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CHAPTER

Issues in the Middle East

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Origin and history of Islam
- Dominant ideologies
- Israel and Palestine conflict
- Arab Spring, Syrian crisis, Libyan Crisis and Kurdish problem
- Origin, rise and spread of ISIS
- Turkish coup and Qatar crisis
- Final analysis of the Middle East

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to acquaint the readers with all issues in the Middle Eastern part of the world. The chapter introduces the reader to core concepts, terms and dominant ideologies operating in the region and then makes an attempt to analyse the recent problems, ranging from the Israel–Palestine conflict to the Arab Spring, Syrian crisis, Libyan crisis, Kurdish problems and the ISIS.

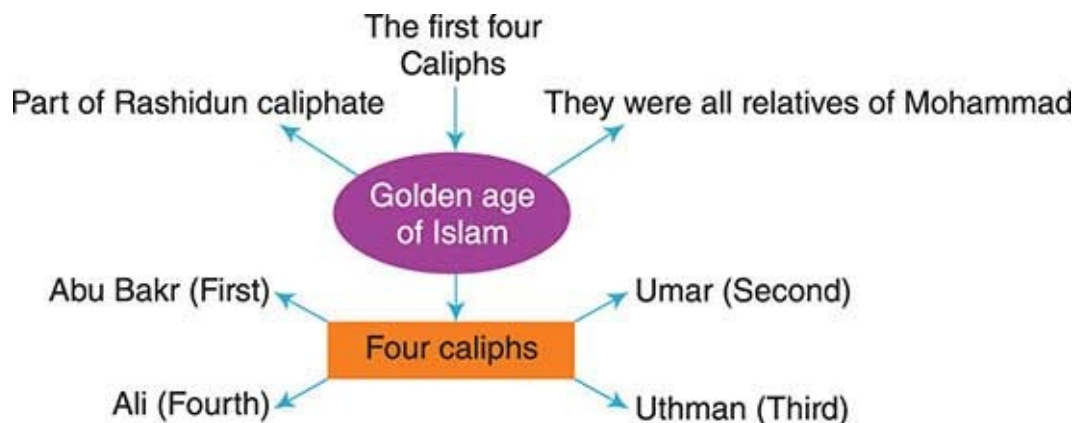
ISLAM—ORIGIN, SCHOOLS AND SCHISM

Islam is associated with the Prophet Mohammad. Mohammad was born to Abd Allah Ibn Abd al Mattalib (Father) and Aminah (Mother). He was raised by Abu Talib, who belonged to the Banu Hashim clan of the Quraaysh tribe. Mohammad was a worker and he married Khadijah. In his mid-forties, he took retirement. During his prayers at the Mount Hira cave, he received revelations from the Angel Gabriel, which was the God's message transmitted to Mohammad. This became the foundation of the religion today known in the world as Islam. Mohammad faced a lot of difficulties to convince people about the revelations of God but he succeeded in creating the foundation of Islam.

After the death of Mohammad, the issue of succession arose. Mohammad belonged to the Quraysh tribe which had descended from Banu Kinahah tribe from Khuzaiman. Thus, the successor of Mohammad had to be selected from Quraysh tribe itself. After the death of Mohammad, Abu Bakr became the new successor. Abu Bakr established the Caliphate institution and became a Caliph after Mohammad. Nearing his death, Abu Bakr desired that Umar be his successor as the Caliph. Umar established a committee of six to decide his successor. The committee arrived at a unanimous decision that the Caliph after Umar should be chosen from the six members. The Committee chose two successors: Uthman and Ali. During the times of Umar as the Caliph, Islam was growing into a huge empire. The growing empire needed a Caliph who would be a military politico genius-like

Uthman, while Ali was a religious man. Ali was also the son-in-law of Mohammad. Uthman belonged to Umayyad clan which was a wealthy clan and eventually succeeded Umar as the caliph. Ali, who had been sidelined, did not appreciate the idea of Uthman as a Caliph as Ali advocated that caliphate should be held by someone hailing from the lineage of Mohammad. Thus, there was a growing rebellion against Uthman as a Caliph.

During the reign of Uthman and Umar, Islam had spread outside Arabia to Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Persia. However, after a few years, Uthman was killed by Egyptian Muslim rebels. After the death of Uthman, the Caliphate now came under Ali who ascended the Caliphate as the fourth Caliph.



Ali faced a lot of challenges as a Caliph. Many people felt Ali was ineffective in punishing the killers of Uthman and some even suspected Ali's involvement in the murder. Uthman's cousin Muawiyah was a member of Ummayid Clan and the governor of Syria. At the time of Ali's reign, Muawiyah claimed the caliphate for himself. Ali refused to accept Muawiyah as a Caliph and advocated the need to get Islam back to the ethical path. A group of people called Kharijites, who first appeared during the time of third Caliph Uthman, were followers of Ali. However, over a period of time, as Ali began to bargain with the Ummayids, the Kharijites felt that Ali had betrayed them and subsequently assassinated him. Meanwhile, after the death of Muawiyah, his son Yazid succeeded him as a Caliph and defeated Hussein at the Battle of Karbala, marking the full schism in Islam. Ali was succeeded by Abu Mohammad Hasan ibn Ali and the successors of Ali came to be called Imams, while the Ummayid and Muawiyahs adopted a Caliphate monarchy. The period of Ummayids saw a dynastic rule. In 638 AD, the faith was split into two main sects namely, the Shias and Sunnis. The Sunnis believed that the leader of Islamic faith should be elected from among the successors of Prophet Mohammad while the Shias believed that the leaders have to come from the descendants of the Prophet.

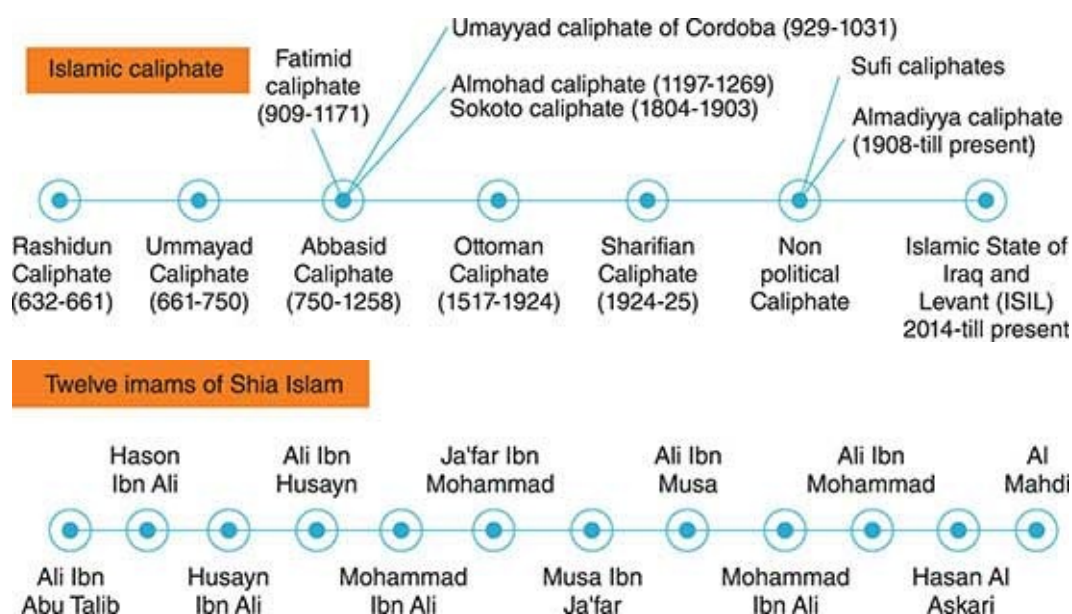
After the death of Yazid, there was again chaos about the succession. By now Islam had spread all over the Arab and Middle Eastern world. There were two main tribes in Syria—Qays in North and Kalb in South—who rallied around Marwan Ibn al Hakam. Ibn Al Zubayr established a Caliphate in Arabia while Al Muktar established a Caliphate under his leadership in Iraq. Marwan I was succeeded by Abd al Malik who was succeeded by his son Al – Walid, who spread Islam from Arabia all the way up to France where, in 736 AD, he was stopped by the Franks of France. The last Marwani Caliph collapsed and was succeeded by the Abbasids led by Al Abbas.

The Abbasids came to power in 750 AD and remained in power till the Mongol invasions in 1258. Abbasids also bought non-Muslim boys and brought them up like

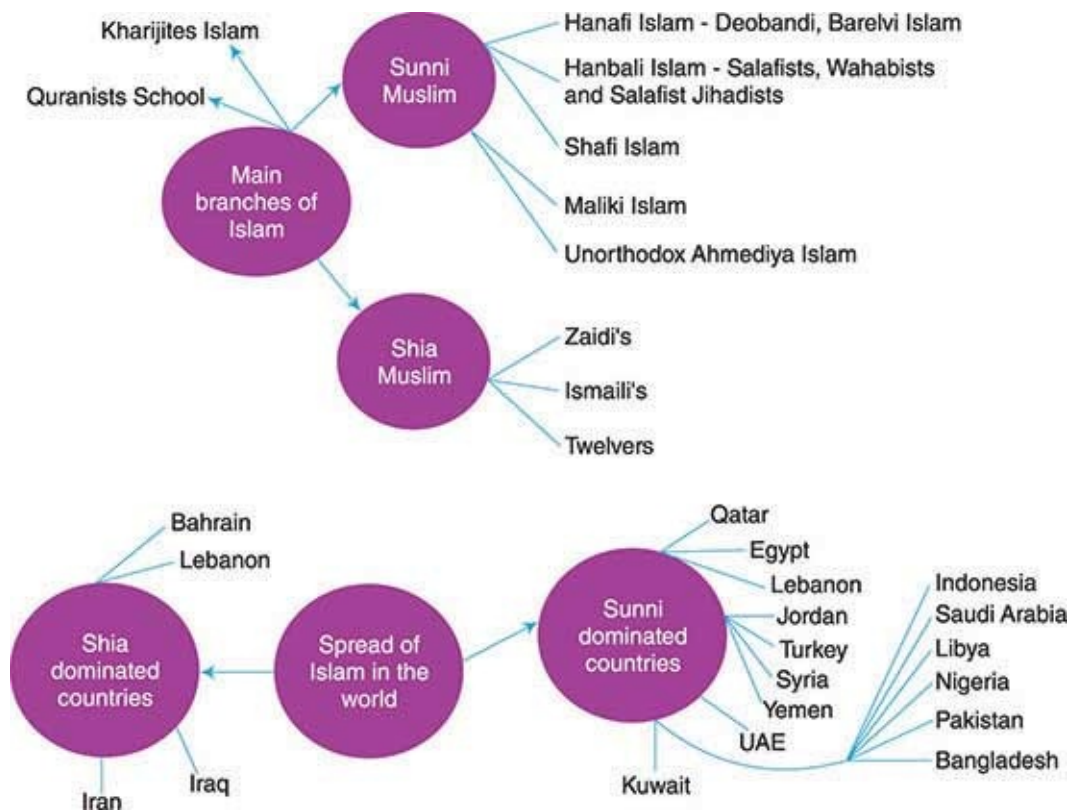
Sunnis. They were soldiers for Abbasids and were called Mamluks. In counter to Abbasids rose the Fatimid who formed a Caliphate in rivalry to Abbasids in North Africa, Sicily, Palestine and Syria. To expand influence, they used the Dawa (missionaries) and used education to spread ideas and principles of their school of thought. The Fatimids declined due to promotion of a doctrine not acceptable to Sunni Muslims. The Fatimids wanted the allegiance of the people to Fatimid Caliph Imam which did not go down well with Sunnis.

Meanwhile, Abdur Rehman of Umayyad established his rule in Cordoba in Spain. By 720, a Moorish control was established in Andalusia in Spain but the state collapsed a little later. There was also a revivalist group of Ahmohads had established their Caliphate in Morocco were led by Ibn Turmat, who advocated strict monotheism but the Almohad Caliphate declined due to the rise of fanatic Almohads. Thus, during the time of Abbasids, multiple caliphates sprung up. In 1517, Selim-I made Egypt a part of Ottoman territory and this saw the rise of the Ottoman Caliphate which lasted till 1924, when it was abolished leading to the birth of Turkey. In modern times, in Nigeria, Usman dan Fodio had established Sokoto Caliphate in 1804 while in lieu of Ottoman Caliphate came Sharifian caliphate. There have also been two non-political Caliphates, namely the Sufis and the Ahmadiyyas. In June 2014, Abu Bakr al Baghdadi of the Islamic state of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) gave a fresh call for establishment of a Caliphate once again.

The Shia Muslims on the other hand believed that Ali was the first Imam and Abu Mohammad Hasan ibn Ali was the second. For Shias, the eleventh Imam was Hasan Al Askari. Today, amongst the Shia Muslims, one school of thought believes that Hasan Al Askari had no surviving sons but another sect called the Qatiyyas believes that Mohammad Al Mahdi is the son of Hasan Ali Askari and he is in hiding somewhere and shall come to guide the Shias.



Broadly speaking, Muslims are divided into four branches, namely Shias, Sunnis, Kharijites and Quaranists. The faith witnessed a split in 632 which led to birth of two largest sects called Shias and Sunnis. The Quaranists are those who hold Quran to be the authentic source of Islamic faith and reject different recorded oral traditions or Hadith. The Shias and Sunnis are further divided into various sub-groups. The diagram below will clarify the schools.



ISLAMIC IDEOLOGIES—WAHABISM, SALAFISM, MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, BAATHISM AND ALAWIS

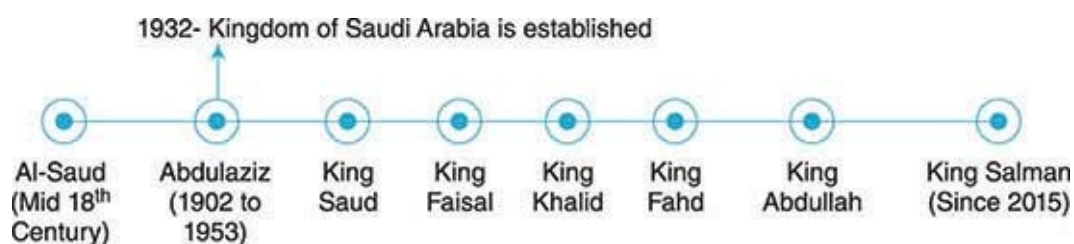
Wahabism and Saudi Arabia

Sheikh Mohammad Ibn Abd Al Wahab is the founder of Wahabism. Al Wahab was born in 1703 in Nejd in Central Arabia. At the age of ten, Al Wahab learned Quran and found a lot of discrepancy in what was mentioned in Quran and what was being practised in reality. Al Wahab noticed people deviating from the path advocated in Quran by worshipping saints and tombs, which were practices that were completely against the Quran. He began to preach the ideas of Quran which went against the existing practices of people. In 1724, Al Wahab went to Basra in Iraq and found many followers and sympathisers in Basra, amongst whom were several prominent persons. However, he was asked to leave Basra. In 1727, Al Wahab came back to his village Uyayna in Nejd from Basra. In his village Al Wahab again began to preach his ideas which were not appreciated by the ruler of Nejd who ordered him into exile. Al Wahab reached a small emirate in Arabia by the name Diriya. The king of Diriya was Mohammad Ibn Saud. As Al Wahab preached in Diriya, he began to increase his followership. This was not appreciated by Ibn Saud who wanted Al Wahab to leave Diriya but Ibn Saud's wife, being a follower of Al Wahab, convinced Ibn Saud to let him stay in Diriya.

Al Wahab's ideology was based on monotheism. In this book *Kitab at-Tawhid*, Al Wahab explains that Muslims should only follow Allah and those who believe in one God are true Muslims. He said that all others who are Muslims but believe in practices other than Allah and monotheism live in a state of Jahiliya. Al Wahab demanded conformity to one God or Caliph and advocated that the true followers of unity and monotheism, who are the chosen ones, can eliminate non-true Muslims like Sufis and Shias, and so on. When Al Wahab preached these doctrine in Diriya, Ibn Saud saw in these doctrines a grand design to enforce conformity, gain acceptance and expand his empire in other

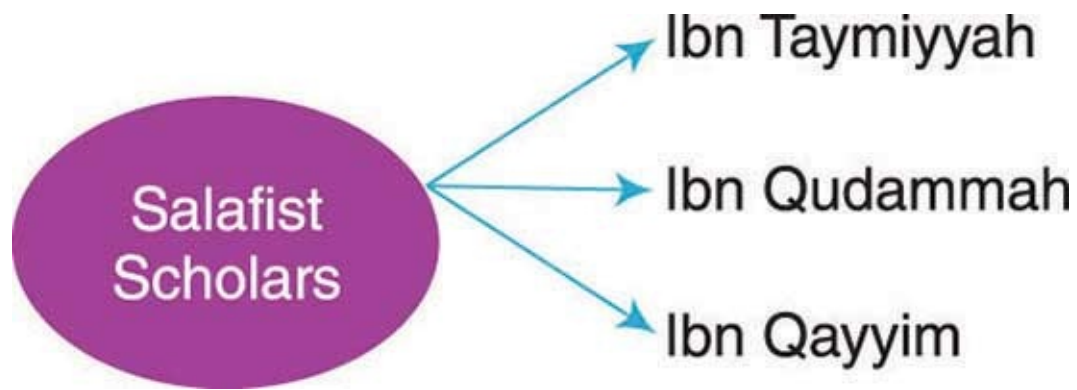
emirates of Arabia. Ibn Saud began his territorial expansion and conquest over other emirates of Arabia on the pretext of the enforcement of Wahabi doctrine and gave birth to a unified Arabia which was now called Saudi Arabia (derived from the name of Mohammad Ibn Saud).

After the death of Ibn Saud, his successor Abdal Aziz also used territorial expansion and violence to ensure the spread of Wahabi ideology and this is how, after the unification of Saudi Arabia, Wahabism emerged as the core ideology of the ruling state and ruling family. Abdal Aziz established an army of people named Ikhwan to spread Wahabi ideology through forced coercion. The members of Ikhwan used to slaughter people who did not conform to the Wahabi ideology. The Ikhwan soldiers used to wear black clothes, raise black flags, wear a black robe to cover their faces. It is this Ikhwan spirit which is visible in ISIS today. In the period during the World War-II, the US and Saudi Arabia developed an alliance whereby the US would buy Saudi oil in return for money, arms and ammunition and Saudi was allowed to export Wahabism in the Middle East to gain hegemony in Middle East. Saudi used the money to provide training to west Asians and also provided support to extremists who would seek conformity. The ideological underpinnings of the ISIS, Taliban and Al Qaeda trace their roots to Wahabism. Post the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the CIA revived the Ikhwan spirit, leading to the formation of the Al Qaeda and Saudi Arabia used it to expand its influence and hegemony while the US used the ideology and its armies to contain the Soviet.



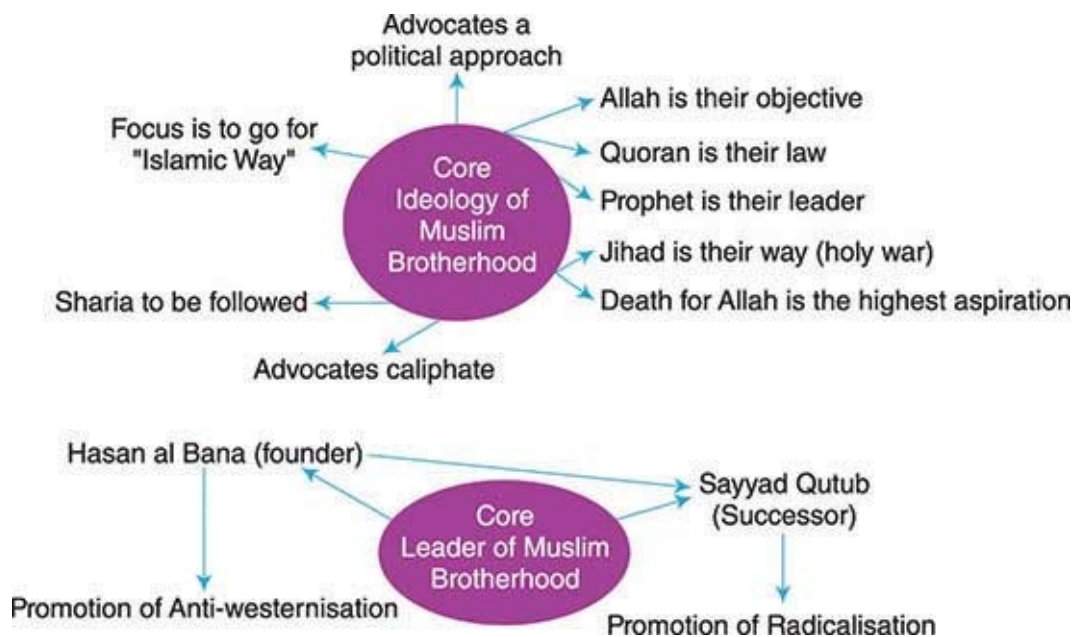
Salafism

Salafism is a world view that looks at the religious questions of Islam. When Prophet Mohammad was alive, he used to preach and hold sermons regularly. There were people who used to listen to Mohammad who would then spread the knowledge they heard from Mohammad by word of mouth. The words of Mohammad to those people who had the privilege of listening to him became a part of the Sunnah. This knowledge of Mohammad or Sunnah was handed over to the successive generations. Salafis are those people who believe that the best way to follow Islam is to follow what these generations learned. For Salafis, those generations of people who listened to Mohammad followed the purest form of Islam and they believe that it's that form of Islam that needs to be followed today. Thus, Salafism is a reform movement aimed at direct emulation of Mohammad, the initial generation, the first few who followed Mohammad. Salafism is a movement which wants to go back for purity of Islam. There have been scholars of Salafism in the modern times who advocate use of Jihad (a holy war) if needed to follow Salafism.



Muslim Brotherhood (MB)

The Muslim Brotherhood emerged in Egypt as a resistance movement against foreign presence. After Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, the territory subsequently fell into the hands of Western powers. As the western powers began to increase their influence in Egypt, it saw erosion of Islamic values in the society. It is in this backdrop that Hasan al Bana emerged on the scene and established the Muslim Brotherhood. Hasan al Bana began to follow a grassroots mechanism to promote Islamic values. He began to focus on issues like health, education and other humanitarian issues. His aim was to establish a direct touch with people of Egypt. He used this grassroots platform to popularise his version of Islam and preached the need for Sharia and a Caliphate as guiding forces in society.

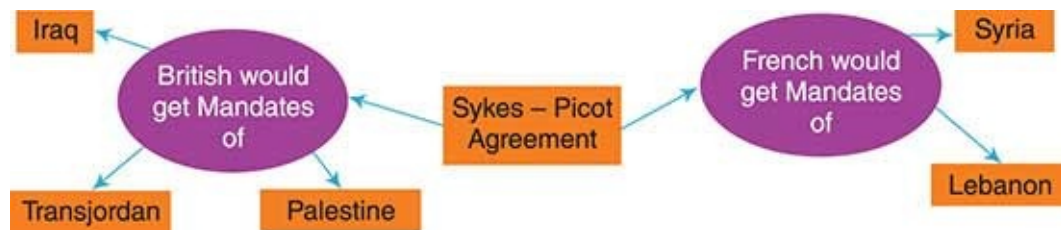


As the Muslim Brotherhood has established a strong mass base in Egypt, it emerged powerfully on the political scene of Egypt after the Arab Spring in 2011. The MB accepts Islam with modern components and is therefore more pragmatic and accommodating than both Salafism and Wahabism. Saudi Arabia does not support the MB as it advocates the establishment of a Caliphate which endangers Saudi Monarchy and their dynastic rule. Thus, Saudi Arabia prefers to support the Egyptian military over the Muslim Brotherhood.

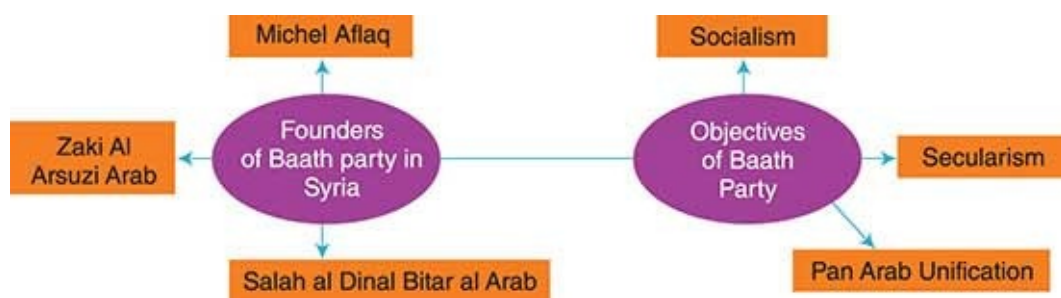
Baathism and Iraq and Syria

During the World War-I, Europe was looking for allies in the Middle East. A British spy T E Lawrence promised Faisal I of Iraq that if he supported the British in the war, after the war he would be rewarded with Mecca, thus earning Faisal's support for the British. The British, along with the French, concluded the Sykes Picot Agreement secretly. The

agreement was about the division of the Middle Eastern territory post-World War-I. The aim of the agreement was to serve oil needs of Britain and France from the Middle East after the War. As the World War-I concluded, as per the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the territory was divided. The British rewarded Faisal with Iraq.



As Syria was under French Control, the Syrians fought against the French and finally gained independence on 17th April, 1946. After Syrian independence, many new parties were born and one such party was the Baath Party in 1947, which was renamed in 1953 as the Arab Socialist Baath Party.



In 1958, on lines of Arab unity, a United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria was formed but due to the dominating personality of Nasser of Egypt, in 1961, the United Arab Republic broke up. In 1963, the Baathist party, through a coup in Syria, established the Syrian Arab Republic. After the Arab Israel War of 1967, the Syrians lost Golan Heights to Israel and became a weak state. Taking advantage of a weakening Syria, in 1971, Hafiz al Assad administered a coup and became the Syrian President through a subsequent referendum. He continued to be in power till 2000 when he was succeeded by his son, Basher al Assad.

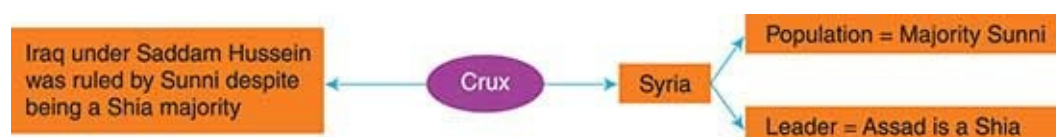


Alawis and the House of Assad

Alawis are Arabic people living in the Jubal al Nusaryiah Mountains of North West Syria. They are known as Nusayrias and are a sect similar to Shias. Post-1970s, the Alawis, the largest Syrian minority group, had formed a government in Syria. The Alawis believe that every human being begins as a star in the sky. The human beings fell on the Earth when they disobeyed the sky God. Thus, a man has to be reborn several times to find a place as a star again. The Alawis consider people of other faiths as animals and believe that Earth is a home for Alawis and other animals. Their religion is extremely secretive with no mosques but they celebrate all Persian and Christian festivals and have adopted modern dressing. The Sunni Muslims feel Alawis are non-Muslims and treat them with utter contempt.

On the other hand, in 1968, in Iraq, Al Hasan al Bakr of Baath party undertook a coup which was followed by another one in 1978 by Saddam Hussein, who established a military rule in Iraq. Thus, Syria, which had Sunni majority came to be

ruled by a Shia minority while Iraq, under Saddam Husain, was a state of Shia majority being ruled by a Sunni minority.



ISRAEL AND PALESTINE ISSUE

When the Industrial Revolution began in Europe, it also brought about the spirit of nationalism amongst the Europeans. The British and the French emerged as two major European powers. After the unification of Germany by Bismarck, even Germany emerged as a strong power. This period of nationalism in Europe also was a period of colonisation. In fact, colonisation of the world had begun by European powers after geographical discoveries and industrial revolution. The British and the French resented the rise of Germany as they perceived it as a serious competitor.

The later part of 1880s saw alliance formations in Europe which ultimately culminated in the World War–I. Germany formed an alliance with Austria, Hungary and the Ottoman empire while the British had formed their own alliance with the French. The Ottoman territory would be disastrous even for the British and French as they used the oil from the territory for industrial activities back home. As the World War–I broke out, in 1916, the British and the French signed the Sykes–Picot Agreement. Also known as the Asia Minor Agreement, the agreement had the British and the French decide the division of the Ottoman territory amongst themselves after the World War–I. As the war ended, the British and French emerged victorious and Germany, Austria–Hungary and the Ottomans lost. The victorious powers of the World War–I now decided to curb German ambitions and also divide the Ottoman territory. The establishment of the League of Nation, the Mandate System and the Balfour Declaration gave effect to the ambitions of victorious powers. The British got the mandate of Iraq and Palestine while the French kept Syria and Lebanon as mandates. In order to curb German ambitions, the Treaty of Versailles was designed and signed in 1919. As per the treaty, the Germans were not allowed to maintain a strong military and its resources were to be shared with victorious powers like Britain and France. The prime intention to inflict harm upon Germany was to ensure that it does not recover enough to act as a threat to Britain and France again. It also severely limited Germany's colonial ambitions.

The wars also created a sense of nationalism in the Jews. The Jews were also inspired to have their own national home in the land they believed had been 'promised' to them by God. Theodore Herzl, in 1896, established the World Zionist Organization in Basel in Switzerland as a political movement to take Jews from Europe to Zion. (Zionism subsequently emerged as a political movement of Jews; Zion or Jerusalem is where the temple mount is located in Palestine). The basic idea of Theodore Herzl was that first, rich European Jews would go to Palestine and purchase lands and over a period of time, other Jews would go and settle in Palestine. Zionism, which emerged as a political movement, ended up being a movement to colonise Palestine. As the number of Jews in Palestine began to increase, the move was not appreciated by the Arabs. After World War–I, as the Mandate of Palestine had come under British control, the Arabs complained to the British

about the rising number of Jews in Palestine. The British subsequently controlled the entry of the Jews into Palestine but did not impose a complete halt. This sowed the seeds of the Arab–Palestine disenchantment.

During the inter-war period, Germany began to defy the Treaty of Versailles and also began to uproot the Jews in Germany. Hitler blamed Jews for the problems of Germany and in 1940, unleashed the horrific Holocaust as a ‘final solution to the Jewish Problem’. The mass massacre of Jews led to a wave of deep sympathy for the Jewish people all over the world. America also convinced its ally Britain to allow entry of one lakh Jews from Europe to Palestine and ease the entry restrictions. As more number of Jews began to enter Palestine, it upset the Arabs in Palestine. The situation in Palestine was very volatile. As the Jews and Arabs fought for the claim of Palestine, the UN was created as a successor to League of Nations on 15th May, 1947. The British decided to hand over their mandate of Palestine to the UN for deliberation. Subsequently, the UN established United Nations Special Commission on Palestine (UNSCOP). The UNSCOP deliberated upon the Palestinian issue. During the UN debates, one group advocated that Arabs have been controlling Palestine but Jews also have a rightful claim on the territory and therefore, the territory of Palestine should be partitioned for Arab Palestinians and Jews, creating a plan which came to be known as the Majority Plan. On the other hand, the other group advocated that there should be a Federal Palestine and Jews can be accommodated in a unified Federal Palestine without the need to partition. Thus, this group created this plan which came to be known as the Minority Plan.

On 29th November 1947, the UN voted on both the plans. As per the vote, the Majority Plan received the maximum votes. The Palestine territory was to be partitioned and it was decided to establish an Arab Palestine and a Jewish Palestine while keeping the city of Jerusalem under international control. As per the decision of the UN, with support of the US, on 14th May 1948, the Jewish Palestine got established on the demarcated territory and Israel, as a state, was born. However, the Arabs failed to establish Arab Palestine on the demarcated territory. In 1948, after the creation of Jewish Palestine or Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan collectively attacked Israel. This led to the first Arab–Israel war in 1948. The UN immediately stepped in and by 1949, an Armistice agreement was achieved. From 1919 to 1956, there was truce in the region but in 1956, Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal and prevented Israel from accessing the Suez Canal. This led to a Tripartite Agreement between Israel, Britain and France in Sevres, France after which, Ariel Sharon of Israel attacked Egypt and captured the Gaza strip and Sharm el Shaikh.

The subsequent intervention of US to diffuse the crisis led to peace again. But the Suez crisis firstly led to a big blow to the supremacy of Britain and France while boosting the image of Nasser in the Arab world. The awakened Arab world began to ponder as to why the Arabs could not succeed in establishing the Arab Palestine. The Arabs realised that it was because they lacked an organisation like the Jews and recognised the fact that splinter groups advocating for Arab Palestine have to be brought under a unified umbrella. In 1964, the Arabs established the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO emerged as an organisation of the Arabs fighting Israel military for supremacy in the Palestinian region. Britain, France and Israel, along with the Americans, condemned the creation of PLO in 1967. Egypt was mobilising its military units along the Sinai and also

closed the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel. This war lasted for six days (also known as the six days war) and Israel captured the Gaza strip from Egypt.

Israel also took the West bank from Jordan and Golan Heights from Syria after the war. Arabs took the matter to the UN, urging UN to compel Israel to vacate the occupied territory and go back to accept the borders that existed before the 1967 war. The UN passed the UN Resolution–242, urging Israel to vacate the territory and immediately resort to holding of borders as existed before 1967. The state of Israel refused to comply to UN orders. The refusal of Israel to comply to UN resolution 242 came as a big shock to the Arab world. The PLO subsequently became more radical to tackle Israel.

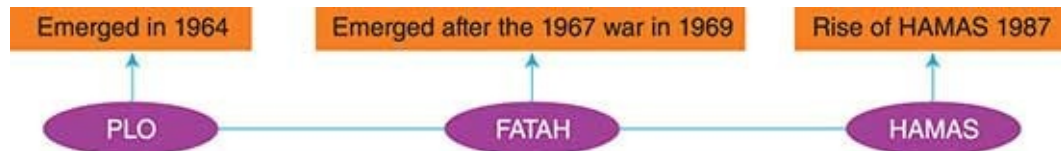


The factional group called Fatah was one of the most radical groups which began to gain popularity for its aggressive stance to Israel. In 1969, the leader of the Fatah, Yasser Arafat, became the head of the PLO and began to vouch for an armed struggle against Israel. The Arabs continued to support the aggressive tactics of the Fatah, which now dominated the PLO. On 6th October, 1973, as the Jews were busy celebrating the holy festival of Yom Kippur, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Libya attacked Israel. This took Israel by surprise, but with support of the US, Israel succeeded in defeating each Arab participant. Subsequently, the Arab countries of OPEC imposed an oil embargo upon the US. The efforts of the Nixon administration led to the uplifting of the embargo by 1974 but also caused an upward spiral of oil prices. For the first time, the global financial balance of power tilted in favour of the Middle East. The US responded domestically with Project Independence (a project for energy security) and also decided to use the comfortable situation to advocate for peace. Post the oil embargo, PLO also shifted its original maxima list position of advocating for liberation of Palestine under Israeli control to advocating the two states theory. It pressed for the creation of Arab Palestine in the Gaza strip and West Bank.

The US sensed an opportunity in this changed stance and in 1978, invited the Arab nations for talks at Camp David. The PLO rejected the call for talks organised by US. However, Egypt, led by Sadat Anwar, responded positively and went ahead with the talks. The Camp David Talks of 1978 led to the Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty and Egypt agreed not to use violence against Israel while Israel agreed to more autonomy for Palestinians, with the possibility of sovereignty in future. However, the Israel–Egypt rapprochement was denounced by the Arab world and the PLO. Despite a breakthrough at Camp David talks with Egypt, there was no big achievement overall as the PLO did not participate while Israel refused to give effect to the UN Resolution–242. The frustration amongst Arabs for their failure to make Israel vacate territory and the intense disenchantment in Palestinian people led to the first Intifada. The first Intifada culminated with rise of Harkat-al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (HAMAS), led by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin.

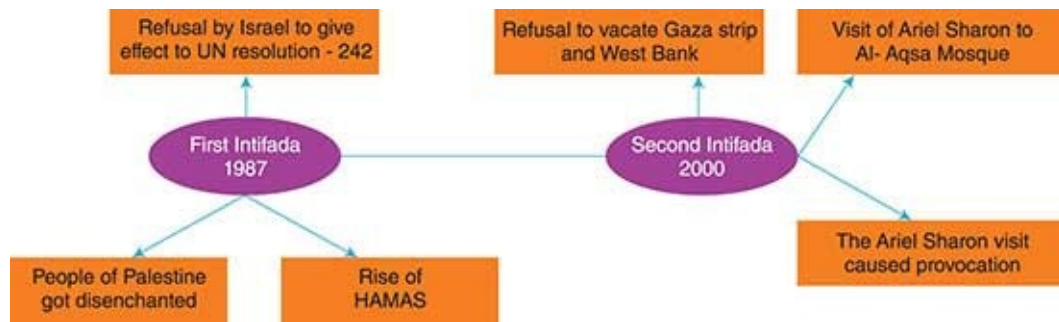


Hamas emerged as an organisation in Gaza strip and vowed to eliminate Israel by force. At this time, the response of the Fatah was different and it proposed that as an organisation, its focus would remain on establishing the Arab Palestine in Gaza strip and West Bank.



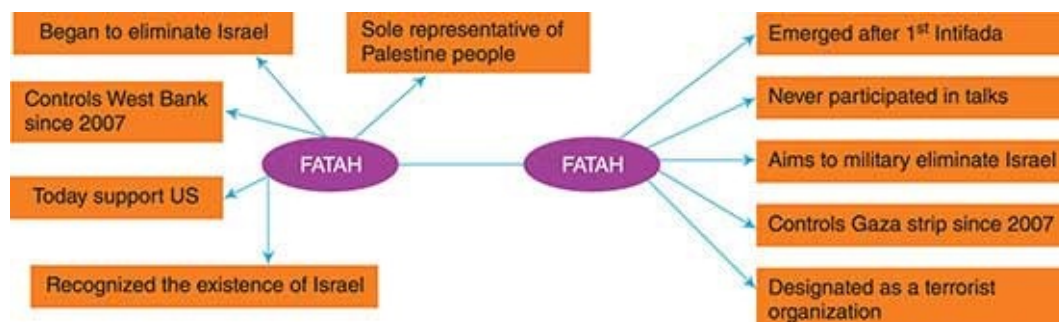
As the Cold War ended with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1989, the US emerged as a superpower. In 1991, the US invited the Arabs again at Madrid as a follow up to the Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty. In the Madrid conference in 1991, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and some influential Palestinian people participated, although the PLO had not been invited as a representative of the Palestinian people. The only success of the Madrid Conference was the Israel–Jordan Peace Treaty. Syrian insistence on reclaiming Golan Height delayed the Syria–Israel truce. Israel did propose, however, that it would hand over Golan Heights back to Syria if Syria concludes a Peace Treaty. The talks with Lebanon in Madrid could not proceed as Iran exercised influence on Lebanon, through Hezbollah. The US followed up the Madrid talks of 1991 with the Oslo Accords in 1993. For the first time in the history of the Middle East crisis, the US succeeded in bringing Israel and the PLO at a common platform for talks. HAMAS continued with its military position and therefore was not a part of Oslo talks. The Oslo talks saw the ‘Land for Peace’ proposals. It was decided that Israel would undertake a phased withdrawal from Gaza strip and West Bank while the PLO would accept the existence of Israel and would do away with idea of using force against Israel. It was agreed that PLO would establish a Palestinian Authority (PA) which would act as a political entity to govern Gaza strip and West Bank.

Israel was to vacate Gaza Strip and West Bank by 1998. The PLO, in the meantime, had also established the PA. The rise of a right wing government in Israel by 1998 created an issue. In 1998, the Israeli government refused to vacate Gaza strip and West Bank. Subsequently Israel’s Ariel Sharon visited the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem (the third holiest site in Islam after Mecca and Medina) and this move provoked the Palestinians. This provocation manifested as the Second Intifada in 2000. The Second Intifada caused heavy violence in the region again.



The volatile situation came under control in 2003 when Ariel Sharon announced the Disengagement Plan. Israel agreed to vacate Gaza strip and West Bank by 2005. However, in 2004, Yasser Arafat died and was succeeded by Mohammad Abbas. In 2005, Israel vacated Gaza strip and West Bank and elections were organised on behalf of the PLO. Both PA and the HAMAS decided to contest elections. The US and its allies extended their support to PA in the election. As the results of the election were announced, it stunned everybody as HAMAS won the election in Gaza Strip while Fatah won a few seats in the territory of West Bank. This sowed the seeds of subsequent Fatah–HAMAS conflict.

In 2007, after the talks, HAMAS and Fatah formed the National Unity Government (NUG) where HAMAS was led by Khaled Mashal and Fatah PA by Mohammad Abbas. The violence still continued due to ideological differences. The NUG collapsed in June 2007, after which the HAMAS took control of the Gaza Strip while the Fatah took over the control of West Bank. As Fatah enjoyed the support of the US, in 2014, it succeeded in making Palestine a non-member state of the UN and in 2015, a member state of International Criminal Court. Hamas as an organization continues to deploy military tactics and remains committed to eliminate Israeli military. In December 2016, US abstained at the Security Council resolution related to a resolution sponsored by New Zealand on the settlement issue in the Palestinian territory. This was the first time in the history of creation of Israel that US, instead of supporting Israel, abstained from a resolution and came down heavily on Israel. For a long period of time, the Obama administration and Benjamin Netanyahu had been on opposing ends with each other. There had been some critical differences over the perception of the Iranian nuclear deal (of 2015) by both US and Israel. Obama administration favoured a positive attitude to Iran, which was not the case with Israel. The long pending disagreements were a major factor in the recent decision of US to abstain from voting at the UN Security Council.



INDIA'S PALESTINE POLICY

Since the Indian National Movement, India has been positively inclined towards Arabs India and has rejected Zionism. India believed Zionism is a colonial movement of the

Jewish people to try and eventually colonise Palestine. India did not harbour any negativity towards Jewish people, but it rejected the ideology of the Jewish people to colonise Palestine. After India became independent, India recognised the creation of Israel at the UN, yet extended no diplomatic relations with Israel. In the 1956 Suez crisis, India blamed Israel for escalating conflicts. After the 1967 war, India favoured the UN Resolution 242 and advocated that Israel vacate the territory captured in the 1967 war. In 1974, India allowed the PLO to establish an office in New Delhi and also accepted the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian People. In 1981, Yasser Arafat paid a state visit to India. Post the Oslo Accords of 1993, India has supported the Fatah or the PLO or the PA. India does not support the HAMAS. In 2015, at the UN Human Rights Council vote against Israel on war crimes in Gaza, India abstained along Kenya Ethiopia, Macedonia and Paraguay as the resolution related to International Criminal Court to which India is not a signatory.

ARAB SPRING, SYRIAN CRISIS AND LIBYAN CRISIS

Islam, after its origin, has spread as an ideology or religion to places as far as France. Islam had a lot of interaction with different cultures all over the world. However, after 1453, the fall of Constantinople coupled with subsequent Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution saw the rise of Christianity in Europe. The rise of Europe was perceived as the rise of Christianity by Islamic scholars. This time also coincided with the beginning of imperialism. The western intrusion in the body politic led to a new discourse. Many scholars of Islam sensed a feeling of defeat and began to introspect. Some believed that the reason Christianity flourished was because of advancements in science (fuelled by the Renaissance and geographical discoveries) while others believed it was because of military superiority. Some Islamic scholars advocated deep introspection within and presented an idea of going back to pristine Islam as they felt that Muslims have deviated from their true faith.

The early modern period also saw a strong control of Western powers over the Middle East. Initially, it was by the British and the French who wanted a control over the Middle East for oil to sustain the Industrial Revolution. The World Wars also led to redrawing of the boundaries of the Middle East, done in a manner to suit the imperial interests. This territorial demarcation at the end of World War–I created a deep sense of resentment amongst the Arabs. The period after World War–II and the Cold War saw the US emerging as a new power. The Cold War period in the Middle East witnessed a rise of military dictators and dynastic dictators (as in Saudi Arabia). The oil boom post-1973 and the oil embargo again financially strengthened the dictators but the financial benefits did not percolate to the Arab citizens. The population at large was still left out and felt humiliated to see how their leaders (authoritarian rulers) co-opted by the West. The Arabs were also aggravated with creation of Israel in 1948 and subsequent loss of Arab lives in military conflicts with Israel in 1948 and 1967.



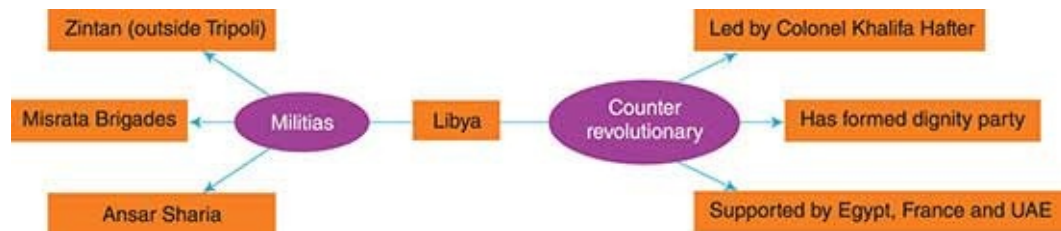
One answer that emerged for Arabs during the Cold War was to reassert the influence of Islam, with which came the invocation of Jihad. The US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan played a key role. The US used Jihadis to contain the Soviet influence in Afghanistan while Saudi Arabia spread Wahabism through Jihad to urge for a return to pristine Islam. The Salafist Jihadism that emerged during the Cold War was perceived as the first response to regain control over destiny. Thus, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the US used Islam to mobilise it as a weapon to tackle communism. However, they rapidly lost control over the monsters that they had bred and fed. This precisely happened in the form of 9/11 attacks. Post-9/11 we saw the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003). The subsequent period also saw a rise of Islamophobia in the Christian world. The Arabs again were fatigued with increased violence and consequences caused by the Holy war or Jihad. It was now well accepted that radicalism was not the answer. There was a huge intellectual vacuum felt by Arab citizen who had legitimate grievances against their leaders and realised that violence certainly was no answer. What contributed to more frustration in the Arab world was a series of Arab Human Development Reports that emerged from 2002 onwards till 2009.

All these Arab Human Development Reports pointed out to lack of social development of Arab citizens. These reports also contributed to a deep sense of loss of dignity amongst the Arab people. The common Arab citizen was frustrated due to brutal suppression by their leaders, high prices of commodities, rising unemployment and rampant corruption.

The spark came from Tunisia in December 2010 when a street vender, Mohmmad Bouazizi, self-immolated himself due to suppression by Tunisian police. Self-immolation in Islam is a forbidden act as it is believed that a person indulging in immolation will find no place in heaven. This act of self-immolation became a political statement leading to mass agitations in Tunisia against Ben Ali, who promptly ordered his forces to militarily suppress the protestors. The military forces refused to act on orders. This ultimately led to his downfall. The revolution that happened in Tunisia was called Jasmine Revolution because jasmine is culturally important for Tunisians—in the month of December, a lot of vendors in Tunisia sell jasmine flowers. The Tunisians appreciate the purity and the scent of the jasmine. It was called Jasmine revolution as the idea was to purify Tunisia and clean it up from the corrupt government held by Ben Ali. Due to this Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia, on 20th January 2011, the Democratic Constitutional Rally, the party under Ben Ali was dissolved. On 1st March 2011, the Nahdah Party in Tunisia was legalised to contest future elections. Ben Ali was convicted for embezzlement of public funds even though he has lived in exile in Saudi Arabia since his ouster. The unrest from Tunisia spread to Egypt. Egypt, since 1980, was under the rule of Hosni Mubarak. The protestors occupied the Tahir Square in Cairo to demand the ousting of Hosni Mubarak. Post Arab Spring, Egypt witnessed a power tussle between Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian army.

In 2011, the protestors also protested against the Muammar Gaddafi regime in Libya who refused to leave the Libyan scene. Libya then subsequently saw a NATO intervention which led to a forced removal of Gaddafi. Libya became the first state that underwent Civil War after the Arab Spring. After Gaddafi, Libya has fragmented into multiple groups all of whom assert power today. The regime of Gaddafi at least had kept all factions under

control but post Gaddafi, Libya has slipped into a civil war and the crisis in Libya still continues. The conflict in Libya is about wealth and power. After the removal of Gaddafi, the society which has got fragmented has seen the rise of local militias. The militias are controlled by tribes which have been asserting dominance over resources. In 2012, the General National Congress was elected but each major city still has a dominant militia. The GNC elected in 2012 had to give power to House of Representatives in 2014 which has not happened yet.



The Arab Spring has seen protests against Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen and also against the ruler in Bahrain. In Morocco, King Mohammad VI has agreed to transition. Elections have happened. People want the monarchy to stay in Morocco as well as in Jordan.



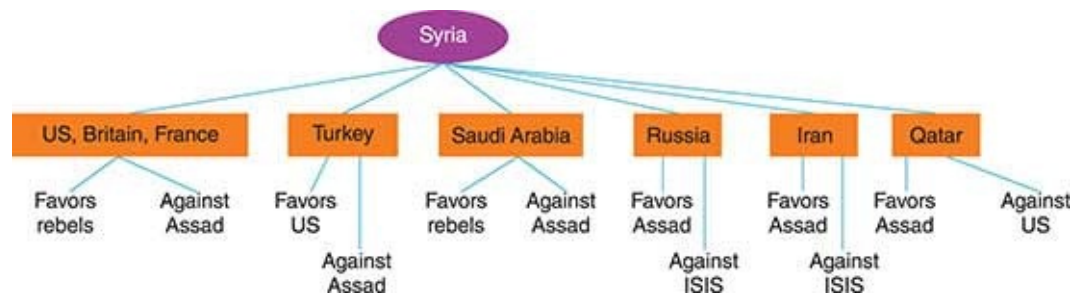
Why is the Revolution in the Arab States called Arab Spring?

Spring is a new season when normally the ice melts, winters end and new beginnings happen. The term at political level was first used in 1968 in Prague when it achieved political liberalisation. The winter in political connotation signified a controlled society with a high degree of oppression exercised by a ruler and no freedom for the people. The spring signified a change from the winter. This is what was signified by the Arab Spring that began in December, 2010 in Tunisia.

Syria became independent in 1945 and became an Arab Republic in 1991. As explained earlier, Syria was under the control of Assad. The Arab Spring created protest even in Syria but Assad refused to leave the scene. This has plunged Syria into a situation of civil war as the opposition favours his removal. This issue of the Syrian conflict has become all the more complex with foreign participation. In September 2016, apart from existing players, Turkey has entered into the Syrian conflict as a new player.

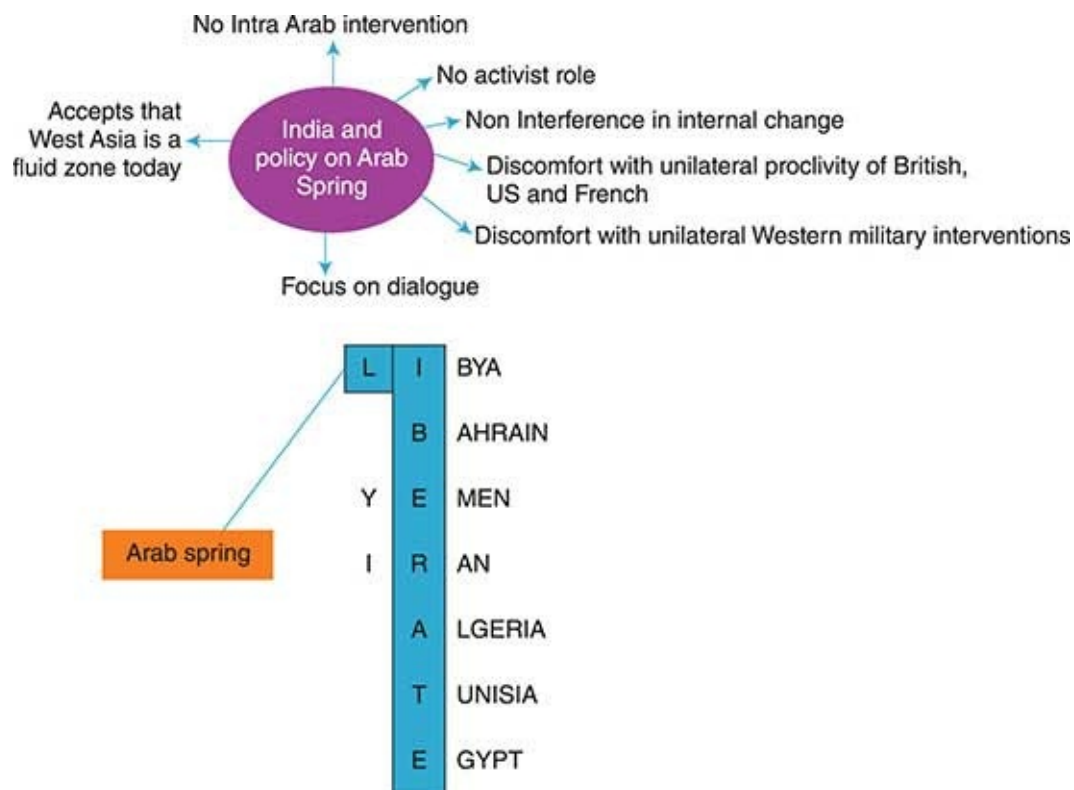


Russia supports Syria as Russian Black Sea bases are not very far away from Syria and Syria is an important nation in Russia's West Asia Policy. The civil war in Syria has caused enormous damage to its civilian population which has led to the population to seek refugee outside Syria. The year of 2015 saw a colossal refugee crises when people began to leave Syria for Germany, Greece, Sweden and Turkey.



INDIA’S POSITION ON ARAB SPRING

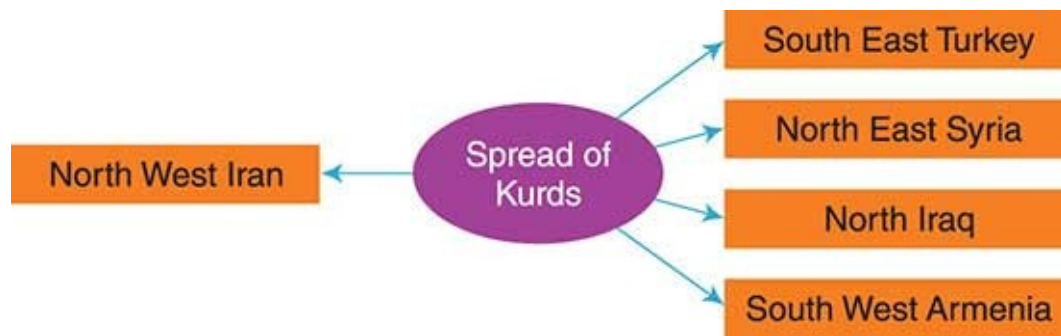
India has followed a pragmatic approach and has evolved its view on a case-by-case basis. India has advocated the policy of non-enmeshment in sectarian conflicts. Broadly, India has followed hands-off approach of not interfering in internal transition. As some countries have slipped into civil wars post Arab Spring, one priority that has emerged in the Indian foreign policy is the protection of Indian expats in this region. A bigger concern for India has been to protect the sea lanes of communication to sustain oil supplies. Our policy is now to engage with West Asia at the level of security and defence. Broadly, as the Arab Spring favours democracy and has a secular outlook, India favours the changes brought about by it in the Arab World.



KURDISH PROBLEM

Kurds are indigenous people belonging to the Mesopotamian plains. The problem of Kurds goes back to the period of World War-I. After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the World War-I, many Kurds wanted a separate state called Kurdistan. The idea was to

unify all Kurds spread in the Middle East.



The Treaty of Sèvres in 1920 also advocated a new Kurdish state to be established. As the Ottoman Empire disintegrated after World War-I, the Treaty of Lausanne demarcated the boundary of Turkey and created Turkey as a modern state without the mention of Kurdistan. However, the Kurds, since then, have been fighting for an independent state. The Kurdish people have no common dialect but belong to a common race and culture and a majority of them are Sunni Muslims. In the years since 2014, the Kurds have been in news due to attacks on the Kurdish people by Islamic State (ISIS).

In 1978, Abdullah Öcalan, a Kurdish nationalist leader, established the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and proposed to fight for Kurdistan as an independent state in Turkey. Till 1990s, The PKK indulged in an armed struggle and demanded the independent state. However, since the end of the Cold War, the PKK has dropped the idea of an armed struggle and has been advocating more cultural and political autonomy. The PKK has been in negotiations with Turkish government and the latest round of talks happened in 2012 where the Turks and PKK have established a ceasefire. In July 2015, as the ISIS-related violence on members of PKK increased, the PKK blamed Turkey for all attacks on their members. The Turks, in relation, launched a synchronised war on terror on PKK and ISIS. Turkey alleges that the PKK has been adamant on the secession of the Kurdish region from Turkey through armed struggle and thus labels it a terrorist organisation.

Kurds in Syria have established a Democratic Unity Party (PYD) which fights in Syria not for an independent Kurdish state but for more autonomy in the local democratic administration in Federal Syria. In 2004, after the Qamishli uprising in Syria, the PYD formed People's Protection Units (YPG) in Rojava or the area of Syrian Kurdistan. In 2014, when the ISIS attacked Syria, the YPG repelled the ISIS.

In Iraq today, around 15–20% of the population is Kurd. The Kurds, historically, have enjoyed maximum rights in Iraq. In fact, in 1946, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was formed by Mustafa Barzani. Barzani wanted more autonomy for the Kurds in Iraq. In 1958, the Kurdish nationality was recognised by the new Iraqi constitution, but Barzani advocated self-rule which was not acceptable to Iraq. In 1961, Barzani launched an armed struggle. To diffuse the situation, the Iraqi government offered an autonomous region in 1970 but the deal failed. In 1974, there was a split in KDP which led to Jalal Talabani establishing the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The KDP and PUK have repeatedly tried to share power but tensions between the groups have prevented any such endeavour. After the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, a coalition called Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) was setup in 2005 in Dohuk, Ibril and Sulaimanya. The KRG has been primarily an advocate of autonomy for Kurds. They have members belonging to the Kurdish

nationalist guerilla organisations called Peshmargas. In 2014, when the ISIS attacked Iraq in the North where Kurds reside, the KRG sent Peshmargas to fight. Since February 2016, Mustafa Barzani's son, Massoud Barzani, the current leader of the KDP, has been an advocate of a referendum and the demand for the referendum was forcefully forwarded again in January, 2017.

There also exists a small group of people in the Middle East called Yazidis. They are among the world's oldest minorities and are a monotheistic people. Yazdis and their faith originated thousands of years ago, with roots in Zoroastrianism. They follow a blend of Islam and Christianity. In the recent years, due to attacks on Yazdis by ISIS, the minority group is in danger. The ISIS has labelled them devil worshippers and have called for their eradication. The Yazdis are almost on the verge of extinction. Today, they live near the Sinjar Mountains in Iraq. The Yazdis are non-Arabs and non-Muslim minorities.



ISLAMIC STATE OF IRAQ AND SYRIA (ISIS)

The latest challenge that has emerged in the Middle East is of the Islamic State (henceforth referred to as the ISIS). To understand the origin of the ISIS, we need to trace back to the period of the Gulf War-I. In 1990, when the first Gulf War began, in Iraq, Saddam Hussein used chemical and biological weapons against his adversaries. The US supported Kuwait in the war but as the war ended, it failed to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. As the UN imposed sanctions against Iraq and isolated it, it was believed that a weak Iraq under Saddam Hussein would lead to a palace coup against Saddam and there would be a subsequent regime change.

In 1998, the US passed a law signed by Clinton authorising 97 billion US dollars to replace the regime of Saddam with a democratic regime in Iraq. The task was entrusted to the CIA. However, the 9/11 attacks changed all equations. In 2001, the US President was empowered with the Authorized use of Military Force (AVMF) to declare a war upon Afghanistan and Iraq for which the US President would not require authorisation from the UN Security Council. This led to the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and of Iraq in 2003. After the end of Gulf War, the UN had instructed Iraq to remove and dismantle all its chemical and biological weapons. Iraq had not complied with the directions of the UN. In November, 2001, the UN Weapon Inspector Hans Blix informed the Security Council that Iraq is in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction. On 20th March, 2003, after failure of Iraq to dismantle the weapons of Mass Destruction, the US invaded Iraq and launched operation Iraqi Freedom.

Saddam was captured in December, 2003 and hanged subsequently after court's verdicts. After Saddam's capture, the ground was prepared in Iraq for democratic elections. Before we move further, we have to keep a few things in mind. Firstly, the Muslims living in Iraq are Shia and are in majority. Secondly, Saddam was a Sunni Muslim. The situation in Iraq under Saddam was that Shia majority nation was controlled

by Sunni minority and a Sunni leader. When the US invaded Iraq, the US was determined to side with the Shias as they constituted the majority. This created an inherent sense of betrayal and a rising number of Sunni extremist groups who unleashed violence and chaos in Iraq. One such prominent group was Jamat al Tawhid Wa-i-Jihad (JTWD). It was founded in 1999 by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in Jordan. Al-Zarqawi developed proximity to Al-Qaeda's Osama Bin Laden in due course of time. In 2004, the JTWD performed *bay'ah* and joined the Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). The commonality of Al-Qaeda and JTWD in Iraq was the deep anti-Shia sentiment.

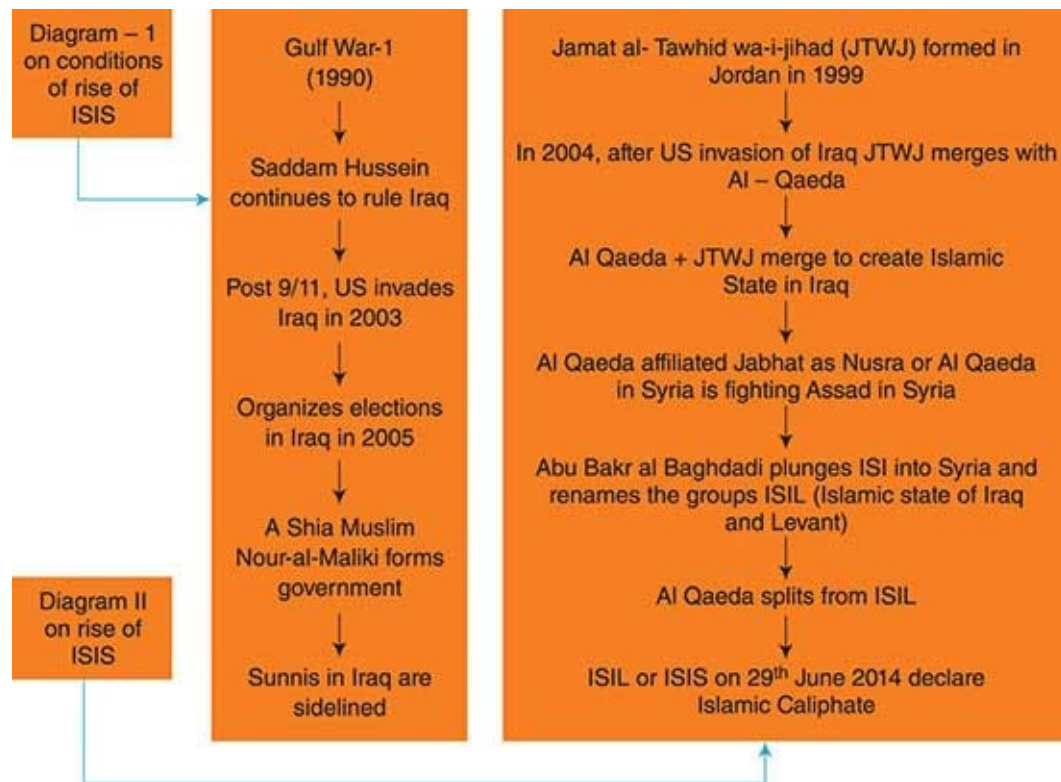
In 2006, Al-Zarqawi took steps to bring other pro-Sunni, anti-Shia groups fighting in Iraq under a uniform banner and succeeded in knitting the organisations under Majlis Shura-al-Mujaheeden (MSM). Al-Zarqawi was killed in the same year in a US air strike. He was succeeded by Al-Masri, with the Al-Qaeda in Iraq now transformed into Islamic State in Iraq (ISI). Abu Ayyub al-Masri announced that the new goal of ISI was to capture the territory of Iraq which had passed into the hands of Nour Al-Maliki (the Shia ruler who assumed power after elections in 2005 in Iraq). Al-Masri clarified that the goal of ISI is to establish Sharia in Iraq.

The ISI began to capture the lands of the Anbar province in Iraq where Sunni disenchantment with Shias was very high. The US forces in Iraq in 2007 began to take help of Sahawat al-Anbar to tackle ISI. As the US used Sahawat al-Anbar, they began to successfully wipe out ISI. In 2010, al-Masri died and was succeeded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Al-Baghdadi began to rework the structure of Islamic state of Iraq. He decided that the group needs to broaden its thinking and reach. Al-Baghdadi repositioned the group, shifted base to Syria and renamed the group as the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL). The shifting of ISIL in Syria upset the Al-Qaeda in Syria fighting against the Assad government and they decided to split from ISIL. Al-Baghdadi, on 21st June, 2014, announced a new goal of ISIS or ISIL, that is the establishment of a Caliphate once again in the Islamic world, followed by its establishment in rest of the world later. Al-Baghdadi, on 29th June, 2014, designated himself as the Caliph Ibrahim. ISIS has vowed affiliation to the Salafi-Jihadi ideology.



Is the War against ISIS India's War?

In 2016, a counter terrorism conference was held in Jaipur, India. It witnessed participants from 25 states that discussed issues related to the ISIS. In the conference, Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishanker asserted that India favors a 'whole of the world' approach to counter terrorism. This was asserted in response to the question that should India under the Global War On Terrorism (GWOT) contribute forces to contain ISIS? The theoretical explanation of the GWOT is that it perceives that the threat to all states is uniform in nature. This logic is in sync with the goal of the ISIS that is to establish a global Islamic caliphate. Indian Foreign Secretary asserted that if the need be, India could contribute troops to contain ISIS at the global level, but only under the UN Flag. The Indian foreign policy believes that the GWOT will be India's war only when the terrorists who wage a war against India are perceived by other states as a threat too.



Should we Defeat or Contain the ISIS?

ISIS has created a spectacle of violence on the basis of legitimization by religious texts to radicalize people. Despite knowing that there is no balance of power between the military strength of ISIS and its adversaries, it still uses publicity tools and strategic weapons to terrorize enemy states. The goal of ISIS is to create hegemony of terror using the strategic concepts of core and periphery. The core goal is to establish a caliphate while the periphery is the rest of the world. ISIS feels that if it cannot expand the core (that is establish a caliphate), it will attack the periphery (that is attack the countries in the world). This is a new tactic in global jihad and is very different from the jihad propagated by Al Qaeda. Al Qaeda waged an asymmetric warfare with mercy of other states (like Taliban in Afghanistan) on rest of the world without establishing a proto-state of its own. On the other hand, ISIS has established a proto-state in areas from where they carry out the attack on the periphery. The major issue in the fight against the ISIS is that the states are concerned about tackling the periphery and not the core. For Syria, the goal of Assad regime is to ensure the survival of Syria than defeat ISIS. For the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, their goal is to prevent the ISIS to capture their territories. For Iraqi army, the goal is to protect the Shia lands in Iraq. Saudi Arabia and Turkey don't wish to see ISIS expand further as they feel that ISIS has weakened the strategic depth of Shia Iranians. Thus, the real question is that, is the world really serious about defeating ISIS or the aim is to only contain ISIS within own territorial limits.

CRISIS IN YEMEN

Yemen is an Islamic nation with 65% Sunni and 35% Shia population. It is a fertile territory which also receives adequate rainfall due to its mountainous terrain. The

population of Yemen is relatively poor as the natural resources of Yemen are declining. Historically, Yemen had a Zaydi Mutawakhallite kingdom from 1918 to 1962 which ended with the reign of Mohammad-al-Badr. The conflict in Yemen is primarily between Houthis and Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Houthi's belonged to a Shia sect called Zaydis and were organised as the Jund Ansar Allah.

The problem in Yemen began for the first time in 2004 when Hussein Badr-al-Houthi began an uprising against the Ali Abdullah Saleh government in Yemen. The root cause of the uprising was the demand by Houthi for more autonomy with an aim to protect Houthi Shias from cultural invasion by Sunni Muslims. This conflict lasted from 2004 to 2010. In 2011, as the Arab Spring gripped the entire Arab World, the Houthis participated against the Saleh government, which was being led by Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi as a de facto head. In 2012, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi came to power. In February 2014, National Dialogue conference happened in Yemen. In the conference, Houthis also participated. The conference spoke about dividing Yemen into a federation of six regions. The Houthis opposed the idea, saying that with the forming of such a federation, violence shall begin all over again. Houthis, being Shias, receive support from Iran and at present, control Northern Yemen and the capital Sana. In the southern part of Yemen, since 2007, there has been a secessionist movement called al-Hirak or South Yemen movement which also poses threat to Yemen's sovereignty. In the south-east part of Yemen, Al-Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula and Ansar-al-Sharia are active as Sunni extremists. As there are Indians in Yemen, the Indian government has stationed naval ships—INS—Sumitra, INS—Mumbai and INS—Tarkash in on standby for any immediate evacuation in future. The conflict, at the regional level, can be perceived through the prism of the Shia—Sunni axis, with groups supported by both by Iran and Saudi Arabia.



TURKEY COUP, 2016

The Turkish Coup in 2016 has become a new flashpoint in the ongoing crises in the Middle East. The issue revolves around a US-based Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen who heads a well organised movement in Turkey called Hizmate. Hizmate means service, and the organization runs a lot of schools and hospitals in Turkey and outside Turkey. Gulen is also a spiritual leader who preaches a liberal form of cultural Islam. The ultimate goal of Gulen is unclear but the movement primarily focuses on education. Gulen has a lot of followers in Turkey, including his hardcore loyalists deep within Turkish administration, police and intelligence. In the 1980s, when there was a coup in Turkey, the army had blamed Gulen for plotting for an Islamic dictatorial government. In 2000, the Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit indicted Gulen for the crime to undermine the core Turkish

state feature of secularism and charged him for trying to install an Islamic dictator in Turkey. In 1999, Gulen went to the US for medical reasons and since then has stayed in the US, living in exile in Pennsylvania today. Gulen was initially a supporter of Erdogan and his AKP party, but as Erdogan began to gain power, by 2010–11, his disagreements with Gulen began over power struggle. Problems began when pro-Gulen police and judiciary and members of AKP party were locked into a power tussle. The issue erupted when investigations in Turkish intelligence agency pitted officials who were pro-Erdogan in the intelligence agency against the pro-Gulen police and prosecutors. In 2013, the prosecutors of Istanbul Zekeriya Oz (a pro-Gulen official) raided three ministers and their sons belonging to the AKP party and also raided some bureaucrats. The raid opened up the ‘gold for oil’ transaction scandal between Turkey and Iran. Since January 2014, Erdogan and the AKP party began to perceive Gulen as an enemy of Turkey and in May, 2016, branded his organisation as a terrorist group. In 2016 July, there was a coup in Turkey and Erdogan blamed Gulen for the coup. He also said that there is a strong US–Israel nexus that is trying to destabilise Turkey.



QATAR CRISIS

In June 2017, Middle Eastern states namely Bahrain, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Libya, Maldives and Yemen decided to suspend diplomatic, air and sea links with Qatar. The states assert that Qatar financially supports Muslim Brotherhood (MB), which is perceived by them as an organization that threatens the stability of the Middle East. The states also allege that Qatar has allowed Al Jazeera, a TV channel, to telecast anti-Saudi Arabia and anti-Egypt programmes. However the root cause of the crisis lies in sectarian fissures of the Middle East. The above states believe that the foreign policy of Qatar is deeply influenced by Shia Iran than by Sunni GCC states, thereby strengthening the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide. The suspension of diplomatic ties has pushed up prices of concrete and steel. Qatar is using the construction material in a full swing as it is completing projects to host the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Qatar is connected to Saudi Arabia through a small sliver of land along the Arabian Peninsula and uses the land route to import around 40% of its food from Saudi Arabia. The diplomatic standoff has enhanced food security concerns for Qatar causing inflationary spikes in the economy. There are more than 6,00,000 Indians in Qatar working as expats in different positions. The Indians in Qatar constitute the largest expat groups. The states that have imposed the diplomatic cutoff with Qatar have expelled the nationals of Qatar working in their territories. Qatar also has responded by expelling the nationals of those states. This, in the short run, has created job opportunities for Indians in Qatar.

CRUX OF THE ENTIRE MIDDLE EAST IN DIAGRAMS

