recognizing these facts, many Gulf States have embarked in the development of “knowledge” economies.

Masdar City, being built in the United Arab Emirates, is the boldest move towards the creation of a knowledge based economy. Masdar, which stands for “The Source” in Arabic, will be entirely powered by solar energy, a unique example worldwide. The aim of the project is to create a self-sustaining city with zero-carbon and zero-waste which will be the host of a research and development center that will focus, among other fields, on renewable energies.

The city will cover 6.4 km², be home to 50,000 inhabitants and envisages to attract or create 1,500 enterprises related to the clean energy sector. Automobiles will be banned and most commute will be done through public transport. This will also allow for narrow shaded streets for pedestrian travel. This project is supported by large energy corporations such as General Electric, BP, Total, and Royal Dutch Shell.³²³

With the development of such a project the UAE will be in the position of becoming a knowledge exporter instead of a knowledge importer.³²⁴ By doing so, the UAE is exploiting the opportunity presented in the challenge to find alternative sources of energy to assure

³²³ Wikipedia : Masdar City

³²⁴ The Masdar Initiative,

(<http://www.masdaruae.com/en/Menu/index.aspx?MenuID=42&catid=12&mnu=Cat&fst=cm&mi=vs>)

the sustainability of its domestic growth by diversifying its economy. It is also recognizing the fundamental shift it must make from an export (oil and natural gas) based economy to a service “knowledge” base economy.

This project also serves to illustrate the UAE’s commitment to a clean future. Further demonstrating its support for renewable energies, the UAE hosted the second World Future Energy Summit in January 2009 with the participation of over 15,000 delegates, thirty governments and over three hundred firms.³²⁵ Lastly, the UAE is currently campaigning to host the headquarters of the future International Renewable Energy Agency.

Nonetheless, Masdar the UAE and Gulf States will face stiff competition in creating knowledge based economies. Today, Germany, which is a generally clouded country, is the world leader in the production of solar energy.³²⁶ Germany is a leader in solar energy electricity not because of a technological breakthrough, but because of legislation that was adopted in 2000 requiring regular electric companies to buy power produced from alternative clean sources at a higher premium. Continuing in that trend, Germany adopted further legislation that requires that any new building being constructed after January 2009 be able to produce 14% of its annual energy consumption through solar power. These incentives will result in the creation of a market with many companies competing to provide the required services and thereby creating new jobs.

The conclusion to be drawn is that Gulf States should also enact, in parallel with heavy investments, a legislative framework to foster entrepreneurial initiatives.

Wind energy is often referred in tandem with solar energy and is also gathering momentum. It is considered as competitive as solar energy.

In May 2009, Iran will be hosting an international conference with the aim of addressing the Iranian wind market and the financial, technological and managerial issues.

Iran has the longest shoreline of the region which could be exploited by this source of energy. However experts believe that the Red Sea coastline is more suited for wind energy production. The Masdar consortium is also investing in wind power with the recent purchase of a significant equity stake in the WinWind Oy firm which specializes in the

³²⁵ “World Future Energy Summit Kicks Off in Abu Dhabi”, *The Tree Hugger*, 20 January 2009

(<http://www.treehugger.com/files/2009/01/wfes-kicks-off-in-abu-dhabi.php>)

³²⁶ “Cloudy Germany, a Powerhouse in Solar Energy”, *The Washington Post*, 5 May 2007

(<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/04/AR2007050402466.html>)

construction of large scale wind turbines.³²⁷ The UAE already hosts the largest wind turbine of the region located off its coastline on the Sir Bani Yas Island. Were wind energy to become more lucrative, it would raise the stakes on the already territorially disputed islands between Iran and the UAE; for the moment these are disputed only because of their geo-strategic value as they control the entry point to the Gulf.

Oman, which we mentioned earlier, is also contemplating investing in wind energy technology as it has a large maritime façade on the Indian Ocean and is preparing a landmark study that will outline the road map for the development of wind energy.

More symbolically, Bahrain's World Trade Center building is powered by two large wind turbines.

Solar and wind energy are sources that level the playing field by subtracting from the energy production equation the location factor since they can be produced virtually anywhere where as oil is situated in a particular location. Therefore, with these energies, the geo-strategic importance of the Gulf will diminish over the long term.

Hydrogen Based Energy

A fuel cell is an electromagnetic device that produces electricity from a fuel, in this case hydrogen being the fuel. However, hydrogen cannot be found on earth as a fuel source and must be extracted from water and therefore requires energy. The electricity is produced when hydrogen is converted back into water.

Today the most advanced country in this field is Iceland which launched the Icelandic New Energy company to research and develop that energy source after having recognized its dependency on foreign oil and coming to the conclusion that energy had to be stored in a more intensive form than batteries.³²⁸ Hydrogen is produced from the clean renewable geothermal power capacity of the country. In 2003, it inaugurated a small fleet of public buses, followed in 2007 by the import of hydrogen-fueled cars.³²⁹ The large scale adoption of hydrogen fueled cars has only been delayed because of car manufacturers.

Geothermal energy is not an option in the Gulf. To produce hydrogen on a large scale, Gulf states would have to build nuclear power plants. This option does not seem to be very feasible.

Nuclear Energy

Another alternative source of energy is nuclear power. Nuclear power is only a partially clean alternative energy as it produces

³²⁷ "Masdar Invests 120 euros Millions in Wind Turbine Manufacturer", Eye of Dubai, 24 September 2008 (<http://www.eyeofdubai.com/v1/news/newsdetail-25971.htm>)

³²⁸ Icelandic New Energy website (www.newenergy.is)

³²⁹ The Christian Scientist Monitor "Iceland strides towards a hydrogen economy" (<http://features.csmonitor.com/environment/2009/02/12/iceland-strides-toward-a-hydrogen-economy/>)

radioactive waste, which cannot be easily disposed of. However, its overall functioning principal is relatively simple as the nuclear material is used to heat a water source which then powers a turbine thereby producing electricity. Mastering the nuclear reaction is tricky and requires extensive knowledge.

Currently, Iran is the most advanced country in the region in the pursuit of developing civilian nuclear power as it is estimated that it will complete the construction of its first nuclear power plant in 2009.

³³⁰

Legally, according to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, to which Iran is a party, Iran has a legitimate right to develop nuclear power for peaceful purposes. The Treaty only bans the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

From an economic perspective, nuclear power will allow Iran to save and export more of its oil production. As pointed out earlier, Iran has the largest population in the region and currently 45% its domestic energy is produced through the burning of its oil.³³¹ This extra power capacity will allow Iran to export more of Iran's oil and increase its influence on the world energy markets.

Iran is not the only country in the region interested in nuclear power. Although the UAE is firmly investing in clean renewable energies, it has expressed strong interest in nuclear power. In January 2008, it signed a partnership agreement enabling Total, the French oil company, to join forces with the reactor-designer Areva and the utility company Suez to build power stations in the United Arab Emirates.³³² Furthermore, in January 2009, it signed a nuclear cooperation accord with the outgoing US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.³³³ Like Iran, the development of nuclear energy will allow the UAE to export more of the oil it produces, and to rely on nuclear power for its domestic needs.

Likewise, Saudi Arabia has also demonstrated an interest in developing nuclear power. During the last official visit of United States President in May 2008, George Bush signed a cooperation agreement between the two governments with King Abdullah.³³⁴

³³⁰ World Nuclear Association, (<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/info.html#countries>)

³³¹ Energy Information Administration, Iran (<http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Iran/Background.html>)

³³² "France Set to Announce UAE Nuclear Deal", International Herald Tribune, 14 January 2008

(<http://www.iht.com/articles/2008/01/14/business/energy.php>)

³³³ The Washington Institute, "Atoms for What? The US-UAE Nuclear Accord" (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3010>)

³³⁴ "The United States supports Saudi Arabian Civil Nuclear Program", 16 May 2008 (<http://www.america.gov/st/peacesec-english/2008/May/20080516160353idybeekcm0.3394586.html>)

Other Clean Energies

The wide usage and application of other sources of clean energies such as geothermal, bio-fuels and hydro-electric are very limited in the Middle East .

The Gulf region is not a geo-thermally active region like Iceland, so investing in this source of energy would be wasteful.

The same argument can be made about bio-fuels as the Gulf has an arid climate, ill suited for the growth of crops to be used as fuels. The only country to have mastered this alternative on a large scale is Brazil which explains in part why it consumes and imports such low amounts of fossil fuels.

As the Gulf is an arid region, hydro-electric power can only be envisaged on a limited scale and cannot be substituted to oil. For that matter, it should be pointed out that Saudi Arabia does not have any exploitable rivers, and that most of its fresh water is produced through desalination units which are voracious in energy use, hence its need to develop nuclear power in the long term.

Wider Technological Possibilities

While Masdar City is the largest technological park being built with a focus on renewable energies, all over the region other more modest centers are also being constructed. The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation's (UNIDO) "Investment and Technological Promotion" programme lists seven technological centers in the UAE, four in Iran, two in Saudi Arabia and one respectively in Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.³³⁵

These technological centers cover a wide range of scientific fields such as advanced engineering, agro-food, bio-technologies, chemistry, electronics, energy, health and medicine, nano-technologies, and information and communication technologies.

These technologies will have a potential wider effect than the simple adoption of clean energies as they can redefine the social, economic and political landscape.

For example, new technologies in communications can provide new commercial opportunities thereby promoting growth creating new jobs and diversifying the economy. This would result in the gradual establishment of a knowledge economy. In addition, these new firms would lead to the establishment of a larger tax base which can partially offset the depletion of oil revenues.

The Gulf States have chosen the path of developing and investing in technological parks as they help to encourage productive

³³⁵ UNIDO: Investments and Technological Promotion
(<http://www.unido.org/index.php?id=o26781>)

research and development in academia and provide an easy mechanism to commercialise this research.³³⁶

Conclusion

In conclusion, solar and wind energies are not easily exportable commodities like oil is today. Therefore, as the world will transition to these new energy sources, the geo-strategic importance of the Gulf in energy markets will decline.

Hence, investments in clean energies must only be one aspect of investments in new technologies. The real riches of renewable energies rely in the investments made to develop a wider “knowledge” economy based on human capital. This reality has been recognized and many Gulf States are now investing their capital in a wide array of technologies.

The exhaustion of oil resources imposes a fundamental shift in the economies of Middle East countries as they must manage their transition from commodities exporting countries to servicing and knowledge based countries. This implies tough choices.

So far, Gulf countries have recognized this reality by investing in technological centers. However these centers should not be an end in themselves. Challenges will be great, as the region will not only have to compete with industrialized “knowledge rich” countries but also with emerging economies such as China and India which have vast populations.

The tipping point of oil’s importance will be reached when it will become more cost-effective to obtain energy from renewable energies than from fossil fuels.

Over the long term, the strength of Gulf countries relies in the vast amounts of funds they have at their disposal. Perhaps the Middle East will be the region that ultimately develops and masters the technology for carbon capture and storage on a large scale.

³³⁶ “The Rise of Middle East Technological Parks”, 3 October 2007
(<http://www.scidev.net/en/new-technologies/features/the-rise-of-middle-east-technology-parks.html>)

IRAN AND ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Introduction

The issue of Iran's nuclear enrichment program has become a dilemma for the United States and the European countries. The question of Iran's nuclear enrichment program for peaceful purposes is still a puzzle. In addition, it is of deep concern for regional countries in the Middle East as well as for other powers.

This paper elaborates on the legality of Iran's nuclear program, its background, facts and speculations, the stands of concerned countries as well as possible threats and scenarios in the future.

Background

The Islamic Republic of Iran, which was known as Persia until 1935, is situated in the Middle East. It shares borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and the Caspian Sea, Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, Iraq and Turkey. It has a population over 70 million. It is a Muslim country, with 90% Shi'a and 8% Sunni Muslims. The remaining 2% belong to Jewish, Bahai and Zoroastrian faiths. The major language is Persian, but there are also other languages like Turkish, Kurdish, Luri, Baluchi, and Arabic.

In the 1960s Iran embarked on establishing a nuclear program with the encouragement of the United States, as part of the Atoms for Peace program. The first significant nuclear facility built was the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC), founded in 1967, housed at Tehran University, and run by Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). This Center has always been one of Iran's primary open nuclear research facilities. It has a safeguarded 5-megawatt nuclear research reactor that was supplied by the US in 1967. Work on a nuclear reactor to be built by Siemens at Bushehr then began. Iran had plans to construct as many as 23 nuclear power stations by the year 2000. There was also some speculation that Iran intended to build a nuclear weapons capability. This nuclear program continued with the support of the US and the Western European countries until the Islamic Revolution in 1979. It was almost nearing completion in 1979 when Ayatollah Khomeini pronounced the project as "un-Islamic."

Meanwhile, nuclear power has fallen out of favor in most countries since the Chernobyl disaster in the former Soviet Union. In August 2002, the National Council of Resistance in Iran (NCRC), an Iranian exile group, revealed information that Tehran had built nuclear-related facilities that it had not revealed to IAEA.

In 2002, the agency began investigating allegations that Iran had conducted clandestine nuclear activities and reported a violation of safeguard agreements. The IAEA referred the matter to UN Security Council in February 2006, and the Council has adopted five resolutions

requiring Iran, (a) to cooperate fully with IAEA's investigation of its nuclear activities, (b) to suspend its uranium enrichment program, (c) to suspend its construction of a heavy-water reactor and related projects, and (d) to ratify the Additional Protocol to its IAEA safeguards agreement. The IAEA Director General Mohamed El-Baradei in his most recent report in September 2008 indicated that Tehran has continued to defy the Council's demands by continuing work on its uranium enrichment program and its heavy-water reactor program.

According to the Iran-IAEA agreed work plan in 2007, most of questions which had created suspicions that Iran had been pursuing a nuclear weapons program, have essentially been resolved but one major issue that is still unresolved concerns the "possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program".³³⁷

The Russian View

Russia and Iran share a common interest in limiting the political influence of the United States in Central Asia. This common interest has led the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to extend to Iran observer status in 2005, and offer full membership in 2006. Iran's relations with the organization, which is dominated by Russia and China, represents the most extensive diplomatic ties that Iran has shared since the 1979 revolution. By the mid 1990s, Russia had already agreed to continue work on developing Iran's nuclear program, with plans to finish constructing the nearly 20 year old nuclear reactor plant at Bushehr. The international community sent Iran's docket to the Security Council, but Russia and China held off sanctioning Iran, in order to present Tehran with an enhanced package of incentives.

The Arab View

Arab governments are most anxious about Iran's nuclear progress. Iran is supporting Shia communities in some Arab countries. There have been historical conflicts between Arabs and Iranians in the region. After the famous battle of Qadisiya, Arabs defeated the forces of the Persian Empire and Islam was introduced to Iran (637-651 AD). Since then Iranians are followers of Shia Islamic faith while the Arabs except Bahrain, Lebanon and Iraq are Sunnis.

Iran had good relations with the Arabs during the Pahlavi dynasty era. However, after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the foreign policy of Iran changed because Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, declared that "the concept of monarchy totally contradicts Islam". He had the intentions to export the revolution to other parts of the Muslim world.

This led to a hostile attitude towards the Islamic Republic of Iran by Arabs. Thus, during the early 1980s, Iran was isolated regionally

³³⁷ CRS Report for Congress, Paul K. Kerr Dec. 4 2008

and internationally. It is for this reason that the Arabs supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war .

There is a dispute between Iran and UAE over t three Islands in the Gulf, namely, Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb. These islands were part of Iran from antiquity, and Iran re-possessed them in an agreement with UK. All three islands are also claimed by UAE.

The United States View

The United States official position on Iran is that a nuclear-armed Iran is not acceptable and that "all options", including the unilateral use of force and first-strike nuclear weapons, "on the table". The U.S is totally against the any sort of nuclear program of Iran. In June 2005, the US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice said International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) head Mohamed El-Baradei should either toughen his stance on Iran or fail to be chosen for a third term as head of the IAEA.³³⁸

During the period of the Shah, the US was the major economic and military partner of Iran. This relationship changed dramatically after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. The hostage crisis exacerbated the relations between these two countries and led to the suspension of diplomatic relations. Them in January 2002, U.S. President George Bush gave his "Axis of Evil" speech, describing Iran, along with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, as an axis of evil and warning that the proliferation of long-range missiles developed by these countries was of great danger to the US and that it constituted terrorism.

The U.S is trying to stop Iran from any nuclear ambitions. Although Bush was against any kind of negotiation with Iran, the new administration has shown more flexibility for talks with Iran.

The European Union View

The EU is a strong supporter of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). In October 2003, France, Germany and the United Kingdom launched a diplomatic effort aimed at resolving the issue through negotiations. In 2005, in June 2006, and again in May 2008, they presented far-reaching proposals to the Iranian authorities which would help Iran to develop a modern civil nuclear power program, whilst meeting international concerns about its peaceful nature. The proposals offer Iran broad co-operation in the technological and economic field as well as in the political and security field.³³⁹ Regrettably, and in spite of the EU's best efforts, Iran has not heeded the requests to allow negotiations on a long term agreement that would provide assurances that Iran's nuclear program is entirely for peaceful purposes.

³³⁸ US agrees to back UN nuclear head, June 9, 2005, BBC

³³⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/iran/nuclear_en.htm

The Non-Aligned Movement View

In July 2008, the Non-Aligned Movement welcomed the continuing cooperation of Iran with the IAEA and reaffirmed Iran's right to the peaceful uses of nuclear technology. The movement further called for the establishment of a nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East, and called for a comprehensive multilaterally negotiated instrument which prohibits threats of attacks on nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. They also emphasized the need to address this issue through non-discriminatory agreements.

The Israel View

Iran does not formally recognize Israel as a country, and official government texts often simply refer to it as the "Zionist entity" or the "Zionist regime". Israel and Iran do not have diplomatic relations and the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, once spoke about wiping the Israel out off the face of the earth.

Iran has the largest Jewish population in the Middle East outside of Israel, and the Iranian Jewish community is guaranteed one parliamentary seat in the Majlis. A large population of Iranian Jews resides in Israel as well. Israel is against Iran's nuclear status, and is always trying to stop Iran's nuclear program by different ways and means. Israel publicly declared Iran's nuclear program a direct threat to itself.

Earlier, along with Turkey, Iran was considered one of Israel's closest and few Muslim friends. In the aftermath of the Six Day War and the closure of the Suez Canal, Iran supplied Israel with a significant portion of its oil needs as well as facilitating the transfer of Iranian oil to European markets via the joint Israeli-Iranian Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. The two nations had numerous business transactions, although the extent of these dealings was never officially quantified. Iran and Israel did also develop close military ties during this period, and were even linked in joint venture military projects, such as Project Flower to develop a new missile.

The International Atomic Energy Agency View

In 2002, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) started investigating allegations that Iran had conducted clandestine nuclear activities; the agency ultimately reported that some of these activities had violated Tehran's IAEA safeguards agreement. The agency has not stated definitively that Iran has pursued nuclear weapons, but has not yet been able to conclude that the country's nuclear program is exclusively for peaceful purposes.³⁴⁰ Iran and IAEA agreed in August 2007 on a work plan to clarify the outstanding questions regarding Tehran's nuclear program. Most of these questions have essentially been

³⁴⁰ CRS Report for Congress, Paul K. Kerr , December 4, 2008

solved, but El-Baradei told the Agency's board in June 2008 that the agency still has questions regarding "possible military dimensions to Iran's nuclear program". Iran has not agreed either to the Agency's request to provide access, as a transparency measure, to additional locations related to the manufacturing of centrifuges, uranium enrichment, and uranium mining and milling, as called for by the Security Council.³⁴¹ Iran has not suspended its enrichment related activities or its work on heavy water-related projects, including the construction of heavy water moderated research reactor, and the production of fuel for that reactor.

The Iranian Position

When Shah started Iran's nuclear plans, he expressed the view that oil is valuable and should be used for high-value products, and not simply for electricity generation. Iran's foreign minister has described attempts to stop it from gaining nuclear capabilities as "nuclear apartheid" and "scientific apartheid". According to the interviews and surveys, the majority of Iranians in all groups favor their country's nuclear program. The president of Iran, Ahmadinejad, has said that sanctions cannot and will not dissuade Iranians from their decision to make progress on the nuclear fuel cycle, or the production of heavy water, both of which have been achieved under sanctions.

The Iranian authorities express their intentions as follows:

- Iran plans to expand its reliance on nuclear power in order to generate electricity, as a substitute for oil and gas consumption,
- Iran's nuclear enrichment program is exclusively for peaceful purposes,
- It is the inalienable right of Iran to do so according to Article IV of the NPT,
- Iran denies any desire to seek nuclear weapons capacity for deterrence or retaliation,
- Iran has signed the Additional Protocol in December 2003.

Analysis

Although Iran has repeatedly asserted that its nuclear program is strictly peaceful, stating that "we consider the acquiring, development and use of nuclear weapons inhumane, immoral, illegal and against our basic principles and have no place in Iran's defense doctrine", the issue is still in the focus of world attention.

Iran is arguing that the enrichment process is a means of modernizing the country and reinforcing its sovereignty. It merely for creating power plants and it is as a substitute for fuel. The Iranians claim they have no nuclear weapons ambitions, and they claim that the other

³⁴¹ Report by the Director General to the Board of Governors, 19 Feb, 2009

NPT signatory states are bound to assist Iran's civil nuclear program under their NPT commitments.

But the US, the EU, and their other allies, refute these claims and believe that Iran is running a clandestine nuclear enrichment program for the purpose of acquiring nuclear weapons as part of its military ambitions. These suspicions increased after Iran announced in September 2000 that it had succeeded in launching a new type of Shehab-3 missile, which has a range of 1,500 kilometers. Military experts affirmed that the missile, which has the capability to carry nuclear heads.

Additionally, in early February 2004, the Government of Pakistan reported that their nuclear scientist, Abdul Qadeer Khan had signed a confession indicating that he had provided Iran, Libya, and North Korea with designs and technology to aid them in their nuclear weapons programs. The Pakistani official who made the announcement said that Khan had admitted to transferring technology and information to Iran between 1989 and 1991.

Iran has benefited from the collapse of the former Soviet Union. It has brought in nuclear experts, and obtained nuclear equipment, machinery, and technology through various means. Indeed, much of the debate about the Iranian nuclear enrichment program is the concern over Iran's mastery of civilian technology which could provide it the means to rapidly develop a weapons capability. Once Iran obtained the knowledge and acquired the required technology, then making a nuclear weapon or bomb will become an easy next step.

Political point of view

Iran obviously intends to be a prominent country in the Middle East because it is living in a dangerous neighborhood. It wants to have influence in the Persian Gulf, but this cannot be achieved without a strong economy and military presence. At present, only one country, Israel, is a nuclear power in the Middle East, though in the nuclear geo-politics of the greater Middle East, we can include Pakistan, India, Russia, China and even the United States.

If Iran is intending to build nuclear weapon, and that is not certain at all, then it would in all likelihood be to counter Israel, and perhaps also as deterrent against any possible attack in future.

Evidence and Suspicions

Iran does not have a bomb and claims that it will never divert from peaceful uses to weapon production. In the language of Article IV of the Treaty, the NPT recognized Iran's "inalienable right to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination, and acquire equipment, materials, and scientific and technological information." The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has found no evidence of an Iranian nuclear weapon program. Most Western states nevertheless suspect Iran of trying to

acquire a nuclear weapons capability, which if acquired would be a contravention of Iran's commitments under the NPT and associated agreements. In law, suspicion has to be supported by evidence, and that is missing in this case.

Conclusion

The enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes is the right of every country according to the NPT. Iran's claims are based on this fundamental argument, which no one can deny. However, there are still doubts and ambiguities regarding Iran's claims that the enrichment program is for peaceful purposes because of the dual-use nature of this technology. There is no guaranty that once Iran has acquired the knowledge of a peaceful nuclear program, it cannot be used for making nuclear weapons.

On the basis of the above, the following conclusions emerge:

- Firstly, Iran's nuclear program is unstoppable. It is based on a clear legal permission under Article IV of the NPT, which gives it the "inalienable" right to pursue the objective of the peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- Secondly, irrespective of any ambiguity in the intention of Iran behind pursuing the enrichment program, the fact remains that there is no evidence that Iran is pursuing a nuclear weapons program. There is only nuclear enrichment and the pursuit of the nuclear fuel cycle.
- Thirdly, any suspicions of any Iranian nuclear weapons program will inevitably lead to the pursuit of a similar capacity by other countries in the region and will stimulate other states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, for example) to start their nuclear programs also.

THE WMD FREE ZONE PROPOSAL

Introduction

The Middle East is one of the most volatile and war-torn regions of the world with numerous conflicts over ideology, religion, ethnicity, culture, land, water and oil. Despite the fact that these conflicts in the Middle East attract the involvement of major powers of the world, the conflict pattern is basically a regional one. The possible ambitions of the countries in the region to acquire nuclear weapons and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)³⁴² are also rooted primarily within this regional context.

The Middle East remains the region with the greatest concentration of states that are not party to one or more of the international treaties dealing with WMD: the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC), the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as well as the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Moreover, WMD, specifically chemical weapons, have been used in the Middle East. A number of countries in the region had or have some form of WMD-related research, development or weaponization program. The consequence of the WMD dilemma in the Middle East, however, has greater impact on the international peace and security, and therefore, the WMD problem in the Middle East cannot stand-alone; it should not be left alone forever without a solution. Hence, the political realities in the Middle East mandate the establishment of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the region in parallel with a peace agreement between Israel and its Arab neighbours.

This paper examines the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's initiative to transform the Middle East into a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction – WMDFZ – by expanding the previous proposal for establishing a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East. It analyses the dynamics between the Arab-Israeli peace process and the WMDFZ proposal as a mechanisms for regional security, together with the related nuclear dimension and the associated weapons of mass destruction proliferation issues in the Middle East. This paper also discusses the reasons behind Israel's nuclear position and its relationship to the peace process while analysing the required political environment to free the Middle East from all WMD. Further, the paper recommends some practical actions towards establishing a WMD policy in the form of a WMDFZ for the regional arms control in the Middle East.

³⁴² The concept of weapons of mass destruction refers to nuclear weapons, biological and toxin weapons, and chemical weapons and in addition certain delivery vehicles for such weapons.

For more than half a century, the Middle East, has been confronted by the two dilemmas of security and defense without being able to find a way out of them. It became a region of concern with regard to not only nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and their delivery systems, but also as the world's largest recipient of conventional weapons.

The Middle East is also one of only a few regions in which chemical weapons have been used in warfare. Iraq has used them both against Iran, during the decade-long war fought by the two countries in the 1980s, and on its own territory, in the largely Kurdish city of Halabja in 1988. During the Gulf War, the prospect of Iraq launching Scud missiles armed with chemical warheads against Israel or coalition forces was taken seriously across the region. Hence, historical use makes the threat posed by chemical weapons all the more tangible and has led to the development of chemical weapons programmes by a number of states in the region.³⁴³

States with Weapons Of Mass Destruction

Israel

Israel is a country which unofficially possesses nuclear weapons in the Middle East. The Israeli leadership itself does not confirm or deny reports about the existence of nuclear weapons, preferring instead a policy of "nuclear ambiguity".³⁴⁴ Prime Minister Simon Peres said: "*A certain amount of secrecy must be maintained in some fields. The suspicion and fog surrounding this question are constructive, because they strengthen our deterrent.*"³⁴⁵

There is no confirmed evidence of Israeli production or stockpiling of chemical weapons, despite allegations of its possession of an advanced chemical weapons program. Rumours and allegations also persist that Israel possesses an offensive biological weapons program, but no credible evidence. Israel has been developing missiles since the 1960s. It's extensive and comprehensive missile capabilities include cruise and ballistic missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and the Arrow theater defense missile system.³⁴⁶

Israel's security policy is centered on the idea that Israel cannot afford to lose a war. As a small country, with a small population of 7 million, Israel worries about being overcome by its larger Arab neighbours. Thus, the basic tenet of Israel's national security policy is to avoid losing a war by not fighting it in the first place. To accomplish

³⁴³ <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd>

³⁴⁴ See: Israel's Nuclear Weapons at Federation of American Scientists. <http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/israel/nuke/>, 23 Oct. 2002, p.3 of 6.

³⁴⁵ "Israel's Nuclear Program" BBC. December 22, 2003.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3340639.stm

³⁴⁶ Gitty M. Amini, Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies, February 2003.

this, Israel relies on a strong deterrent posture, including the willingness to execute preventive attacks, such as the bombing of the Iraqi Ozirak nuclear reactor in June 1981.

Iraq

Iraq's Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Facility near Baghdad used to be the heart of its nuclear weapons programme. The IAEA removed all known Iraqi stocks of weapons-useable nuclear material in 1991.³⁴⁷ Concerns about a possible resumption of Iraq's nuclear weapons program were used as justification for Operation Iraqi Freedom, which removed Saddam Hussein from power in April 2003. However, subsequent searches by coalition forces failed to find evidence of efforts to restart Iraq's nuclear weapons program, confirming earlier IAEA conclusions.³⁴⁸

Iraq is believed to have made widespread use of chemical agents during its war with Iran in 1980-88, and against its own Kurdish population in northern Iraq, including in Halabja, in 1988. Iraq also had a biological weapon program since 1985. After Iraq's defeat in the 1991 war, UN inspections put a halt to its range of missile projects that Iraq had pursued with extensive foreign assistance.³⁴⁹

Iran

Iran has been also suspected as having chemical and biological weapons, and conducting nuclear research efforts. Iran was accused by the United States, in December 2002, of "across-the-board pursuit of weapons of mass destruction" based on satellite images of nuclear reactor sites. However, inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have not found a nuclear weapons programme in Iran, and Iran regularly asserts that it has not made a political decision to have nuclear weapons.³⁵⁰ Iran has consistently pointed out that the NPT guarantees its signatories the right to seek civilian nuclear power, including uranium enrichment, in return for not seeking nuclear weapons, and has pointed out that Israel is the only nation in the Middle East that actually possesses nuclear weapons.

Iran's chemical weapons program started in 1983 as a response to Iraq's use of chemical weapons against Iran in the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988).³⁵¹ While it has admitted to the development and production of

³⁴⁷ <http://www.greenpeace.org/international/campaigns/peace/solutions/regional-solutions/peace-in-the-middle-east>

³⁴⁸ http://www.nti.org/h_learnmore/nwftutorial/chapter06_02.html

³⁴⁹ Gitty M. Amini, Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies, February 2003.

³⁵⁰ http://www.nti.org/h_learnmore/nwftutorial/chapter06_02.html

³⁵¹ Gitty M. Amini, Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies, February 2003.

chemical weapons in the past, Iran is a member state of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)³⁵², and therefore subject to the Organisation's inspection regime.

The results of all OPCW inspections conducted in the country so far have been favourable, and the OPCW has deemed Iran to be in full compliance with the terms of the CWC.³⁵³

Iran's biological weapons program was also initiated in the early part of the war with Iraq. Iran's building of a missile arsenal has involved both the purchase of complete missile systems from abroad and the development of indigenous systems.³⁵⁴

Other countries in the region

Syria, Libya and Egypt have been also reported to possess chemical warfare capability.³⁵⁵ In December 2003, Libya, long suspected of developing nuclear weapons, announced that it was terminating all its WMD programs.³⁵⁶

The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

While tensions over Israeli nuclear weapons and Iran's nuclear program continue to hinder progress toward a zone free of WMD, stability in the Middle East region remains intangible due to the lack of serious action and pressure for resuming the Middle East peace process on the part of key states.

Nuclear weapons are a part of this problem with countries in the Middle East either having a nuclear weapons programme (Israel) or being suspected of pursuing one via its nuclear energy programme (Iran).

It is clear that the overall Arab-Israeli conflict will not end unless nuclear weapons and disarmament are on the table, and that is why Israel maintains its nuclear position as a bargaining tool.

As long as Israel maintains its nuclear arsenal, it feels that it has the upper hand in negotiations with its Arab neighbours.³⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Israel's nuclear doctrine of ambiguity has chipped away in the last few years.

³⁵² OPCW is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC or Convention).

³⁵³ Pamela Mills, Preventing Chemical Warfare and Terrorism: The CWC and the Middle East, Opinion & Analysis, Disarmament Diplomacy, Issue No. 65, July - August 2002.

³⁵⁴ Gitty M. Amini, Weapons of Mass Destruction in the Middle East, Center for Nonproliferation Studies (CNS), Monterey Institute of International Studies, February 2003.

³⁵⁵ Anthony H. Cordesman, "The Military Balance in the Middle East: an Executive Summary", IGCC Policy Paper # 49, March 1999, p. 88.

³⁵⁶ http://www.nti.org/h_learnmore/nwftutorial/chapter06_02.html

³⁵⁷ Erin Fitzpatrick, The Impact of Israeli Nuclear Weapons On The Peace Process And Options For The Future, May 9, 2005

Starting with the War of Independence in 1948, Israel has been involved in six wars³⁵⁸ with its neighbours. Additionally, they have experienced two Palestinian uprisings (intifadas) in 1987 and 2000.

The WMD Free Zone Proposal

Initial Proposal

The call for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (NWFZ) in the Middle East has a history of over 30 years. The regional de-nuclearisation initiative was first introduced aftermath of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. In 1974, Iran and Egypt proposed the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East at the 29th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. During the debate on the draft resolution, Egypt stressed the following four major principles: (a) the states of the region should refrain from producing, acquiring, or processing nuclear weapons; (b) the nuclear weapon states should refrain from introducing nuclear weapons into the area or using nuclear weapons against any state of the region; (c) an effective international safeguards system affecting both the nuclear weapon states and states of the region should be established; and (d) the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East should not prevent parties from enjoying the benefits of the peaceful uses of atomic energy, especially for economic development.³⁵⁹

In December 1974, the General Assembly adopted the draft resolution by 128 votes to none³⁶⁰, with only two abstentions (Israel and Burma). The resolution “*commended the idea of establishing a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East, considered that it was indispensable that all parties concerned in the area proclaim solemnly and immediately their intention to refrain, on a reciprocal basis, from producing, testing, obtaining, acquiring or in any other way possessing nuclear weapon*”.

While Israel abstained from joining the resolution for six years, they negotiated a new proposal in 1980. In the end, they withdrew the proposal, which asked for “direct negotiations between the countries in the region rather than installing a zone by universal fiat”³⁶¹, and all the parties in the Middle East agreed on the draft proposal for a NWFZ. From 1980 onwards, there was no opposition to, or abstention from it including Israel. The United Nations General Assembly has every year since 1980 unanimously endorsed the proposal.

The Mubarak Initiative

In April 1990, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt widened the

³⁵⁸ 1948 War of Independence; the 1956 Suez War; the six-day war in 1967; the War of Attrition from 1968-70; the 1973 Yom Kippur War; and the 1982 Lebanese War.

³⁵⁹ UN General Assembly Records, A/C.1/PV.2001, p. 32-36.

³⁶⁰ UN Document A/RES/3263 (XXIX), 9 December 1974.

³⁶¹ Claudia Baumgart and Harald Muller. A Nuclear- Weapons-Free Zone in the Middle East: A Pie in the Sky?, Winter 2004-05.

http://www.twq.com/05winter/docs/05winter_muller.pdf

proposal for establishing a NWFZ in the Middle East by calling for the transformation of the Middle East into a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction- WMDFZ- thus expanding the proposal against nuclear weapons to one which added a ban on biological and chemical weapons also. Egypt submitted this proposal to the United Nations in April 1990, which emphasized the following points:³⁶² (a) All weapons of mass destruction without exception should be prohibited in the Middle East; (b) All states of the region, without exception, should make equal and reciprocal commitments in this regard; and (c) Verification measures and modalities should be established to ascertain full compliance of all states of the region with the full scope of the prohibitions without exceptions. Furthermore, the Mubarak proposal pointed to the following terms to be taken into account:³⁶³ (a) A qualitative as well as quantitative symmetry of the military capabilities of individual states of the Middle East. Asymmetries cannot prevail in a region striving for a juste and comprehensive peace; (b) Increased security at lower levels of armament...Security must be attained through political deliberations and disarmament rather than the force of arms; and (c) Arms limitation and disarmament agreements should consider equal rights and responsibilities, and states should equally issue legally binding commitments in the field of disarmament.

The Mubarak Initiative did not receive universal enthusiasm in the Arab world. When Egypt presented the Initiative at the June 1990 Baghdad Arab Summit meeting, Saddam Hussein objected to the proposal. Concern was expressed that the Initiative might damage Arab interests by allowing Israel to shift attention from nuclear weapons to other weapons of mass destruction, and that the establishment of the WMDFZ might limit the access of the region's states to civilian technology. ³⁶⁴ Nevertheless, by the end of 1994, Egypt obtained support from Syria and Saudi Arabia for its position favouring the creation of the WMDFZ as an integral part of the peace process.

The Israeli Approach

Following complex negotiations, Israel adopted the central elements of the Initiative in a draft document defining Israel's approach to the goals of arms control in the Middle East. The essence of the approach was made public by the then Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres, in a speech at the 1993 international conference organized in Paris to sign the Chemical Weapons Convention, indicating that the

³⁶² UN Document A/45/219-S/21252, April 18, 1990.

³⁶³ James F. Leonard and Jan Prawitz, *The Middle East as a NWFZ or WMDFZ application*, Excerpts from *Pacifica Review*, Vol. 11 No.3, Oct. 1999, p 263-264.

³⁶⁴ Nabil Fahmy, "Egypt's Disarmament Initiative," *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, November 1990, pp. 9-10

establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East required the prior establishment of peace and the application of mutual verification measures.³⁶⁵

At the October 1994 Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East (ACRS) meeting in Paris and at the December 1994 meeting in Tunis, Israel endorsed the transformation of the Middle East into a WMDFZ in the draft Statement on Arms Control and Regional Security discussed. Further, Israel proposed that the statement include a call for establishing the Middle East as a mutually verifiable zone free of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.³⁶⁶ Hence, for over twenty years, Israel has supported the idea of a WMD-free Middle East, but it always predicated it on a regional peace agreement, and so its position has been that once there is a long lasting peace in the Middle East, no state should possess WMD.

Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS)

Focus on WMD issues in the Middle East increased following the discovery of a clandestine nuclear weapon program in Iraq after the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Shortly after the war, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 687 of April 1991, which emphasized the denuclearization of the Middle East to promote regional security. Later, at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, which brought Israel, the Palestinians, and many other Middle Eastern countries to the table, the participants agreed to take a multilateral track towards regional arms control and security.

The establishment of the ACRC working group in October 1991 as a multilateral forum for Arms Control and Regional Security in the Middle East was a direct outcome of the Madrid Conference and the American military campaign in the Gulf war. The move, however, has not gone very far. For one thing, not all the region's states are parties to the ACRS; in fact, some of the most relevant states in this regard are missing.

Neither Iran nor Iraq was a party to the ACRS; Syria, while negotiating peace and security with Israel at the bilateral level, decided not to attend the multilateral forum until it saw a significant progress on the bilateral channel.³⁶⁷ Nevertheless, due to dissent between Israel and Egypt over the WMD free zone³⁶⁸, the ACRS has not held a formal meeting since September 1995.

³⁶⁵ David Makovsky, "Peres to Seek Mutual Verification of Arms Ban with Arabs," *Jerusalem Post*, January 13, 1993.

³⁶⁶ <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd65/65op3.htm>

³⁶⁷ Avner Cohen, "The Nuclear Issue in the Middle East in a New World Order" in Efraim Inbar and Shmuel Sandler ed., *Middle Eastern Security: Prospects for an Arms Control Regime* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), pp. 55–56.

³⁶⁸ <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd65/65op3.htm>

Link with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

During the months prior to the April 1995 NPT Review Extension Conference, the Arab League instructed a group of Arab arms control experts to draft a WMDFZ treaty text. Anticipating Israeli apprehensions on the geographical extent of the zone, the draft treaty said that a WMDFZ zone must incorporate Israel, Iran and all 22 members of the Arab League. At the March 1995, meeting, the draft treaty was discussed but no decisions were made regarding its implementation.

Both the 1995 and 2000 NPT Review Conferences³⁶⁹ expressed clear support for the establishment of a NWFZ in the Middle East. The Resolution on the Middle East adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference called on all states in the region to join the treaty and put all nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. Although Israel was not named directly, it is the only state in the Middle East not party to the treaty. The resolution also requested all states in the region to work toward a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons, as well as other WMD, and called on all NPT states parties, in particular the nuclear weapons states, to support this goal.

When IAEA Director General El-Baradei visited Israel in 2004, Israeli officials said they might consider joining the NPT only in the context of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region which they would consider favourably in the context of the peace process and as part of phase II of the “road map to the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”, developed by the Quartet Group (United States, European Union, the United Nations, and Russia), which foresees a “revival of multilateral engagement on issues including...arms control.”³⁷⁰ At the 2005 NPT Review, Israel said that before they would consider joining “certain security conditions are met, such as peace treaties with all of its neighbours and the establishment of a verifiable WMD-free zone – to include long-range missile capabilities-throughout the region.”³⁷¹

Link with the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

The Arab states perceive the Israeli nuclear capability as a means of deterrence, and also as a means of potential use in preemption strike missions. Israel’s nuclear ambiguity has led many Arab states to develop chemical and biological weapons (CBW) programs. To the Arabs, these CBW programs are considered “a poor mans’ bomb,” to counter the Israel nuclear threat. When the CWC, which bans production of poison gases and calls for the destruction of existing stockpiles, was opened for

³⁶⁹ http://cns.miis.edu/treaty_npt/npt_briefing_book_2009/pdfs/sectiond.pdf

³⁷⁰ “Strategic Doctrine- Israel.” Global Security, 2004.

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/israel/doctrine.htm>

³⁷¹ Kaye, Dalia Dassa. “Time for Arms Talks? Iran, Israel, and Middle East Arms Control,” Arms Control Today. Washington: Nov 2004. Vol.34, Iss. 9; pg. 6.

signature in 1993, Egypt announced a policy of linking its adherence to Israel becoming a party to the NPT. Egypt further pushed for all Arab countries and the Arab League to adopt this position. The final communiqué of the June 1993 summit meeting of the League, held in the Egyptian capital, stated: "*The Arab leaders stress the need for Israel to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to subject all their nuclear facilities to the inspection regime of the International Atomic Energy Agency*".³⁷²

Nonetheless, in the course of 2001, the linkage policy suffered from two failures. In March 2001, at an Arab League summit in Amman, Jordan, regional leaders reissued the call for Israel to join the NPT but the final statement made no mention of the linkage policy.³⁷³ In November 2001, during the fifty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly, Libya announced its intention to accede to the CWC; this statement further undermined the linkage policy as Libya has historically been one of its most ardent supporters.³⁷⁴ Later, Libya ratified the CWC and the CTBT in January 2004.

Egypt still maintains that linkage is a necessary component of its support for a WMDFZ in the Middle East.³⁷⁵ By March 2009, in addition to Egypt, only two members of the Arab League, Somalia and Syria, still maintain such a policy. Meanwhile, 18 League members³⁷⁶ have become states parties and active members of the OPCW.

Israel itself signed the CWC in 1993, despite a long-held position not to join global arms control regimes.

Progress in the Middle East Peace Process

The Arab countries in the Middle East believe that peace cannot be achieved while Israel continues to possess nuclear weapons which they clearly see as a threat to their security. For this sole reason, Egypt and other Arab nations insist on Israel's accession to the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state, or its acceptance of a WMDFZ. While Israel agrees with the aim of a WMDFZ, Israel's position over twenty years has been that only after there is a long lasting peace in the Middle East should no state possess WMD. These apparently polar opposite positions are what led to the breakdown of the ACRS talks within the Middle East Peace Process. But these polar opposite positions, WMD first or peace first, can only be overcome if the states involved accept that everything needs to be put on the table, that it is not possible to

³⁷² Final Communiqué, Arab League Summit Conference, Cairo, June 23, 1993; cited in Steinberg, Gerald, M. "Peace, Security and Deterrence in the Middle East: The Obstacles to a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone," draft workshop paper, 1996.

³⁷³ <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/summit0103.htm>

³⁷⁴ See UN document, A/56/PV.49.

³⁷⁵ Moukhtar El Fayoumi, "The CWC in the Present Middle East Environment: An Egyptian View," *OPCW Synthesis*, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, The Hague, November 2000, pp. 26-28.

³⁷⁶ See Annex 2 to this document.

discuss regional peace without addressing the issue of nuclear and other WMDs, and that therefore, the WMD issue cannot be dealt with in isolation, outside the context of a comprehensive regional solution for Israeli-Arab conflict.

The peace process in Israeli–Palestinian conflict has taken shape over the years, despite the ongoing violence in the Middle East and an "all or nothing" attitude about a lasting peace, "which prevailed for most of the twentieth century". Since the 1970s there has been a parallel effort made to find terms upon which peace can be agreed to in both the Arab–Israeli conflict and in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Some countries have signed peace treaties, such as the Egypt–Israel (1979) and Jordan–Israel (1994) treaties, whereas some have not yet found a mutual basis to do so. Since the Annapolis Conference in November 2007, the current outline for a Palestinian–Israeli peace agreement has been a two-state solution.³⁷⁷ Meantime, a series of destabilizing incidents have been linked to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. There are the obvious escalatory actions between the two main parties, such as the many suicide bombings carried out by Palestinians, and the series of Israeli raids and re-occupations of Palestinian towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Reducing the amount of violence between the Israeli and Palestinian populations may eliminate many of the incentives and justifications for escalating violence and arms build-ups. Meantime, all these facts and events point to that, before a lasting peace can be reached, there are numerous issues to be resolved, including the following: Palestinian concerns over Israeli settlements and land; question of Palestine and Palestinian rights; Palestinian economy and quality of life; Palestinian refugee issues and right of return; status of Jerusalem; Israeli security concerns; existence of Israel – agreed-upon borders; and withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories.

The way forward – Recommendation 1

The, Recommendation 12 of the report concluded by the 2006 WMD Commission states that:³⁷⁸ *“All states should support continued efforts to establish a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East as a part of the overall peace process. Steps can be taken even now. As a confidence-building measure, all states in the region, including Iran and Israel, should for a prolonged period of time commit themselves to a verified arrangement not to have any enrichment, reprocessing or other sensitive fuel-cycle activities on their territories. Such a commitment should be coupled with reliable assurances about fuel-cycle services*

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http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_process_in_the_Israeli%E2%80%93Palestinian_conflict

³⁷⁸ Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms, the independent international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, 2006 (<http://www.wmdcommission.org/files/english.pdf>)

required for peaceful nuclear activities. Egypt, Iran and Israel should join the other states in the Middle East in ratifying the CTBT”.

It is, therefore, unlikely that the region will agree to establish a WMDFZ before the Middle East Peace Process is concluded. The dispute between Israel and its neighbours is the most significant impediment towards the establishment of the zone. On one hand, Israel is not likely to give up its nuclear deterrent capability until it feels that its national security is no longer threatened. Israel's neighbours, on the other hand, argue that the mere existence of Israel's nuclear program threatens their security. Therefore, a renewal of the Peace Process will be an important part of a comprehensive approach to eliminating WMD in the Middle East.

The way forward – Recommendation 2

Among the 21 member states of the Arab League, 18 have broken with the linkage policy and joined the CWC. In particular, the ratification of the CWC by Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the Sudan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen is significant. These states' deviation from a policy of linkage to Israeli actions provides hope that other three states, including Egypt, might become member states in the near future.

Further, Israel is the only state in the world not party of any of three main treaties relating to biological, chemical and nuclear weapons. It is time for Israel to show its good will by explicitly and fully joining the international prohibition of at least these two categories of WMDs; biological and chemical, by ratifying BWC and CWC.

The ratification of existing treaties relating to biological, chemical and nuclear weapons would certainly provide a basis for a treaty to establish a zone free of WMD in the Middle East. Thus, such a WMDFZ should preferably be based on the global treaties prohibiting atomic, biological, and chemical weapons (NPT, BWC, and CWC) and share the general objectives of those treaties, i. e. the complete renunciation of those weapons, except that the nuclear weapons of the five nuclear weapon states will remain until nuclear disarmament is completed. Therefore, the obvious way of paving the way for a WMDFZ in the Middle East is to begin focusing on the concerted efforts for the ratification of existing global arms control treaties in the area.

The way forward – Recommendation 3

It is essential to explore strategies to strengthen the verification mechanisms of existing treaties, in particular, the BWC verification lacunae, which would eventually serve as one step forward towards a WMDFZ. The BWC's self-reporting requirements need to be tightened up so that states must declare their biological weapons activities more accurately. Most importantly, making them more obligatory than voluntary may increase compliance rates.

The way forward – Recommendation 4

To date, 113 states signed or become parties to treaties establishing existing five NWFZs³⁷⁹. With the addition of the Antarctic Treaty, NWFZs now cover more than 50 per cent of the Earth's land mass.³⁸⁰ The Treaty on a NWFZ in Central Asia has just entered into force in March 2009.³⁸¹ Thus, recent growth of NWFZs suggests that these regions will continue to expand. While the hopes for these NWFZ have yet to be fully realized, they set an example that other regions, such as the Middle East, may follow in the future. When developing proposals for the verification regime of a future Middle East WMD Free Zone it would be useful to look at existing NWFZs for inspiration and lessons learnt.

The way forward – Recommendation 5

Applying the ACRS experience to current realities would provide another avenue to address current regional realities and arms control dilemmas. Such an arrangement for multilateral talks and cooperation would strengthen the regional cooperation in the Middle East through CBMs and help shaping inter-state relations through win-win cooperative efforts. The strength of multilateral cooperation is that it provides another dimension of negotiations, supplementing bilateral talks, and greater linkages and greater opportunities for communication between these states, thus offering new means of preventing conflicts and reducing suspicions of one another. Reduced tensions and perceptions of threat may reduce their desire to seek WMD capabilities.

The key to such an approach for regional cooperation should focus on addressing common concerns, not only "hard security issues" but also "soft security"³⁸² issues such as sustainable development and human rights as these are a frequent and recurring source of insecurity and conflict. One idea to promote peace and development in the region would be to undertake joint programmes around sustainable energy, including nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and other energy alternatives. Another area of focus would be to make stronger linkage between security and development in the region, not just as the result of

³⁷⁹ Five existing NWFZs cover Latin America and the Caribbean (Treaty of Tlatelolco, 1967); the South Pacific (Treaty of Rarotonga, 1985); Southeast Asia (Treaty of Bangkok, 1995); Africa (Treaty of Pelindaba, 1996); and Central Asia (Treaty of Semipalatinsk, 2006). In addition, Mongolia has a self-declared nuclear-weapon-free status. The Antarctic Treaty, the Outer Space Treaty and the Seabed Arms Control Treaty also prohibit the placement of nuclear weapons in the relevant geographical areas. (<http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NWFZ3.shtml>).

³⁸⁰ UN document A/54/42

³⁸¹ <http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/pdf/canwfz-fact-sheet.pdf>

³⁸² The terms "hard security" and "soft security" are used to distinguish between military security and underlying human needs that lead to insecurity, such as development, education and health.

treaty commitments, but also through regional programmes to improve living standards, education system, health facilities, governance, science and technology. This forum could also be a powerful platform to solicit views of the states in region regarding the modalities for a Middle East WMDFZ, including its geographical extent; its basic prohibitions; the means of verifying compliance with these prohibitions; the commitments to this zone to be made by the states outside the region; and various technical clauses, such as verification and withdrawal provisions. Therefore, renewing such a multilateral security forum in the Middle East would be useful in combating the proliferation of WMD in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The goal of a WMDFZ in the Middle East has been affirmed by all states involved as well as the international community at the highest political levels. Yet, instead of movement towards this goal, the trend is towards proliferation of WMDs in the Middle East. This current slow progress towards the prospects for establishing a Zone Free of WMD in the Middle East is most clearly a direct result of the failing aspects of the Middle East peace process.

In the Middle East, the establishment of a WMDFZ represents a key component of regional security. The current situation, though complex, represents a window of opportunity. Towards this end, a greater momentum can also be expected from America's New Nuclear Policy that President Barack Obama's outlined while calling for a "world without nuclear weapons" in Prague in April 2009 during his first trans-Atlantic trip. He pledged that "*the United States will take concrete steps toward a world without nuclear weapons.*"³⁸³

The establishment of a WMDFZ in the Middle East could also play a positive role by helping foster broader regional cooperation and trust. Towards this goal, there are many lessons to be learned from the existing NWFZs based on their experience. Further, it is important to have a multilateral security forum in place in the Middle East, similar to the former ACRS, to initiate a multilateral dialogue and address regional security and arms control issues in a comprehensive manner through CBMs.

In conclusion, there can be no progress in the direction of a WMDFZ in the Middle East without a comprehensive political settlement. Given the absence of a political deal over the wider differences in the region, nuclear proliferation is regarded as too sensitive an issue to be addressed before a comprehensive political deal is reached, or, at the very least, before diplomatic recognition is extended by all states in the region to each other. Thus, any enduring

³⁸³ http://www.globalsecuritynewswire.org/gsn/nw_20090406_5795.php

peace in the Middle East will only be achieved through an inclusive and comprehensive approach to security, which should include a complete ban on WMD, and appropriate security and confidence building measures. Essentially, progress on arms control and security arrangements should be pursued in parallel with the peace process, so that progress on either front will reinforce progress on the other.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Introduction

Women in the Middle East constitute half of the society, and are heavily involved in its social, economical and political developments. While the progress of the women is the most important factor for the progress of any nation, women in the Middle East are not getting their full rights.

The role of women in the Middle East and their position in the society has been an issue of debates and discussion for a long time. Their status is not fully settled and has been influenced by religious traditions, lack of education, oppression by family members, discriminatory legislation, violence, and ignorance and bigotry.

Ancient cultures looked at women as the agent of the transgression which made humanity into mortal species. Daughters were considered a painful burden and a potential source of shame to their fathers at different times.

Discrimination against women in rights and duties is not natural but cultural and a consequence of social existence. Many people confuse culture with religion, many women do not know what their rights are, and many men do not even care.

Women in Islam

The three revealed religions agreed on one basic fact: Both women and men are created by God, the Creator of the whole universe. However, disagreement started soon after the creation of the first man, Adam, and the first woman, Eve. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden. The snake persuaded the woman to break the command and she pushed the man to do the same.

Muslims believe in the divine origins of all the three revealed religions, Judaism and Christianity and Islam. No one can be a Muslim without believing in Moses and Jesus as prophets of God.

With the advent of Islam, circumstances for women changed and improved, their dignity and humanity were restored and Islam confirmed their capacities to carry out their responsibilities and duties as equal to men.

Dignity and Equality

The Islamic conception of women as a human being and as an equal to man follows from what the Quran has said about women: *"For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who*

*engage much in Allah's praise-- For them all has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward”*³⁸⁴.

According to the Quran, a woman's role on earth is not limited only to childbirth and nursing. She would assume full capacity and liability once she has attained maturity and has received the message of Islam. A woman is required to do as many good deeds as any other man is required to do. In fact the Quran has instructed all the believers, women as well as men, to follow the example of those ideal women such as the Virgin Mary³⁸⁵.

Mothers and Daughters

Prophet Muhammad worked solidly to wipe out all the traces of female infanticide. He restored woman's dignity and humanity. He promised those who were blessed with daughters of a great reward if they would bring up their daughters kindly and perfectly. He also emphasized in several places on the great role of mothers by saying that “Paradise is under the feet of the mother”.

In Islam, the Quran places the importance of kindness to parents as second only to worshipping the Almighty God. The honor, respect, and esteem attached to motherhood are described powerfully by the Prophet in this Hadith: *"A man asked the Prophet: 'Whom should I honor most?' The Prophet replied: 'Your mother'. 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother'. 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your mother!' 'And who comes next?' asked the man. The Prophet replied: 'Your father'"*³⁸⁶.

Education

The right of the woman for education and learning is basic and guaranteed by Islamic teachings. Islam actually makes it incumbent on all Muslims, including all women to seek knowledge. The Prophet said in Hadith: *"Seeking knowledge is incumbent on every Muslim"*. Another saying of Prophet Mohamed is the Hadith; *"Education is obligatory on both Muslim men and women, even if they have to go to China to seek it"*.

Women used to attend all the general assemblies for learning held by the Prophet. They were entitled to full freedom of expression of their views. Al-Sayidah Ayesha, the wife of the Prophet, was famous for going all-out to advance her juristic opinions. Many Muslim women were used to openly express their views in the presence of the Prophet Mohamed as well that of as his successors, the Caliphs.

Marriage and Divorce

On the basis of the principles of the Islamic jurisprudence, Muslim women, like Muslim men, enjoy the same capacity and freedom

³⁸⁴ Surat (33:35)

³⁸⁵ Surat (66:11;13)

³⁸⁶ Hadieth (Bukhari and muslim)

choose or reject a spouse. She can obtain divorce from an estranged husband against his will.

A Muslim woman retains her independent legal personality and her family name. The Muslim bride is entitled to marriage gifts from the groom, and these gifts become her property and neither the groom nor the bride's family have any share in or control over them once they are given. The husband is not allowed any share in his wife's property except what she offers him with her free consent; the Quran has stated its position on this issue quite clearly.³⁸⁷

Islamic Law recognizes divorce, yet it discourages it by all means. Islam does recognize the right of both partners to end their wedded relationship and gives the husband the right for Talaq (divorce). Islam grants the wife the right to dissolve the marriage through Khula and she can sue for a divorce.

Polygamy

Polygamy is a very ancient practice found in many human societies. The Bible did not condemn polygamy. To the contrary, the Old Testament and Rabbinic writings frequently attest to the legality of polygamy. King Solomon is said to have had 700 wives and 300 concubines³⁸⁸. King David is said to have had many wives and concubines³⁸⁹.

The Quran, too, allowed polygamy, but not without strict restrictions: "*If you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, marry women of your choice, two or three or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with them, then only one*"³⁹⁰.

It should not be understood that the Quran is exhorting the believers to practice polygamy, or that polygamy is considered as an ideal. We have to ask our own conscience at present time: What is more dignifying to a woman, to an accepted and respected second wife, or a virtually unknown kept mistress?

The Right to Work

Women represent half of the society. Therefore, it is in the interest of the society for women to work. Women have their rights to work and seek employment. There is no decree in Islam which forbids woman from seeking employment. Muslim women are fully entitled to go out for any need, to the market, to do business, or otherwise. Al-Sayeda Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet, was a working business woman. Prophet Mohamed was in fact employed by her under her management and supervision.

³⁸⁷ Holy Quran (4:4).

³⁸⁸ (Kings 11:3)

³⁸⁹ (2 Samuel 5:13)

³⁹⁰ Holy Quran (4:3).

Ownership of Property

In Islam, women have the right of independent ownership of property. Their rights to money, real estate, or other properties are fully guaranteed. These rights undergo no change whether they are single or married.

In matters of inheritance, however, a woman's share is one-half a man's share. This does not imply that she is worth half a man! According to Islamic Law, men are fully responsible for the maintenance of their wives and their children, and in some cases, they are also responsible for their needy women relatives. Therefore, this variation in inheritance rights is only consistent with the variation in the differing financial responsibilities of men and women.

Political Rights

Any investigation of the teachings of Islam, or into the history of Islamic civilization, will find clear evidence of woman's equality with man in what we call "political rights" today.

During the Caliphate of Omar Ibn al-Khattab, a woman argued with him in the mosque. She proved her point, and caused him to declare in the presence of people: "A woman is right and Omar is wrong."

Companions of the Prophet Muhammad, men and women, used to present their oath of allegiance to him personally. No man could swear the oath on behalf of his daughter or his wife. Nor could a man repudiate the oath made by any of his female relatives. Women, as well as men, would independently come to him and pledge their oaths.

The Present Situation

In ancient cultures in the Middle East and elsewhere, women was discarded and despised. Then Islam came and offered women dignity, respect and protection in all aspects. Their status improved and they were granted many rights that the modern world has recognized only recently.

Unfortunately, Muslims deviated from the teachings of Islam in the treatment of women. They ignored and neglected the role of women in religion and temporal life. In fact, the decline of the Middle East into backwardness in science and education was due mainly to the segregation of women.

Recently, with the dawn of modern civilization, science and knowledge were transformed from theory and tradition into experimentation and analysis. Women everywhere and especially in the Middle East have been re-born. They have realized that their positive role is important to the success of society. Women in the Middle East have started demanding their rights.

Women in the Middle East have made the establishment of a positive interaction with the human rights system a part of their direct

objectives. It is reflected in the increasing presence of women in civil and political society organizations.

Women in the Middle East are now assuming more active role in the social, economical and political impacts. The continuation of their positive roles is the key objective to restore women's dignity in the development of society, with a concerted attack on serious issues such as illiteracy, poverty, and divorce.

In today's world, in some countries of the Middle East, the gender roles of women have changed greatly. Traditionally, middle class women were typically involved in domestic tasks and child care. For poorer women, especially working class women, this often remained an ideal, as economic necessity compelled them to seek employment outside the home. The occupations that were available to them were, accordingly, lower in payment than those available to men until recently.

As changes in the labor market for women came about, availability of employment changed from only "dirty", long shift factory jobs to "cleaner", more respectable office jobs where more education was demanded. Women's participation in the labor force in some Middle East countries rose. These shifts in the labor force led to changes in the attitudes of women at work. These changes allowed for the revolution which resulted in women becoming career and education oriented.

Because marriage in Islam is a sanctified bond, it should not be broken except for compelling reasons. Women are still not getting marriage or divorce easily. Men and women are always instructed to pursue all possible remedies whenever their marriages are in danger. Divorce is not to be resorted to except when there is no other way out. Unfortunately, in some societies old traditions still exist and divorced women are blamed and looked down upon.

In some Middle East countries women still experience incidents of domestic violence. This domestic violence is not condoned, even by the women themselves.

Many societies realized the important role of the women and that success would hang on her education and self-development. She is the mainstay of the family. She man's partner in his life and livelihood. Middle East countries must try to project a more positive role of women in media, political decision-making, and legislation. More concerns should be visible in the fight against illiteracy, domestic violence, and discriminatory legislation. Women should retain equal opportunities in social work, and legal protection against violence.

With all the rights that women gained form Islam, Middle East women are oppressed and losing their rights in today's world. Extremist and tyrant regimes are behind some of the rules and regulations that oppress women today.

In Afghanistan under the Taleban, women were banned from driving, working and attending school. In Saudi Arabia women still face many restrictions, even though modern Saudi businesswomen are making a growing impact on the economy. Restrictions do not allow mixed offices. Traditional and restrictive rules still forbid Saudi women from driving cars and from leaving the country without the written permission from their husbands or fathers.

Women represent half of the society, so if they stay at home without employment, it is a waste and it harms the national economy. Therefore, it is in the interest of the society for women to work. Moreover, there should be no restriction on benefiting from woman's exceptional talent in any field.

In politics, the representation of women brings a different perspective to politics. An example is Hanan Ashrawi, the former spokeswoman for the PLO, who was one of the most famous Arab women in the world. She is a woman in a man's world and a Christian in a world that would like to see itself as Muslim. Another example is Golda Meir, the fourth prime minister of the State of Israel. She was Israel's first and the world's third female to hold such an office, was described as the "Iron Lady" of Israeli politics, and even called "the best man in the government".

Conclusion

Middle East societies have deviated from the Islamic precepts concerning so many aspects of their lives for so long. A wide gap between what Muslims are supposed to believe in, and what they actually practice has been widening day after day. This gap has had disastrous consequences in almost all aspects of life: Political tyranny and fragmentation, economic backwardness, social injustice, scientific bankruptcy, intellectual stagnation, etc. The woman in the Middle East is in a need for a renaissance that will bring her rights closer to the ideals of Islam.

Furthermore, women in the Middle East must have the courage to confront the past and to reject outright the traditions that contravene the precepts of Islam. The Quran severely criticize the pagan Arabs for blindly following the traditions of their ancestors. On the other hand, women have to develop a critical attitude towards whatever they receive from the West or from any other culture. Interaction with and learning from other cultures is an invaluable experience.

In today's Middle East society, different values coexist, intertwined with various social and cultural attitudes in a complex network. Legislation is attempting to stop these traditions and criminal acts against women. Strong Civil Rights organizations are fighting these customs and traditions and teaching women to speak out for their rights.

Tunisia, for example, bans polygamy and has the region's most progressive legislation for women. But a plan to ban polygamy in neighboring Morocco has been adamantly opposed by Islamists.

Libya's leader, Colonel Gaddafi, is protected by female bodyguards, whereas Saudi Arabia, enforces strict segregation and forbids women to drive.

Egyptian women have been allowed to vote ever since the 1950s, but Kuwaiti women still cannot. And in the past year, after hard campaigning, Egyptian women have won further rights, reversing laws that prevented them from obtaining divorces and traveling abroad without their husbands' permission.

The Arab Human Development Report 2005 concluded that *“the causal relationship between the rise of Arab women and human development in the Arab world will, therefore, be fulfilled only as long as it encompasses the human development of all citizens of the region”*.

Modernization, industrialization and mechanization would improve living standards in all sectors of society, including for women. An important role of the state in the liberation of women is to provide social services, education and public health that enable women to play their various reproductive, social and political roles. Only then will women be able to organize themselves to become effective forces for social, economic and political change in the Middle East.

THE AFRICAN UNION AND THE ARAB LEAGUE

Introduction

The cooperation between the African Union and the Arab League relies on the ancient and historical linkage between the Arab world and Africa. Given the huge potential of the Arabic and African countries, the cooperation between the two organizations needs to be strengthened and their efforts have to be combined in addressing issues of common concerns.

It is well recognized that one-third of the population in Africa is Arab, and that one third of the Arab countries are on the African continent. The first African language is Arabic and according to the World Book Encyclopedia, Islam is the largest religion in Africa. It spread slowly and peacefully in the continent, primarily through contacts with Muslim traders from the Near East. The migration waves from East Africa and the Horn of Africa into the Gulf never stopped, and 80 years after the discovery of oil, Africans are coming as workers in a number of countries in the Middle East. The Gulf is therefore a place where African and Arab cultures have been intermingling for 700 years.

The African Union and the Arab League have built their partnership upon their brotherhood and shared interests. They aim at coordinating development efforts so as to face the challenges of globalization and the prevailing international crisis more effectively. They also join their efforts in addressing crisis and conflicts occurring in the two interlinked regions

The Spread of Islam in Africa

The spread of Islam began in the 7th and 8th Centuries along the north littoral coast of Africa, from Egypt and Sudan in the east to Mauritania in the west. In Morocco, Muslims founded the city of Fez (808 AD), which gave refuge to Andalusian Muslims and Jews. On the east coast of Africa, where Arab mariners had for many years journeyed to trade, Arabs founded permanent colonies, especially in Zanzibar, in the 9th and 10th Centuries. From there, Arab trade routes into the interior of Africa helped the slow acceptance of Islam and led to the development of Swahili culture and language.

The Islamization of West Africa began when the ancient kingdom of Ghana (circa 990 AD) extended itself into the Sahara and the Islamic center at Sanhajah. By the 16th Century, the empire of Mali had established a center of trade and Muslim learning in Timbuktu. In the region of the East Sudan, Islamic penetration followed the route of the Nile. By about 1366 AD, the two Christian kingdoms of the East Sudan, Makurra and Aloa, also became Islamic.

Militant reformers, such as the Fulani, greatly extended the area over which Islam held sway in West Africa. In 1809 the Sokoto caliphate, which was eventually incorporated under British rule into Nigeria, was founded. In the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, Africa, like the rest of the Muslim world, was swept by a wave of religious reform.

Today, more than a third of the African continent's inhabitants are of Muslim faith. Countries in the Maghreb, as well as Senegal, Mali, Niger are mostly Muslim. Half of Nigeria's inhabitants are proponents of the Islamic faith. In addition, there are large Muslim communities in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Since their introduction in Africa in the 7th Century, the Muslims played a significant role in the process of state-building, in creating commercial networks, in introducing literacy, as well as in exchanges of inter-state diplomacy within Africa and beyond.³⁹¹ Islam came as a religion but also introduced a legal system, a language (Arabic), and systems of writing and learning. The adoption of Islam has profound and varied effects on religious practices, governance, law, dress, architecture, and learning, but the gradual incorporation of Islam also meant that Islam was profoundly affected by indigenous African cultures. Ironically the period of greatest expansion of Islam came during the decades of European colonial rule in Africa from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, which was also the period of the greatest spread of Christian growth below the Sahara.

African Slavery

From fairly early in the Islamic era, the slave trade brought African people into the Middle East, along the Nile and up the coast of East Africa. They were the engines of infrastructure development in southern Iraq, and they also were the human resources for what was the only plantation economy in the history of the Middle East. They revolted, not once or twice, but three times during the Abbasid caliphate period. The third and final so-called Zanj Revolt was a major, cataclysmic event in the history of the Abbasid Empire. It took place

³⁹¹ See Nehemia, Levtzion and Randall Pouwells, N. L. (2000). *The history of Islam in Africa*. Ohio University Press.

near the city of Basra in southern Iraq over a period of fifteen years (869-883 AD) and involves over 500,000 slaves of Zanj (East African Bantu) ancestry, working in the humid heat of the salt marshes. It is believed that many of today's Basra area "Afro Arabs" are descending from one of these Zanj groups though many may have settled that area under different circumstances via the Arab-African sea trade routes.³⁹²

The Zanj Revolt, and then the conversion to Islam by Africans along the Indian Ocean coast contributed widely to the change to origins of the slaves brought to the Arabian Gulf. It becomes thereafter difficult to enslave Muslims over time, as notions of equity and egalitarianism within the Islamic polity become stronger. In Saudi Arabia, a number of high personalities have African origins, probably as the result of extensive intermarriage between progeny of former slaves and the royal family of the Saud clan.

According to Eve Troutt Hunwick³⁹³, "*there is a very black and white interpretation of slavery which just does not work in the context of the Middle East or East Africa*". In the Ottoman Empire, when the slaves were freed, they could often reach the uppermost levels of power, short of being the Sultan himself. All the great viziers in the Ottoman Empire were trained as part of this elite institution.

Cultural Bridges

The Gulf is also a place where African and Arab culture have been intermingling for 700 years. Islamic values have much in common with traditional African life, its emphasis on communal living, its clear roles for men and women, and its tolerance of polygamy. Africa cannot ignore the value of the Arab contribution, in connection with the use of Arabic characters by many African languages, as is confirmed by many sources. Africans who made their way into the Gulf, whether through slavery, through trade, through a variety of other contexts, brought their languages, their cultures, and their music. Pearl diving songs with African origins are found in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and Abu Dhabi. Songs in Swahili by African Bahrainis still survive and the Mustawtana arts settled in Kuwait. The Tambura (lyre) that has its source in Africa,

³⁹² See Segal, R. (2002). *Islam's Black Slaves: The other black Diaspora*

³⁹³ See Hunwick, Eve Troutt and Markus Weiner (2001). *The African Diaspora in the Mediterranean*.

is even used in Kuwaiti religious songs. The Leiwa, a ceremonial dance, well known with the complexity of its poly-rhythms is similar to the rhythm in many East African countries. The Ardha, a traditional Bedouin war dance by men before they go off into battle, is also a testimony to the influence of African emigration to the Gulf region.³⁹⁴

The “Funun al-Wafida”, known in Bahrain as the arts of those who come from elsewhere, meaning from Africa, as well as the Zar, a dance from East Africa, which has a ritualistic, healing religious quality also constitute a testimony of African cultural legacy. In Qatar, the Sudanese community has brought their Sufi traditions to the shores of the Arabian Gulf. In sum, the Gulf is more than just a component part of the Arab world. It's a region with a strong cultural link with Africa so it has a special role to play in the future of Africa.

Trade Exchanges

With the emergence of Arab oil exporting countries in the 1970s, trade exchanges flourished between Arab and African sub-Saharan countries. However the trade cooperation is close to the economic dependant model with a strong cultural dimension, such as the teaching of Arabic language in countries benefiting from substantial aid, or the support to certain African universities offering Islamic studies.

Compared to the total volume of Arab countries import and export, the Arab-African trade remains insignificant with 1.7% of imports and less than 1% of exports.³⁹⁵ The weakness of economic ties may be attributed to the low level of development of Sub-Saharan countries, whose principal trading partners remain western developed countries.

Comparative Analysis of the Two Organisations

It is clear that African history is intertwined with the history of Arab countries and that trade and cultural exchanges have contributed to strengthen the ties between the two regions. Therefore the cooperation between the African Union and the Arab League has to be built upon the great legacy of the past.

³⁹⁴ From Braude, J. (2006). Interview for Program African Slaves in Islamic Lands.

³⁹⁵ See Haseeb, M. D.-W.-A. (1985). *The Arabs and Africa*. Amman, Jordan: Arab Thought Forum, Muntada al-Fikr al-Arabi, published by Taylor & Francis.

History

The African Union came about as the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). This started in Sirte, Libya in 1999 where African Heads of States and Governments adopted the Sirte Declaration on the African Union in September 1999³⁹⁶. A year later, in Lome, a decision was adopted on the establishment of the African Union and the Pan African Parliament, and the Constitutive Act entered into force after the ratification of two third of the member states in May 2001. The official launch of the AU marking the transformation of the OAU to the AU took place in Durban in 2002.³⁹⁷

For its part, the Arab League was first proposed by the Egyptian government in 1943 to some of the other Arab states. The original charter of the Arab League created a regional organization of sovereign states that was neither a union nor a federation. Two years later, the Arab League was founded in Cairo in 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan (Jordan, as of 1950), and Yemen. Following the adhesion of a number of Arab countries, the Palestine Liberation Organization was admitted in 1976. In 1979, after it signed a peace treaty with Israel, Egypt's membership was suspended and the league's headquarters was moved from Cairo, to Tunis. However, considering the importance of the cooperation with Egypt, Arab leaders decided in 1989 to readmit the latter to the League, and consequently to move back the headquarters to Cairo.³⁹⁸

Members

In the light of their basic instruments, the African Union Constitutive Act and the Pact of the Arab League of States, which respectively entered into force in 2001 and in 1945, the two organizations share a lot in common, in term of objectives, principles and areas of cooperation. The African Union is composed of 53 African States, among which 9 countries belong to the Arab League, namely, Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Somalia, Sudan,

³⁹⁶ See Organization of African Unity (OAU), (1999). *Declaration and decisions EAHG/Decl.(IV)*.

³⁹⁷ See the *Official website of the African Union*, www.africa-union.org

³⁹⁸ See the *Official website of the League of Arab States*, www.arableagueonline.org

Tunisia.³⁹⁹ The League of Arab States (LAS) comprises of 22 member states. In addition to the nine African members, it includes, from west to east of Asia, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen.⁴⁰⁰

With respect to Morocco which joined the LAS in 1958, it was one of the founders of the former Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. In 1985 Morocco withdrew from the OAU in 1982 when the latter recognized the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). It would be recalled that the SADR, proclaimed by the Polisario Front in 1976, asserted sovereignty on the Western Sahara – a former Spanish colony. The final status of this region claimed by Morocco and the SADR remains outstanding and the issue is still under consideration of the United Nations since the cease-fire of 1991 between the two parties.⁴⁰¹

Core Objectives and Principles

The African Union and the Arab League have a common respect for the solidarity, sovereignty and independence of their member states. They aim to promote peace, security in their respective regions, and to enhance development, welfare and standard of living of populations. Both organizations were established in order to better coordinate the multiform cooperation among their member states.

From the former Organization of African Unity, the African Union has evolved by giving high priority to the integration of the continent. In fact the African Union was formed as a defensive response to the persistent conflicts, political instability, corruption and the growing economic globalization which had led to the marginalization of African countries. The aspiration to speed the pace of integration is illustrated by a number of decisions recently adopted in the 2007 Accra declaration.⁴⁰² The ultimate target is the establishment of a United States of Africa; however, this ambitious goal is still facing some reluctance. Two approaches are in competition: The gradualists argue

³⁹⁹ See African Union, *African Union Constitutive Act*. (2001)

⁴⁰⁰ See League of Arab States. (1945). *Pact of the League of Arab States*

⁴⁰¹ See Theofilopoulou, A. (2006). *The United Nations and Western Sahara, a never ending affair*

⁴⁰² See African Union, (July 2007) *Accra Declaration. Ninth Ordinary session of the African Union Assembly*

that the integration of the continent has to be done gradually through regional integration, while the unionists state that the Union Government cannot wait for regional integration which may take time, and has to be established as quickly as possible.

Regarding the integration process within the Arab League, it is still slow. Nevertheless, the organization has served as a platform for drafting important documents and decisions aimed at promoting economic integration among member states, such as the Joint Arab Economic Action Charter, which set out the principles for economic activities of the League.

The AU and the LAS also share common principles, such as the prohibition of the use of forces for the settlement of disputes between member states and the principle of non interference in the internal affairs of another. However, as stipulated in its constitutive Act, the African Union has the right to intervene in a member state in case of grave circumstances (war crimes, genocide, crimes against humanity). The Council of the Arab League, on its part, shall intervene for the settlement of a dispute or in case of aggression or threat of aggression.

Fields of Action

Both the African Union and the Arab League encompass wide-ranging fields of action, from peace and security, human rights, political and diplomatic, economic and financial, social, cultural and humanitarian matters, to gender issues. The two organizations have shown their equal commitments in peacekeeping and peace building in Africa and in the Middle East and are both actively engaged with other international partners.

The Arab League has also fostered cultural exchanges between member states, by preserving manuscripts and Arab cultural heritage, and by launching literacy campaigns. It has greatly helped to advance the role of women in Arab societies, and promoted child welfare activities.⁴⁰³ The African Union has, on its part, developed its own continental program, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an integrated socio-economic development framework aimed at promoting activities of regional purposes, namely in

⁴⁰³ See the Official website of the League of Arab States, www.arableagueonline.org

agriculture, human development, infrastructure, production and exports, intra-African trade, environment.⁴⁰⁴ It appears that the two organizations have demonstrated their leadership in their respective regions and have served as catalysts of peace and development.

Structures, Composition and Working Methods

The structure of the African Union is modeled on that of the European Union and seems to be more complex than that of the Arab League. According to its Constitutive Act, the supreme policy organ of the Union is the Assembly composed of Heads of States, followed by the Executive Council composed of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and the Permanent Representatives Committee. The Commission is the executive organ and is chaired by a Chairperson elected by the Assembly. The Commission, through its 8 departments, is in charge of the implementation of adopted decisions and conducts the daily work of the Organization. The AU is certainly the first regional organization which has established a peace and security architecture comprising of the Peace and Security Council, a Panel of the Wise, an Early Warning System, and a Stand-by Force.⁴⁰⁵ The Constitutive Act made also provision for other specific organs such as the Pan-African Parliament, the Court of Justice, Specialized Technical Committees, the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), and Financial Institutions (African Central Bank, African Monetary Fund, and African Investment Bank). However most of these structures are not yet fully operational, mainly due to the lack of resources.

On its part, the Arab League is mainly composed of a number of Special Committees, and a Council of Representatives which is the deliberative organ. The executive organ, the Permanent General Secretariat is chaired by the Secretary-General appointed by the Council. In the case of the LAS, the Assistant Secretaries of the Council are appointed by the Secretary General himself.

The two organizations regularly held their statutory meetings twice a year, but at a different period, January and July for the African

⁴⁰⁴ See the Official website of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), www.nepad.org

⁴⁰⁵ See Kambudzi, A.M (2009). *AU Peace and Security Architecture*. Presentation at AU/UN desk to desk collaboration. Manhasset

Union, then March and October for the Arab League. This appears to be convenient for the two and facilitates the coordination of their action, since each has an observer status to the other organization. The proximity of the two headquarters, Addis Ababa (AU) and Cairo (LAS), greatly facilitates exchanges and communication.

In sum, the two organizations share a lot in common, however some differences exist. The structure is more elaborated but complex with heavy bureaucracy for the African Union. It appears that decisions are taken at higher level (Heads of State) within the AU, which is not always the case within the LAS. The Secretary General of the LAS, on its part, seems to have more executive power, which is not the case for the Chairperson of the AU Commission.

Cooperation between the Two Organisations

Basic Instruments

As mentioned earlier, the African Union and the Arab League are meant to build their cooperation on the historical ties and brotherhood between African and Arab peoples. The two organizations have expressed their willingness to put their efforts together towards addressing issues of common interest. The first Afro-Arab Conference held in Cairo in 1977 paved the way for a genuine partnership with the adoption of three important declarations.⁴⁰⁶ The Declaration and Program of Action on Afro-Arab Cooperation address the principles, areas of cooperation, institutions, as well as the granting of mutual observer status and representations to the respective secretariats. The Declaration on Afro-Arab Economic and Financial Cooperation stresses the need for a long term program, for improving technical and financial assistances to African development projects, for strengthening financial institutions, namely the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), and for encouraging trade and investments.

Other major milestones also marked the history of the cooperation between the African Union and the Arab League: the first General Cooperation Agreement signed in 1986, and a second one

⁴⁰⁶ See Declaration (Ref: AUG/OAU/LAS/(1)AFRAB/Doc.1-4). (1977). *First Afro-Arab Summit*. Cairo

signed in 2007, which supersedes the previous one. The latter relates the modalities of cooperation and calls for common policies on regional and international issues. Four consultative meetings between the two Secretariats also took place in 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

Objectives and Structures

The following two major objectives of “Afro-Arab fraternity” are outlined in a number of basis documents. To realize these objectives, the two organizations agreed to undertake continuous cooperation through the AU Commission and the LAS General Secretariat.

They were meant to consult each other periodically on regional and international issues of common concern to them; exchange information and data; organize meetings, seminars, workshops, trade fairs, exhibitions; undertake joint studies aimed at enhancing economic, social, cultural and other cooperative efforts between their respective member states; synthesize and coordinate their respective development strategies; and finally, mobilizing resources.⁴⁰⁷

Political and Diplomatic Cooperation

Since 1977, the two organizations constantly underscored the need to continue the political dialogue and to deal with issues of common concern, including the resolution of conflicts in the two regions. In this regard, they hold consultative meetings within the Joint Standing Commission to review political developments of common interest. In 1977, they declared in one voice their strong condemnation of the apartheid regime in the Southern region of Africa, and their support for the independence of Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, and Djibouti. They jointly condemned the politic and economic oppression of former colonialists and western powers on the newly independent African countries.

The two organizations are particularly vocal in expressing their solidarity and support to the Palestinian people and their condemnation of Israel occupation of the Palestinian territories. They reaffirmed their support to the Arab Peace Initiative and the need to remove the

⁴⁰⁷ See AU/LAS, (March 2007). *General Agreement on Cooperation between the African Union and the Arab League*

separation wall built by Israel. Recently, they joined their voices and strongly condemned the barbaric attacks launched by the Israeli forces on the Gaza Strip which resulted in death and injuries of thousands of innocent civilians as well as massive destruction of property.

They also share a common vision with respect to the fight for territorial integrity of the Comoros islands. They have welcomed the efforts for promoting the reconciliation dialogue and economic development in the Comoros. In the past, they also joined their voices in condemning the Israel actions against Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The two organizations have rigorously denounced the use of mercenaries by western to disturb African and Arab political regimes. They even affirmed the need to impose embargo, mainly in oil supply, to imperialist regimes.

On African issues, the two organizations commended the willingness demonstrated by the government of the Sudan to cooperate with the UN and other partners towards the deployment of United Nations and African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID). They expressed that the issue of indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of the President of the Sudan may affect the process of reconciliation and sustainable peace in the region, and urged the UN Security Council to activate Article 16 of the Roma Statute for the deferral of the application of ICC decision.⁴⁰⁸

The two organizations also agreed that the persistent political instability in Somalia, compounded with piracy, constitutes the most serious tension in Africa. They requested the rapid strengthening of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), convinced that the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces from Somalia has created a security vacuum. The two organizations expressed the need to work together towards the restoration of a democratic regime in Mauritania.

Economic cooperation

The 1977 Declaration and Plan of Action has identified priority sectors, namely trade, mining and industry, agriculture, forestry, fishing, and livestock; energy and water resources; transport,

⁴⁰⁸ See AU/LAS, (December 2008). Report. *Fourth General cooperation meeting between the AU Commission and the LAS General Secretariat*. Cairo

communication and telecommunications. The Plan is relatively ambitious as is attested by a number of its provisions: establishment of an Afro-Arab Institution for financing and investment, an Afro-Arab free trade zone, a forum for investment, preferential regimes in trade exchanges, cooperation between financial institutions and insurance companies, joint projects in mining and industry, direct investment to joint enterprises, share of research results and technology knowledge in energy prospection and transformation, joint programs in road, train, maritime and aerial transport, creation of consortium, long terms multilateral and bilateral loans, facilitated access to market, to capitals, and to financial institutions.

Relative progresses were registered in the areas of agriculture, trade and financial cooperation, while in other areas no apparent multilateral actions were conducted. It seems that Arabic and African countries have preference for bilateral cooperation which is difficult to record at the level of the two organizations.

Educational, social, and cultural cooperation

As enshrined in the 1977 Declaration and Plan of Action, the objective is to facilitate and to promote mutual knowledge between the African and Arab peoples, and to strengthen partnerships through organization of cultural missions and festivals, scholarships, sports, exchanges of information through the medias, exchanges of experiences, for instance in addressing migration issues, inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue between African and Arab people.

One of the major realizations is the establishment in 2002 in Bamako, Mali of an Afro-Arab Cultural Institute aimed at providing technical and/or financial assistance to needy African and Arab countries and at developing strategic studies on Afro-Arab relations.

The transformation of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute into an Afro-Arab Institute for Culture and Strategic Studies is currently underway. In this regard, a Task Force was established and it critically assessed the capacity of the existing Institute, re-drafted basic documents of the Institute, and formulated a five-year indicative program to be endorsed by the policy organs of the two

organizations.⁴⁰⁹ Cultural cooperation will continue to be the major task of the Institute which mandate was extended to enable it play a central role in the whole process of Afro-Arab Cooperation.

Analysis of the Levels of Cooperation

The failure of the two organizations to hold statutory meetings of their joint policy organs is one of the notable weaknesses of the cooperation. The Afro-Arab Summit was supposed to meet every three years, and the Ministerial Council every 18 months; however they have only met once in 1977. It seems astounding that the African Union and the League of Arab States were not able to organize another Afro-Arab Summit in 32 years, while other strategic partnerships were developed between Africa and different regions and organizations, such as Latin America, the European Union, or countries, such as China, Japan, Turkey, and Iran. Actually, diverse political circumstances have made it difficult to establish a regular dialogue which could have provided the opportunity for building an understanding between Arabs and Africans. For example, the conflicts in Western Sahara, Chad, South Sudan and Somalia have developed in a direction which transformed Arab quarrels into centers of tension for Africans on one hand, and paralyzed common institutions on the other. This situation developed negative perceptions of the Arab presence in Africa, and almost destroyed the dialogue on complementarities between the African and the Arab worlds.

The past four years, however, have witnessed a growing interest and commitment of the African Union and the League of Arab States to revitalize Afro-Arab cooperation and to reinforce the coordination mechanism. A number of events are planned for 2009, such as the establishment of a Joint Preparatory Committee to coordinate the preparation of the 2nd Afro-Arab Summit; the 7th Trade Fair to be held in Djibouti; the 1st Edition of the Afro-Arab Forum; the High Level meetings of African and Arab Experts on Agriculture Development and Food Security; a high level meeting on the Prospect of Investment in Africa and the Arab World which will be organized in

⁴⁰⁹ See Report on Afro-Arab cooperation. (January 2009). *fourteenth ordinary session of the Executive Council of the African Union*

collaboration with the BADEA, AfDB, Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and other African and Arab Funds.

Indeed there are great opportunities for promoting Arab investment in Africa, given for example, the hydro-geological and agricultural potential of the latter, on one hand, and the strong demand for agricultural products in the Arab regions, on the other. Arab financing would also be crucial for effective implementation of the NEPAD. The existence of very strong Arab Diaspora in Africa, specifically in western Africa, where they are integrated into the national economies and the existence of African Diaspora in Arab countries and pilgrimage are also opportunities that could be exploited to strengthen people to people relations. These and other conducive factors, such as geographical proximity, historical, linguistic and religious ties have created an excellent opportunity for the two sides to develop a strong solidarity among themselves.

The international environment is favorable to the consolidation of strategic partnership between regional organizations. The growing peace and security challenges in Africa and the Arab regions and the need for solidarity to deal with global challenges such as terrorism, cross boundary diseases, food and energy crisis, financial crisis, climate change, are also making Afro-Arab Cooperation mandatory and indispensable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the light of the above, it appears that a huge potential of cooperation exists between the two organizations, giving their geographical, historical and cultural linkages, as well as their willingness to draw on the brotherhood between African and Arabic peoples. Notable achievements were registered in various areas, though, the global cooperation did not respond to the aspirations of the 1977 Summit. Afro-Arab cooperation in general was hampered by the lack of political will, the weakness of coordinating mechanisms, and the insufficient participation of civil society, private sector and other stakeholders.

On the way forward, a range of joint events and initiatives to be held this year, particularly the preparation of the second Afro-Arab Summit as mentioned above, will certainly give a new impetus to the

Afro-Arab cooperation. Many proposals stand among the multiple possibilities in the framework of the Afro-Arab cooperation. Therefore, the African Union and the League of Arab States must systematically assess the existing cooperation, to improve their communication strategies, to establish an efficient coordinating mechanism, to rationalize their resources, to better define their priorities, and to improve the cultural dialogue between the African and Arab peoples.