

14. MIDDLE EAST PROBLEM

Background

- Since Israel's creation in 1948, the Arab-Israeli problem has almost been synonymous with the Middle East problem. The Jewish determination to establish a sanctuary after the world callously left them their fate during World War II struggled against the Arab determination to destroy what they saw as the cancer of Western imperialism reasserting itself via the state of Israel. When God gives the same land to two different people, compromise is inherently difficult
- However, the Sunni-Shia struggle that dates almost from the beginning of Islam seems only to have ripened with time and now has replaced the Israeli-Palestinian struggle as the Number One problem in the fractions Middle East. Sunni-Shia conflict has erupted and is challenging modern state borders in the name of each Islamic group's vision of what the Islamic umma (community) should be.
- The U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime in Iraq in 2003 and establishment of a Shia-ruled Iraq is probably the single-most important factor that has ignited the current Sunni-Shia conflict. This seminal event laid down the gauntlet to the Sunni majority that the long feared and despised Shia minority was now rising to challenge for Islam's leadership, a process that the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's Shia revolution in Iran in 1979 commenced.
- Although the Sunnis probably constitute 85 per cent and the Shia only 15 percent of Islam's population, there are roughly as many Shias as there are Sunnis in the Islamic heartland that runs from Lebanon to Pakistan. In addition, the Shia sit on top of some of the richest oil fields in the region, and around the economically and geostrategically sensitive rim of the Persian (Arabic) Gulf number as much as 80 percent of the population. All this might not mean much if it were not for the age-old antagonism the two Islamic groups hold for each other.
- Of course, this is not to deny that the newly empowered Kurds have also become yet another major factor in the Middle East equation. The U.S. destruction of Saddam Hussein also allowed the Iraqi Kurds to become virtually independent as the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), the first proto-Kurdish state in modern times and a powerful model for other Kurds in Turkey, Syria, and even Iran. Thus there is a formidable by its surrounding enemies in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria no longer united in opposition as in the past they always were. Indeed, there is now a virtual Turkish-KRG alliance fueled by Turkey's need for Kurdish oil and facilitated by a common Sunni bond between Turkey and the Kurds opposed to now Shia-dominated Iraq.
- 1. A halt to the construction of Israeli settlements on land beyond the 1967 borders.
- 2. Negotiated borders based on the 1967 boundaries.
- 3. Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine.
- 4. The release of all Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, including those convicted of acts of terror.
- 5. The recognition of a right of return for all Palestinians living in the diaspora.
- 6. A series of smaller, specific issues, such as permission to build an airport in the Ramallah district and the right to issue visas as part of a tourism initiative.
- All of this is not to deny the continuing importance of Middle Eastern oil and the struggles it induces. In addition, the problems of the Arab Spring demands for grass roots democracy and economic fairness for the common Arab population has now segued into a military reaction in states such as Egypt, while anarchy bids fair to follow Qaddafi's demise in Libya. The Iranian nuclear program and the fear it arouses in the West as well as the sudden instability in Turkey, first with the Gezi demonstrations and now the swirling corruption charges against the Erdogan AKP government

that has been in power since November 2002 constitute yet more problems for the Middle East. Finally the Al-Qaeda terrorism problem, far from diminishing with the death of Osama bin-Laden, has suddenly metastasized in Iraq and even more in Syria. Despite all these major problems and their resulting struggles, the renewed Sunni- Shia struggle has now clearly become the new Number One problem in the Middle East and probably helps explain more of that region's problems and wars than any other factor.

ISRAELI DEMAND

1. Sovereignty over Jerusalem, including the Old City.
2. Negotiated borders based on the 1967 boundaries, with land swaps taking into account the major West Bank settlement blocs
3. Recognition of Israel as a Jewish state.
4. A demilitarized State of Palestine.
5. Right of return for Palestinian refugees only to Palestine, not to Israel.
6. An assortment of other smaller issues, such as no unilateral moves vis-a-vis international organizations.

Israeli-Palestinian peace talks: What does each side want?

The Israeli government denies that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has "ceded to" a principal Palestinian demand that negotiations start on the basis of the 1967 borders. In the Middle East war of 1967, Israel captured the West Bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. Palestinian officials will decide whether or not to accept Kerry's offer of renewed peace talks with the Israelis. Among the demands Kerry is fielding for fresh negotiations between the two sides:

2013-14 Israeli-Palestinian peace talks

Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians began on July 29, 2013 following an attempt by United States Secretary of State John Kerry to restart the peace process. The negotiations were scheduled to last up to nine months to reach a final status to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict by mid-2014. They started in Washington, DC and will then move to the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and then to Hebron.

Pre-peace talk compromises

Palestine offered to put on hold international recognition as a state while Israel offered the release of 104 Palestinian prisoners, all of whom have been in Israeli jails since before the 1993 Oslo I Accord. Earlier Israel had already promised to release these same 104 Palestinians, back in 1999 under the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, but never did. According to the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee Report. Israel's decision not to release the prisoners at the time was due to significantly increased violence against Israel by their partner in the memorandum, the PLO. leading up to the Second Intifada.

Middle East peace talks face new challenge

A surprise decision by President Mahmoud Abbas to sign more than a dozen international conventions that could give Palestinians greater leverage against Israel left the United States struggling to put peace talks back on track. Palestinian frustration deepened by Israel's failure to carry out a pledged release of several dozen Palestinian prisoners under the terms of a previous accord. The Palestinians handed over to U.N. representative and other diplomats applications Abbas signed to join 15 international conventions. They include the Geneva Conventions, the key text of international law on the conduct of war and occupation. The developments further complicated efforts by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to piece together a three-way deal to push the faltering negotiations past an April 29, 2014 deadline into 2015. The talks were already in trouble over the issues of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, land captured by Israel in the 1967 Middle East War and Palestinian opposition to Netanyahu's demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state.

Palestinians hope Abbas's move will give them a stronger basis to appeal to the International Criminal Court and eventually lodge formal complaints against Israel for its continued occupation of territory seized in 1967, lands they see as vital to an independent state. Most countries deem the Israeli settlements as illegal. The conventions signed by Abbas were mostly sets of international standards on social and rights issues, such as a conventions against discrimination against women

and for the rights of disabled people as well as the Geneva Conventions.

The Arab League has called an emergency meeting of foreign ministers for April 9, 2014, on the floundering US- brokered peace talks between Israel and the Palestinian. The meeting will discuss Israel's refusal to release Palestinian prisoners, a key sticking point in the negotiations.

2011 Arab Uprisings

The term "Arab Spring" was popularized by the Western media in early 2011, when the successful uprising in Tunisia against former leader Zine El Abidine Ben Ali emboldened similar anti-government protests in most Arab countries. The term was a reference to the turmoil in Eastern Europe in 1989, when seemingly impregnable Communist regimes began falling down under pressure from mass popular protests in a domino effect. In a short period of time, most countries in the former Communist bloc adopted democratic political systems with a market economy.

But the events in the Middle East went in a less straightforward direction. Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen entered an uncertain transition period, Syria and Libya were drawn into a civil conflict, while the wealthy monarchies in the Persian Gulf remained largely unshaken by the events. The use of the term the "Arab Spring" has since been criticized for being inaccurate and simplistic.

Aim of Arab Spring

The protest movement of 2011 was at its core an expression of deep-seated resentment at the ageing Arab dictatorships, anger at the brutality of the security apparatus, unemployment, rising prices, and corruption that followed the privatization of state assets in some countries.

Protesters in monarchies like Jordan and Morocco wanted to reform the systems under the current rulers, some calling for an immediate transition to constitutional monarchy, others content with gradual reform. People in republican regimes like Egypt and Tunisia wanted to overthrow the president, but other than fleeting hopes they had little idea on what to do next. And beyond calls for greater social justice there was no magic wand for the economy. Leftist groups and unions wanted higher wages and a reversal of past privatization deals; others

wanted liberal reforms to make more room for the private sector. Some hardliner Islamists were more concerned with OTiorcmg.'strict religious norms. All political parties promised more jobs but none came close to developing a program with concrete economic policies.

The Root Causes of Arab Spring

At the end of 2010 and the beginning of the 2011, a series of demonstrations and protests began to rise in the Arab world. These protests have become known as the "Arab Spring" or, as someone else called it, the "Arab awakening". The Tunisian revolution that took place in the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi on 18 December 2010 in protest of police corruption and ill treatment has shaken authoritarian leaders across the Arab world in areas such as Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain. The Arab world was living a very difficult economic and social situation as in Europe in 1848. Poverty, rising food prices, inflation, human rights violation, and high unemployment were the main phenomena the Arabs were facing. In addition there was much corruption of Arab leaders as shown by some of the WikiLeaks diplomatic cables. The main reasons of the Arab revolts are not limited to internal causes, so it is important to analyze the international causes such as the failure of the war on terror, the Iraqi war and the U.S.A - European strategy of the imported democracy. Another possible reason could be the failure of the peace process in the Israeli- Arabic conflict.

1. The internal causes:

- (a) **Income Gap:** Throughout history, any revolution is a result of many events that completely change the nature of the society and its political life. Egypt has had a massive income gap throughout Mubarak's control, which is clearly the root cause of the original uprising. One half of Egyptians live on \$2/day or less. The average per-capita income in the country is just \$6,200.
- (b) **Unemployment:** Unemployment in the Arab region is also a major source of economic insecurity and for destabilization of any political system. The percentage of young unemployment was very high and the Arab countries in the region have not been able to

change this situation and create new jobs, especially after the world financial crises.

- (c) **Corruptions and lack of Political and Human Right:** Political and human rights are fundamental for any society and Arab region suffers from bad political systems based on corruption, state of emergency laws, the lack of free elections and freedom of speech and religious fundamentalism.

Egypt was no exception to this corruption and lack of political freedom. After the 1967 "Six Day War", for example, the emergency law number 162 of 1958 was issued. This law limited the freedom and gave greater powers to the police, suspended certain constitutional rights in the name of security, allowed the state to detain individuals and censor and close newspapers more easily and allowed authorities to try civilians in front of military and security courts under certain circumstances. Many events outside of Egypt had an impact on democracy and political freedom, such as 9/11 attack in the U.S.A. This event and the ongoing "War on Terrorism" have been used as an excuse to increase the violation of the human rights and facilitated the role of the military court.

After all these internal causes of the Arab revolt, it is important to not underestimate the role of the technology and the social network (Facebook, Twitter) that facilitated the communication between the protesters. For this reason, the governments in Egypt and Tunisia shut down the Internet during the last protest against Mubarak and Ben Ali, in order to limit communication between protest groups.

2. The international causes:

The geographic position of many Arab states protagonist of the "Arab Spring" lead to analyze the International causes of these revolts. Egypt is the biggest Arab state and it is the first state that signed a peace accord with Israel. At the same time Cairo during Mubarak regime enjoyed a solid alliance with the United States in addition to the high influence on Palestinian parties. To understand 25 January revolution in Egypt there is a need to focus on the relations between Israel and Egypt before the revolution. Egypt became a strategic ally of Israel, as well as Israel's primary supplier of energy. Egypt has also ensured Israel's stability and security. Egyptians have always refused the Camp David

peace agreement, and since the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, calls have grown in Egypt for ending the 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

The failure of the peace process between Palestinian and Israeli, the last aggression against Gaza on 2009 and against Lebanon on 2006 and the Lebanese victory against Israel, gave more reasons and courage to the Egyptians and Tunisian to demonstrate against their regime. After the resignation of Ben Ali in Tunisia and Mubarak in Egypt, much has occurred. Manifestations against governments have increased in number, sectarian clashes in Egypt have multiplied, and elections have been held in both countries amid an Islamic elite political rule. It is perhaps too soon to adjudicate the work of the new political elite in both countries. However one thing is clear: The Arab people have changed and they will not accept the undemocratic politics of their countries' past. Should they be forced to, they will revolt again to protect their rights and claims.

Impact of the Arab Spring

The impact of the Arab Spring concerns protests or by the way attempts to organize, growing protest movements that were inspired by or similar to the Arab Spring in the Arab-majority states of North Africa and the Middle East. These demonstrations and protest efforts have all been critical of the government in their respective countries, though they have ranged from calls for the incumbent government to make certain policy changes to attempts to bring down the current political system in its entirety. In some countries protests have become large or widespread enough to effect change at the national level, as in Armenia, while in others such as Djibouti, were swiftly suppressed. Protests considered to be inspired by the Arab Spring have taken place on every inhabited continent, with varying degrees of success and prominence. In 2011, the subsidiary "Occupy" and Indignants movements inspired protests in 950 cities in 82 countries.

Background

A number of popular protests by citizens against their governments occurred in nations around the world, both following and concurrently with the Arab Spring and many of these were reported to have been inspired by events in the Arab World starting at the end of 2010, creating a network of diffusion. Some potentially

vulnerable states that have not yet seen such protests have taken a variety of preemptive measures to avoid such displays occurring in their own countries: some of these states and others have experienced political fallout as a result of their own governmental actions and reactions to events which their own citizens are seeing reported from abroad.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Djibouti

The demonstrations began when about three hundred people protested peacefully against President Ismail Omar Guelleh in Djibouti City, urging him to not run for another term: the protesters further asked for more liberty as well as for political and social reform. The protest leaders were arrested and after they failed to turn up on, opposition leader Bourhan Mohammed Ali stated he feared the protests had lost momentum. The last protest was planned, but security forces stopped the protest and detained 4 opposition leaders. No protests or planned protests have occurred since.

Ivory Coast

In Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), peace activist Aya Virginie Toure organized thousands of women in numerous peaceful protests across the country. They were met by security forces with tanks that opened fire. She called for military intervention to remove Laurent Gbagbo from power. Nigerian Foreign Minister Henry Odein Ajumogobia accused the international community of "contradictions" by imposing a no-fly zone over Libya and focusing on the civil war in Libya, but failing to take action to protect civilians in the Ivory Coast. Oil production in Libya is seen as a more strategic commodity than cocoa in the Ivory Coast, which influenced the international response to the turmoil facing both countries.

Gabon

A large number of protesters protested since opposition leader Andre Mba Obame declared himself president and urged people to take inspiration from Tunisia's uprising. Obame subsequently hid out in the local United Nations Development Programme office, while President Bongo shut down TV stations and allegedly kidnapped members of the opposition. The UN is accusing Gabon's police of invading and beating

students within the university. Although initial protests overwhelmingly consisted of opposition loyalists, the unrest appears to be developing into a wider social conflict, with students leading the protests.

Mali

A Tuareg rebellion in early 2012 that forced the armed forces of Mali, a West African country with significant holdings in the Sahara, to withdraw south of the line the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) claimed as the Tuareg homeland's southwestern frontier. The conflict was exacerbated by a coup d'etat by the military that forced President Amadou Toumani Toure from power and briefly installed a junta in Bamako, the capital. With government forces pushed to Mopti and southward by the MNLA and other armed groups, including Ansar Dine and the Movement for Oneness and Jihad in West Africa, the MNLA's secretary general, Bilal Ag Acherif, declared Azawad an independent state on 6 April 2012.

Ansar Dine has called for sharia law throughout all of Mali, not just Azawad. The Azawadi declaration of independence has also faced significant pushback from the international community, with no state or international body recognising the de facto state and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) mulling options for an international military intervention against the rebels. The rebellion and coup have been described as "fallout" from the Arab Spring, as the success of the Tuareg rebellion where it had failed in previous efforts throughout the 20th century has been attributed largely to heavy weaponry carted out of Libya by Tuareg fighters on either side of the Libyan civil war in 2011.

Uganda

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was declared the winner of Uganda's 2011 general election on 11 February amidst opposition denunciations. Kizza Besigye, the chairman of the opposition coalition, finished second with 26.01% of the vote. Besigye warned that Uganda was ripe for an Egypt-style revolt after Museveni's more than two decades in power. The protesters failed to amass in large numbers because, a failure to tally its own results through its own SMS system was disrupted by the government, who also

arrested hundreds of opposing field. Besigye'e did not believe his own claim of sparking a revolution.

Zimbabwe

Munyaradzi Gwisai, a former opposition member of parliament; organised a meeting to discuss the uprisings in North Africa. He alone with 45 others, were arrested and allegedly tortured and face a charge of treason that carries the death penalty. Many Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa, who number in the hundreds of thousands, are free to talk of the events. However, past violence in elections and many of the youth and educated middle classes having fled the country there were questions about the pool of protesters to carry out such actions.

Was Arab Spring a Success or Failure?

Arab Spring was a failure only if one expected that decades of authoritarian regimes could be easily reversed and replaced with stable democratic systems across the region. It has also disappointed those hoping that the removal of corrupt rulers would translate into an instant improvement in living standards. Chronic instability in countries undergoing political transitions has put additional strain on struggling local economies, and deep divisions have emerged between the Islamists and secular Arabs.

But rather than a single event, it's probably more useful to define the 2011 uprisings as a catalyst for long-term change whose final outcome is yet to be seen. The main legacy of the Arab Spring is in smashing the myth of Arabs' political passivity and the perceived invincibility of arrogant ruling elites. Even in countries that avoided mass unrest, the governments take the quiescence of the people at their own peril.