

April 2020

Siasat Al-Insaf

The Middle Eastern Review

The Russia India Strategic Partnership

A talk by the Charge d'Affairs of Russia in India

Worlds Apart

Selective Modernization in Dubai

Oil Games

Hypocrisy and the Middle East



The Middle Eastern review



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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR



ABOUT THE CENTER

The Centre for Middle East studies was launched at the initiative of Professor (Dr) Abdul Fattah Ammourah, vice Dean, school of International Affairs, O.P Jindal Global University in 2016 with the objectives of fostering interdisciplinary research on Middle East Studies in collaboration with regional academics, experts and practitioners; conducting research and analysis on bilateral relations between India and the Middle East to explore synergies and address mutual long-standing economic, political and social challenges; supporting a balanced Middle Eastern research studies from various perspectives to widen access to first-hand knowledge of the Middle East; developing materials and resources for educators and the wider public readership; contributing to broad dissemination of research results and information regarding the Middle East; and expanding the network of institutional partnerships with universities in the Middle East, opening opportunities for student and faculty exchange.

Issues in the Middle East are dynamic and fast changing. There are new stakeholders to the conflict and conflict management almost on a monthly basis. Due to this fact and the multiple perspectives in the media on this subject matter, arriving at a consensus would need arguing that the ground reality of the Middle East is chaotic and sometimes misleading.

Since much of the media and academic space on the Middle East is occupied by Western schools of thoughts, we attempt at the Centre for Middle East to de-clutter this space and crowd in opinions of scholars, academicians, media, politicians, diplomats and citizens from the Middle East, emerging nations and the world at large, to counterbalance the scale of knowledge and information that reside in academic- research. process.

We would like to involve students who are interested in studying about how crucial,

geo-strategically and geo-economically important the Middle East is for the world. We believe that any study, seminar, workshops, debates or discussions must lead to adding value to the ongoing search for peace in the Middle East. Our belief is based on the fact that at the end of the day, it is the lives of the people involved in conflict that matters and their betterment is what we target at. Finally, it is student-led and student- driven initiative to foster knowledge- based centre.

RATIONALIZING THE IRRATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Trajectories of Diplomacy and sustainable development, Governance, state-building, Foreign policy, and international relations to address the issues of war and peace in the Middle East, have always been stumbled by external actors, be they super powers, free riders or local, driving the Middle East into a state of unrest, leaving behind a long series of dire social, political, economic and humanitarian impacts on the people, and threats to world peace and security.

Historiography and current evidence reflect the highly volatile and chronic conflicts and struggle for and in the Middle East; making it the focus of world powers' self-centric attention and interests, driven by egoistic motives that are tarnished by three curses: a) natural resources of oil and gas, b) geography of geostrategic location, and c) haphazard imposition of diverse culture, generating interstate and intrastate conflicts and wars.

A purview of the conflict's phases; beginning with its grass roots; a) Palestinian cause-the core issue, b) the Arab-Israeli conflict, c) expansion and diversification of the conflict due to the end of cold war and rise of the U. S hegemon state, with its aggressive "creative chaos" foreign policy whose currency is sectarianism, ethno-religious, interfaith conflicts, and usage

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of terrorism as instrument for strategy implementation with the aim to erode state sovereignty, change of incumbent leaders who resist, and reshape the politics of the Middle East, would unravel the foundations of such a policy with the aim to rationalize the irrational and demonize the rational, crash resistance, and plow through regional and international political situation by all means.

To understand the Middle East current events; wars and prospects of peace, we need to analyse the inter-Arab relationships, the European and US foreign policy, the relations with the Gulf Co-operation Council, the Arab Countries in the immediate neighbourhood and beyond, as well as with Turkey, Iran, Russian Federation, China, India and their implications for Cooperation. One should not forget the Palestinian question- the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the richness of the region with energy resources and its important Geo-strategic position as vital routes for transporting oil and gas., and controlling people's options. To reflect on such policy, it is important to ponder over on what Winston Churchill and Henry Kissinger respectively drew their vision of the Middle East in terms of winning the next wars, and controlling Nations; "He who controls oil will win the next war" and "He who controls oil and people, controls nations". All this constitutes the axis of struggles for and in the Middle East.

We also need to critically project and analyse the developments of the world political systems effecting regional sub-systems, from World War one up to date, and their impacts on the region. Our analysis aims to produce, through the medium of CMES, knowledge-based posture that is more context-specific within and about the Arab region and far beyond, and delve

“He who controls oil will win the next war” and “He who controls oil and people, controls nations”

deeply into the causes of interstate and intrastate wars in the region; the most serious is the present on-going proxy wars, that reside on usage of terrorism as instruments for aggression, invasion and conquests, under the guise of the noble and undeniable principles of Democracy and protection of human rights.

Against this backdrop, diplomacy as a peaceful - dialogue-based problem- solving mechanism to establish the just and comprehensive peace is losing grounds, stemming from diverse reasons ranging from domestic to regional and international motives, generated from imbalance of powers in the current world order, and clash of world powers strategic

interests to dominate this vital and volatile region. Therefore, we need to further strive to navigate in a troubled region of diverse social, cultural, economic and political nature, to sail in rough winds and storms that never subside.

Indeed, the lock and the key for understanding the broader or smaller Middle East wars, peace and diplomacy, rest in the hands of world powers struggle and tussle, nationalist forces resistance to the U.S hegemonic policy to control the world, and leading to either accomplishment of the US hegemony over the world resources, which entails global wars in the age of the theory of Mutual Assured Destruction, “MAD” theory, or the rule of international law, and enforcement of interdependence theory to save our planet from total destruction and the end of Man, the later would help the international community face the rising challenges of terrorism, climate change and spread of epidemic diseases; the last of which is the coronavirus that swept the world with speed of lighting. As Dr Paul Salem points out in his foreword to Dr Habib's book *contending theories in International Relations*, “Until we can make serious progress in understanding this world, comprehending the rules by which it works, and developing principles within which to organize our coexistence, we will live in mortal peril. And if today's world continues, unthinkingly, along the path it is now on, it is probable that the human species, after hundreds of thousands of years of evolution, will extinguish itself.”.

Let's have insightful search for creative ideas and balanced research that would generate a deep dialogue to build on for a creative vision for a just and comprehensive peace, encapsulating international law, sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation states. Our vision is how to preserve the Arab East- the Middle East- which lies at the centre of the world, and how to maintain the Arab identity and preserve the distinctive features of the humanity of man in co-existence, away from double standards and without ignoring the elephant in the room.

Dr. Abdul Fattah Ammourah

Director, Center for Middle East Studies
Former Deputy Foreign Minister of Syria



PATH FROM A CIVILISATION TO A CATAclySM AND BEYOND

The Middle Eastern region has come a long way from spearheading the oriental civilizational rhetoric to a perpetual catastrophe of proxy wars and ethnic violence. Contemporary security studies view it as a complex inherent model of regional conflict that ticks off all possibilities of ethnic violence, international involvement, social groups, non-state actors, sectarian violence and economic scuffle. Multiplicity of identities and an oil rich economy makes for a combustive politico-economic possibility.

'Siasat-al-Insaf', the 'Politics of Justice' is the pioneering journal issue for the Centre of Middle East Studies. Justice imbibes the sole essence of permanence in all the dislodging socio-political and economic contentions that thunder across the region. By evaluating facts, justice and politics in the Middle East seem worlds apart however, perspectives of articles in this journal aim to bridge that very gap between the two.

Much has been scribed about the Middle East and its role on global energy security. However, this journal issue brings forth certain unsought issues of strategic maritime assets, future of age-old wars like the Yemini conflict and the international shift in clout towards the resurgence of Russia in the Middle East.

With a global decline in the United States Liberal Order, the Middle East is scribing its own path towards a future dominated by the constructivist argument of identity politics, which had been etched in the political history of the Middle East for aeons and continues to shape its political contours even now.

While evaluating the future in the Middle East it is imperative to study the unique features that this region faces in terms of political evolution as compared to other regions of the world. Firstly, the oil-led energy politics of the region is reaching a saturation point in terms of its global leveraging policy. Gone are the days of Oil Diplomacy to leverage the West into succumbing to the concessions of Arabic demands. The emerging bisectional rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabi has fissured the demands of the Arabic states by embroiling the region in internal squabbles. The lack of a united front has served as a multiplier of conflicts and players accentuating the violence.

Economically, the states of the Middle East are embroiled in conflict economy due to their lack of de-hyphenation of political rivalries from economic gains. The poorest of nations like Yemen have been enmeshed in civil wars as a proxy of the new cold war for years. This has denied the region the well-deserved

economic development as all the received funds have gone into the pockets of the revolutionaries. This is what Paul Collins defines as the 'Conflict Trap' wherein underdeveloped economies are entangled in conflict and their economic backwardness becomes both, the cause and consequence of their regional conflicts.

Another sui-generis of Middle Eastern politics is the heavy involvement of proxy non-state actors and their political leverage over states and political economy in the region. After the recent US sanctions under the "maximum pressure" policy against Iran's nuclear enrichment Iranian economy has taken a steep fall from rising unemployment to devaluation of currency to depletion of currency reserves, Iran's hands seem tied in bankruptcy. Despite all these restrictions Iran hasn't faltered on its economic support to terrorist organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah. This process largely defines Mearsheimer's assumption of states being rational actors and acting for self-interests through a cost-benefit analysis. The cost of propping up these non-state actors is far more than the concrete economic, military or political benefits received by Iran. Then why does it carry on with this hardline policy of economic starvation of the self by propping up non-state actors against Saudi Arabi in countries as geopolitical far as

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Lebanon? The constructivist theory makes complete sense of this action by explaining the Social Being. Iran does this because these non-state actors allow Iran to export its struggle and thereby define its identity beyond its borders. The support to these non-state actors provides Iran with an organisational mechanism to “socialize” its identity in the world.

According to constructivist theorists, “Self becomes social by acquiring an institutional identity.” The United States did so by exporting the Liberal International World Order through institutions such as the North Atlantic Treaty organization, The Bretton Woods System or the G20. Or when China tries to institutionalize its revisionist identity through the historical silk route reimagines as the Belt and Road Initiative. All these states, though very different in their nature of politics, foster the same goals of exporting their identity through social or economic institutions. The only way Iran can stay in the game or rally against the United States or Saudi Arabia is by the options given to it by its non-state actors in proxy wars and giving up this battle would mean surrendering its identity.

The above-mentioned factors clarify that the nature of conflict in the Middle East is not exclusively on the basis of realist imaginations of power maximization and security dilemmas. Identity and ethnic violence have adopted political

picked model of Ideational Security Dilemma in the region. It’s a mishmash of opposing identities striving for domination with each having different models of the same achievement. Similarly, adhering to Stephen Walt’s account of Defensive Realism, the security dilemma of ideological mobilization is countered through ideational balancing by neighbouring states and because the nature of security dilemma is not militaristic, the countering measures take alternative forms such as identity-building seeking to increase the power ratios of capabilities between opposing identities. This process happened on the lines of creation of Shiite and Sunni camps in the Middle East. Wherein Saudi Arabia and Iran have taken opposing sides on respective religious blocs and curated opposing identities in the region. This constructed identity is the end whereas militaristic and cultural thirst for hegemony is a means to legitimize and expand that identity in the world.

Other parts of the region like Libya, Iraq seem like regimes dwindling into populist demands. The back-lash against corrupt regimes and lack of economic reforms seems to be gripping much of the MENA region into widespread protests owing to which many feel an Arab Spring 2.0 is on the horizon.

Therefore, the future of the region is focused on issues of political rebuilding and humanitarian

and physical wellbeing of the region are highly undervalued. Our journal issue brings a broad range of perspectives to report the rising importance of sociological issues of identity, gender, mental health and refugee safety, something that will be the basis for reconstructing the new Middle East.

Simultaneously, the notion of a new Middle Eastern regional order will revolve around the Iran-Saudi axis of ideational bi-polarity. The emerging pluralistic populist regimes as well as geo-strategic importance will define the identity of the region through the coming years vis-à-vis the international lobbying by United States, Russia and China. When one examines these developments, the questions regarding the future of the balance of power in this region comes to the forth. What would a post-conflict Middle East look like? Who would be the dominant International player in the continent?

This issue of ‘*Siasat-al-Insaf*’ brings to you answers to some of the questions around the recent developments in the Middle East along with a wide scope for the readers to develop an individual opinion on the ideas proposed by the writers.



reconstruction. Socially, means to achieve ends of ideational development, refugee crisis, women hegemony, thereby curating a hand- development and topics like mental

Editorial

Happy Reading!

**Editor-in-Chief,
Tamanna Dahiya.**

Mr Roman Babushkin, Charge d'Affairs of Russia in India

Talk on the evolving Indo-Russian relationship for the students of O.P. Jindal Global University on 14th October, 2019.

The Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia is a testimony of the advanced level of the bilateral relations. It is unique, confiding and mutually beneficial by nature, encompassing all possible areas of cooperation. This relationship is based on similar civilizational values, time-tested friendship, mutual understanding, trust, common interests and proximity of approaches to the fundamental issues of development and economic progress.

India-Russia ties have successfully coped with the turbulent realities of the contemporary world. They have never been and will not be susceptible to outside influence. Development of the entire gamut of India-Russia relations is a foreign policy priority for both countries. That explains why our Leaders, who also enjoy strong personal chemistry, meet each other several times per year – for annual bilateral summits as well as on the sidelines of major international events such as G20, BRICS, SCO, EAS, etc.

Summit in Vladivostok

The XX jubilee Russia-India Summit on 4-5 September in Vladivostok is a remarkable development in the history of cooperation between our two great and friendly countries since we have opened up a new page in our ties with focus on complementarity and synergy of development strategies.

Russian Interaction

THE RUSSIA INDIA STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP



Indeed, along with traditional advanced areas of interaction such as energy, science and technology, military and technical partnership, extensive people-to-people contacts we are moving towards further expansion of our multifaceted relations by enhancing cooperation in the Russian Far East. Even a brief analysis helps to conclude that potentially this is a game changing move.

First, we are concentrating on utilizing mutually beneficial opportunities originating from the Far-Eastern Region, which is extremely rich in natural resources and industrial capacities. The Russian Government is successfully implementing dedicated national

programmes ensuring maximum openness and economic and social integration of this region in the Asia-Pacific community. For this purpose, favourable conditions such as preferential tax regimes and various government support measures have been introduced in order to ensure very attractive business and investment climate there. As an outcome, we see the Far East economy has grown three to five times higher than the rest of the country – up to 23 percent in the recent five years!

So, our Leaders decided that our countries will get together to make the Far-Eastern dimension a new success story in the bilateral partnership. The unprecedented announcement by Prime Minister

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Modi to establish a USD 1 Billion dedicated credit line can be seen in this context.

Second, there is an obvious indication that the Russian Far-Eastern strategy and the Indian Act East Policy dedicated to both countries' extended outreach to the Asia and Pacific Region do complement each other very well!

As far as particular fields is concerned, we have already started working out in practical terms the possibilities of expansion of the Indian participation in the development of hydrocarbons fields in the region, including the Arctic offshore zones. Oil and natural gas reserves there are still under the process of estimation, however it is already clear that they would sustain for decades.

Moreover, the Leaders blessed us with a clear instruction to expand oil supplies from Russia to India, and the relevant discussion between the Governments and concerned companies is well under way with the aim to prepare relevant long term arrangements. That would help to further diversify the Russian export and the Indian import of hydrocarbons.

Along with cooking coal production, gas fuel, alternative energy, shipbuilding and diamond industry, we also expect solid developments in the area of regional infrastructure. The Indian partners are invited to participate in modernization of sea- and airports in the Far-Eastern Region.

Nuclear power cooperation

Nuclear power cooperation is another area, which we can be proud of. Russia as of now is the only foreign country in India being in practical terms involved in construction of nuclear reactors. The flagship project – the Russian-designed Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant based in Tamil Nadu, which is comprising of six blocks. The first two units are already

operational generating low-cost power for local customers. The third and fourth ones are under construction, with supply of their critical equipment being underway. Necessary preparations to start works related to units 5 and 6 are also already there.

“Our Leaders decided that our countries will get together to make the Far-Eastern dimension a new success story in the bilateral partnership”.

This project represents a unique and solid contribution to the Indian carbon-free energy security, employment and education of Indian specialists in many sophisticated areas. Importantly, there is also a great scope for localization and joint production as well as cooperation in third countries.

The Russian-Indian nuclear power cooperation is a candid indication of how deep is the level of mutual trust and complementarity. Based on our unique experience, both Sides look forward to continuing and expanding this partnership.

Trade and investments

No doubt that the progress in implementation of agreements in the above and other related directions would stimulate the expansion of the bilateral dialogue on other topics including mutual trade and investments.

Some important measures are in the pipeline to this end. Particularly, we are working on the re-establishment of the direct Vladivostok-Chennai maritime sea route, which would support to overcome a connectivity gap between the two countries. The work is going on to raise the effectiveness of the North-South Transport Corridor by introduction of

the high-tech solutions for shipment satellite surveillance and further synchronization and facilitation of customs regimes.

Moreover, we are investing a lot to an early conclusion of the Free Trade Area (FTA) between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and India, which will not only bring an impetus to further liberalization for trade but also stimulate overall economic exchanges among the member states of the future arrangement.

Remarkably, we tend to increasingly employ the potential of huge trade and investment fora held in both countries. Along with the Saint-Petersburg International Economic Forum and Vibrant Gujarat and some others, the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF) becomes an extremely important platform for the promotion of the structured bilateral dialogue as well as B2B and P2P exchanges. This year in September with the participation of Prime Minister Modi as the Chief Guest in the EEF, where also the India Lounge pavilion was established, we have witnessed numerous ministerial and CEO's engagements followed by new intended multi-million deals.

Russia and India are committed to ensure trade facilitation through the extended use of national currencies. In mutual payments, national currencies volumes have increased fivefold in recent years – up to 32% in 2018. Both our countries are deeply engaged in the dedicated financial dialogue in the framework of the bilateral Working Group on Banking and Financial Matters as well as in BRICS.

The measures being undertaken in this regard would definitely make our goal to achieve the turnover up to USD 30 bn by 2025. Importantly, we have signed the Action Strategy for advancing bilateral Trade-Economic and Investment Cooperation at the Vladivostok Summit, which would

further streamline our dedicated efforts.

Military and Technical Cooperation

Advanced level of the Russian-Indian military and technical cooperation historically constitute one of the pillars of the strategic partnership between the two countries. This is a two ways movement based on an extraordinary mutual interest proceeding from the fact that the Indian Army is equipped with about 70 percent of the hardware provided by the Soviet Union and Russia. In 2018, it was decided to establish a separate Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation – the next meeting will take place in November 2019 in Moscow to be attended by the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh.

Currently we are working in the framework of the 2011-2020 Long-Term Program for Military and Technical Cooperation and further expansion of interaction in this area, including by joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts, improving after-sales service system. Relevant Inter-Governmental Agreement was signed in Vladivostok, which is a considerable step ahead.

The overall amount of deals which we are implemented at the moment exceed USD 14.5 bn including sophisticated projects such as S-400 air defence systems’ supplies, joint production of Ka-226 multipurpose helicopters (140 units will be produced in India) and Kalashnikovs machine guns in India, supply and construction of advanced frigates. Both Sides are committed to timely realization of the contracts. Important component is that we are achieving a great scope of localization of production – up to 80 percent, with possibility for the jointly produced hardware to be supplied to third



countries.

Every year we expand our participation in the international defence fora such as Air India, MAKS Aero Expo as well as bilateral and multilateral military games ad various programmes of education and training.

We note growing mutual interest in further developing cooperation on military affairs. Our countries enjoy the largest in scale annual bilateral exercises “Indra” with combined participation of all three – Army, Navy and Air – services. Regular dialogue between Ministers of Defence and NSAs along with other concerned agencies and state-owned-corporations is also a sustained practice, including in the framework of the SCO.

International cooperation

We enjoy the level of international cooperation. Together, we are actively promoting a truly multipolar world with greater role of major developing countries and emerging economies in the global governance. At the same time, we are absolutely like-minded in terms of vital importance of strengthening of the United Nations and resolving global and regional challenges and conflicts collectively by political means according to the international law and the UN Charter. Subsequently, we are strongly against any unilateral

geopolitically motivated actions and illegal extraterritorial sanctions, which create nothing but instability, mistrust and unpredictability. This shared approach is vividly materialized in our growing coordination in various UN bodies, G20, BRICS, SCO, RIC, EAS, OPCW and other mechanisms.

The 75th anniversary of the United Nations which was established as a result of the Victory in World War II and the realization of the need for a collective mechanism to maintain international peace and security, is getting closer.

However, we have to admit – although World War III was prevented thanks to the UN, the number of conflicts on the planet has not declined. New most acute challenges emerged – international terrorism, drug trafficking, climate change, illegal migration, the growing gap between the rich and the poor. It is getting harder to address these and many other challenges, since the fragmentation of international community is only increasing.

Over the last quarter century, the world has been going through profound, fundamental transformations. Globalization has generated a major shift in the distribution of economic, financial and political power, shaping conditions for the emergence of a

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more just and more sustainable polycentric system founded on the principle of cooperation between states willing to work together to resolve common challenges.

Now we face a completely new global line-up where the real aggregate GDP calculated on the purchasing power parity basis of the so-called Emerging Seven exceeds the total GDP of what is known as the group of seven industrialized countries. The Emerging Seven are Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and Turkey. It is a striking testimony to the fact that the emerging polycentric system reflects the political, cultural and civilizational diversity of the world as we know it.

Such a world order is set to extend the benefits of globalization to all states, big and small, provided that the whole system is based on a uniform understanding and strict observance of international law, first and foremost the principles of the UN Charter, by all members of the international community. The UN should be upheld as the primary multilateral body governing relations between states.

Being member-states of BRICS, we believe it is absolutely possible to achieve the goal of a constructive polycentrism, where such principles as respect for sovereignty and legitimate national interests, non-interference in the domestic affairs prevail over zero-sum games, attempts at regime change, sanctions and other unilateral policies, which are often wrapped-up with the artificial concept of a rule-based world order.

We are working systematically to combine the efforts of states in the Eurasian region to put in place a modern security configuration that would create equal and broad opportunities for advancing trade, economic and investment cooperation and facilitate the

establishment of an integrated economic and political space.

Complex processes in the region and the world at large are the reason why security issues are high in the agenda of the SCO. The organization is stepping up its efforts to counter the terrorist threat. Joint measures to fight drug trafficking and trans-border crime are being developed and implemented. The SCO-backed Draft International Code of Conduct for Information Security enjoys increasing international support at the UN. Through its Contact Group, the SCO is actively involved in promoting national reconciliation and economic reconstruction in Afghanistan.

Over the 16 years of its existence, the organization has become an influential regional platform for multilateral political, economic, humanitarian and security cooperation. Strict adherence to the principles of equality, mutual respect and consideration of interests through cooperation is a key to the SCO successful evolution.

Geographically and politically, Eurasia is inextricably linked to a wider Asia-Pacific Region. There, too, collective security arrangements, general rules of the game for all states should be based on the universal principles of undivided security, supremacy of international law, peaceful settlement of disputes and non-use of force or threat of force. In this context, primarily in the framework of the East Asia Summit, we are promoting a number of measures to improve security and cooperation architecture in the Asia-Pacific Region.

Dialogue in the Russia-India-China format, which we regard as a mechanism of strengthening confidence, mutual understanding and friendship between major Eurasian states has good potential. The format received a new impetus at the meetings of the troika leaders on

the sidelines of the two recent G20 Summits and confirmed the identity or similarity of the three countries positions on topical issues on the global agenda.

With or without RIC, we won't make a mistake to say that Russia's special and privileged strategic partnership with India, just like Russia's comprehensive and strategic cooperation with China are the two indispensable pillars of stability in Eurasia.

We encourage our partners to create linkages and connectivity between the regional entities in Eurasia in order to more efficiently manage challenges and seize the opening opportunities by creating the Greater Eurasia Partnership. Following this line, the MoU between the Eurasian Economic Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat was signed last year. It elevated Russia-ASEAN relationship to the strategic partnership level. Efforts are ongoing to establish working ties between ASEAN and SCO.

Next year, we expect many high-level opportunities to further expand our cooperation. In 2020, Russia will host more than 120 events during the Russian presidency in BRICS and numerous meetings as the chair-country in the SCO. Along with traditional annual bilateral Summit with India, we are looking forward to welcoming Prime Minister Modi to attend celebrations on 9th of May in Moscow's Red Square dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War over fascist Germany, which was the major contribution to the end of the WWII.

Moreover, in 2020 we will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Declaration of the Strategic Partnership and 10th anniversary since Russia and India became Special and Privileged Strategic Partners.

Mr. Roman Babushkin

ERDOGAN, BETWEEN THE SPECTER OF THE PIRATES (BARBROS) & THE DELUSIONS OF THE BLUE STATE

Dr. Kahtan Al Sioufi

In a fit of hysteria, the neo-Ottoman Sultan requested his country's soldiers to achieve an epic victory in Libya. He was inspired by the heroic tales of the so-called Prince of Ottoman sailors, the pirate Khair Eddine Barbros. On the other hand, Erdogan dreams of a return of the Ottoman Empire through fulfilling his delusional project in the Mediterranean Sea, which he has termed as "The Blue Nation". This aggressive project is considered to be one of the largest geographical fraud and manipulation operations known in history, and it is the main driver for Erdogan's actions and reckless foolish ambitions to reestablish the Ottoman Caliphate.

Erdogan uses Turkish state-supported television drama series, as weapons to falsify history, in a failed attempt to revive a long forgotten era. The most recent of these attempts is the (Arteghral) series, in which Erdogan has made concerted efforts to export a false history of Ottoman conquests which were actually invasions and occupations.

The Arabs resisted the Ottoman occupation and conquests for centuries. The Arteghral series is loaded with many lies, whereby numerous Western references indicate that "Arteghral" is a fictional character created by Othman to create a defunct Empire.

Politics

After the passage of almost a century where the sun has set off the Ottoman Empire, Erdogan still claims that the Empire's properties lie in all the lands that the Ottomans reached, and that these properties belong to Turkey.

Erdogan's Turkey and the "justice and development" party are facing a persisted political-like Coronavirus, which will ultimately lead to their inevitable catastrophic fall. Such inevitable fateful fall resides on a number of rational pragmatic

analyses based on Turkish political and economic internal situation, regional powers conflicts and competition for who will lead the region and have the upper hand, world powers interests and struggle for the vital Middle East in the age of resurrection of religious ideologies and conflicts as instruments for power control and authority. A quick purview of Erdogan's Turkish reckless policy ends up with the following facts and developments:

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC INTERNAL SITUATION

1. Internal political conflict within the ruling authority of "justice and development" party over the excessive political power Erdogan acquires after changing the constitution in an attempt to crown himself as the new Sultan. Conflict and disputes with the other nationalist secular opposition parties over the policy of "justice and development" one-man party, the Erdoganism, particularly in terms of Erdogan's foreign policy towards Syria, Iraq, Libya, Islamic countries and Europe

2. Disputes and war with the Kurds and all political figures and personalities who oppose his policy.

3. Economic situation is stagnating due to the costs of wars, American sanctions and troubled relations with the neighboring countries, Arab countries and Europe.

REGIONAL POWER CONFLICTS AND COMPETITION FOR SUPREMACY

1. War in Iraq, which is also analyses based on Turkish political being waged against the Kurds;

2. War in Northern Syria. It is not

only aggression, invasion and conquest of Syrian territory, but rather, a war which shall prove to be a trap for Erdogan's regime, one of the main supporters of the mercenary terrorist groups.

3. Potential military confrontation between Erdogan's Turkey which attempts to entrench Turkey as representing moderate Islam, believing that Turkey has the potential to lead the Islamic world, by adopting Moslem brotherhood organization's doctrines and supporting terrorist groups on one hand, and Egypt supported by Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, which consider the MBO a terrorist organization, along with Greece and Cyprus supported by the EU and USA, because of Erdogan's military agreement with the Libyan government, in an attempt to control the Mediterranean maritime route, and attain supremacy over the huge reserves of gas and oil in the Mediterranean on one hand, and Libyan oil and gas on the other.

4. Erdogan's plan is to control northern Africa and from there connect the north with his military bases in Sudan, Somalia, Djibouti in the African Horn and the south depth of Africa.

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5. Such strategic Turkish plan- in addition to the Turkish military bases in Qatar- would enable Turkey to encircle Saudi Arabia, and be on the frontline in the war in Yemen, not to say create a Turkish Sunni- led Islam against an Iranian shiaa-led Islam.

REGIONALLY

1. Erdogan is fleeing forward. He has his forces in Iraq and occupied Northern Syria, thinking that this would be a step forward in restoring the glory of his ancestors, and forget the their gory, however he has failed in his mission. He considered transferring the battle to Libya, whereby Libya is now drowning Turkey into the swamp of a forth war; a war front which is thousands of kilometers away.

2. Erdogan is trying to flee from his internal crises by intervening in Libya, and in a meager show, he waited for the approval of his country's parliament to legitimize his occupation of Libya.

3. Erdogan struck an agreement with the so-called Libyan consensus government to reproduce a Trojan Horse to occupy Libya and devour

its resources. In doing so, he ignored the legitimate government of Libya, represented by the parliament, which rejected the agreement, considering it as a Turkish occupation of Libyan lands, and amounting to grand treason.

4. The Turkish parliament approved sending troops to support the terrorists in Libya.

5. The agreement to sell Libya, which was signed by Al Sarraj, who does possess the right to sign, crashed domestically, regionally and internationally due to its illegal nature. The agreement was an attempt to tamper with geography, however it was a stark violation of international law. Sea borders between Libya and Turkey cannot and should be demarcated, because Libya does not share any sea borders with Turkey. Moreover, the agreement turns a blind eye to the Island of Crete, whereby the Greek foreign minister stated that "the agreement ignores one very important fact; that is the existence of the Island of Crete". The agreement also ignores the Dodecanese Islands, which possess large gas reserves, which is the core of Erdogan's ambitions.

Turkey is attempting to redraw sea borders with a country which does not neighbor it, and by igniting the flames in the Middle East, it shall surely enter into a confrontation with the nations lying to the East of this sea. Erdogan believed that his ambitions could be achieved, however the waves of the Middle East have rejected him. He believed that he could become the caretaker of Libya's oil and gas reserves. He sent his soldiers and terrorist mercenaries and went further to appoint himself as the rightful heir of the Ottoman Empire, forgetting that Turkey is stained in blood.

He has failed to read geography, as he has failed history's test, thus drowning the Middle East and the Arab region in sedition and conspiracies. The Islamic Brotherhood project is Erdogan's true engine in the Mediterranean Sea. The delusional Erdogan aspires to revive the Ottoman Sultanate which bled the Arab world for centuries. All of this constitutes the components of the Turkish leadership quandary; a leadership which is increasingly becoming bogged down day after day. It is not making any efforts to get itself out of the predicaments it has placed itself in, rather it continues to embed itself in new crises. The recent

Berlin Conference on Libya was an expression of Europe's fears of Turkey's military intervention, which has increased the flow of refugees towards Europe through the Mediterranean Sea. Europe will not allow the continent to become a destination for terrorists and extremists emanating from the Western shores of Libya, and it is this fact that Erdogan is using to blackmail Europe.

In practice, Erdogan has jumped through the air without realizing that the global energy war does not meet with his war in Libya. On the other hand, President Putin will not offer Ankara with potential benefits on a silver plate. Turkey's entrance into Western Libya is considered as a threat to Russia's interests in an area which it considers to be its gateway to the Arab Maghreb.

The objectives behind Turkey's intervention in Syria are the same as those behind its intervention in Libya. Erdogan is sending his neo-Janissary troop to conflict areas in order to reap the benefits of his military interventions. The neo-Janissaries are the terrorist mercenaries which were compiled based on sectarian and religious factors, whereby the Turkish intelligence is involved in transferring Daesh and Jabhat Al Nusra fighters from Syria to Libya.

In reality, Erdogan's strategy has come up against numerous obstacles, at the forefront of which is his ancestors' dark and bloody history in the Arab region, whereby the Ottomans left destruction wherever they went, killing and torturing people throughout the region.

The Ottomans tore up the very fabric of Arab societies, and they disrespected their institutions, practicing all forms of destruction and chaos. The Ottomans handed over the Arab world to Western imperialism, the painful effects of which are still being felt by Arabs to this day.



Mustafa Kamal (Ataturk) had disowned the Ottoman Empire, because he believed that it was a backward and tyrannical state, however Erdogan is contaminated with a virus of aspiring to revive the Ottoman Empire, especially after he was selected as the supreme leader of the Global Muslim Brotherhood movement. Erdogan has forgotten that Turkey itself is exposed to the risk of being broken apart, especially if we take into consideration that its population consists of a considerable number of Kurds, which are a political force to be reckoned with, and it is also inevitable for the Arab Sanjak of Alexandretta, which used to be the fifteenth governorate of the Syrian Arab Republic, and was given to Turkey by the colonial France in 1939, to be returned to its rightful owner.

Erdogan's internal crisis has shaken up the country's economy and stability. His partners within the Justice and Development Party have distanced themselves from him one after the other. It is better for the Turks to close the doors which have been opened up by Rajab Tayyip Erdogan, whereby what he claims to

be "Ottoman properties", have been returned and shall be returned to their rightful owners. Libya belongs to its people, and it is better for Erdogan to close this doomed chapter, as it is considered to be a threat to world peace. This calls for a resolution to be passed in accordance to Chapter 7 of the UNSC charter.

Turkey's invasion of Libya has failed before it even started as a result of the difficulties of carrying out this invasion. Moreover, the geographical circumstances which drove Turkey to militarily intervention in Syria are different than those in Libya. Turkey's invasion of Libya, nor of Syria will not be in its interests.

Turkey's reputation has sunk on a worldwide level, and its policies are now linked to rashness and arrogance. Erdogan made a bet on history, however he failed to recognize that the current formulae of interests are stronger than history; a history which reeks of blood. He has ignored history and facts; therefore, the scene has displayed a failure of Erdogan's ambitions.

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Image 1 credit: Cem Oksuz/Anadolu Agency



Oil Games

It is not an exaggeration to say that the prosperity of the Middle East is built on its oil fields. Like many other resource rich regions, oil has been a curse for the many states, civilians, and non-state actors that have operated in the region as well. While oil has helped infinitely in the development of some states in the region, it has also been at the crux of many wars and power games. All actors in the Middle East and North Africa, whether states or otherwise, are acutely aware of this paradigm. While environmentalism might have resurged in the 21st century, renewable resources have still not taken precedence over oil as the primary source of fuel in the world. This is especially important since Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) states hold the mantle of being the custodians of the world's energy supply. However, along with upholding this mantle the major oil dispensers in the middle east also have the honour of being at the

Smart Politics or Hypocrisy?

epicentre of the world's most dubious power politics.

Shrouded in duplicity, Saudi Arabia has been in the limelight for its vast reserves of oil since its discovery of the commodity. Being the world's largest exporter of oil obviously serves its purpose, both beneficial and sometimes detrimental to the country. The country might have partaken in the oil embargos of 1967 and 73 in an attempt to influence and constrain the US support for Israel along with other Arab oil exporters. However, while discussions around oil often concern the economic and interstate politics, recent instances have shown that involvement of non-state actors into oil politics has actually been detrimental to the countries involved. The bombings the kingdoms oil facilities brought

oil to the centre stage, once again highlighting the connection of non-state actors surrounding oil politics in the MENA region.

Instances such as these only emphasize the point that oil seems to be shaping almost all interactions in the region in some way, shape or form. Destroying oil reserves, on the backs of which the Saudi state is built, is an emotionally and politically charged move by the culprits, the Houthis in Yemen. Targeting oil becomes a "legitimate and natural response" in the words of a Houthi spokesperson; therefore, entailing the destruction of half of the Kingdoms oil output for their "aggression and blockade of Yemen". By targeting Saudis main source of revenue and the backbone of the world's oil supply, the Houthis leveraged their position against the Kingdom, a clear declaration of the lengths they would go to, to stop the war in Yemen.

The “Leader of the free world” has no less a role to play in all the dirty politics surrounding this nation and the other major oil powers. Since oil was discovered in the Middle East, the US has not only supported but also protected its key suppliers in the region. Before the 1979 revolution of Iran the US was its key benefactor, going so far as to overthrow the Mossadegh government which had nationalized the oil industry in Iran. It then installed the Shah Pahlavi who vehemently sided with the US and was perceived by his own country as a US backed puppet. Though this dictatorial ruler was despised by the entire nation, the world's greatest democracy was his continuous support. The US has always, in serving its own interests supported dictator after dictator while simultaneously compromising the apparent values of the Liberal World Order.

This hypocrisy doesn't lie in the past though. The world knows of the current US-Saudi relationship. Saudi has for long piggy backed on US support seeing that the US has turned a blind eye to most of the atrocities committed by the kingdom. For decades the kingdom has followed its own “code of conduct” with very little backlash from America, its biggest beneficiary. One would not be hard pressed to speculate that this is wholly due to Saudi being the largest importer of arms in the world, most of it originating from American markets. Maybe “America first” actually translates to “Our business and money over your human rights”. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a living example of all that is wrong with the world, where they prohibit a few religions, permit slavery, subjugate women, arrest clerics and princes without warning and imprison feminists for treason. Still the US chooses to look the other way. Even the murder of Jamal Kashoggi a liberal journalist could not deter America's vehement support for the country.

State and non-state actors are, in the end, motivated by their own selfish interests of power accumulation. In the middle east no resource can signify the power and strategic might of the owner better than oil. Therefore, alliances are fickle and loyalties fluid. It is not only alliances between states that manifest itself in the middle east but also alliances of convenience between state and non-state actors are a dime a dozen in the region. Hezbollah, a Lebanese

Maybe “America First” actually translates to “Our business and money over your human rights”

militant group with significant presence in Lebanon's governing structures, has been trying to secure a disputed territory between Israel and Lebanon. Hezbollah Secretary General Nasrallah's caustic rhetoric in light of the event poses Israel as an existential threat to Hezbollah. In lieu of Israel's continuous infringement into the oil fields he issued a statement saying, “*prevent us, we will prevent you; if you open fire at us, we will open fire at you.*” In reality, Hezbollah's strong response stem from fears of losing crucial oil reserves that help the group solidify control off the coast of the above-mentioned territory. Therefore, can Hezbollah be blamed for the threats or is Israel the real culprit through infringement? In the end, so much of power politics revolves around the blame game, where questions of morality have no seat at the table.

In Libya, the national chessboard is dominated by Field Marshal Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), a non-state actor that has systematically taken control of oil fields in the country's south. Ever the strategist, Haftar has left the operation and management of the oil fields to the National Oil Corporation, a state-run organ,

positioning himself as a reasonable leader who could look beyond the economic incentives of oil profits and towards the restoration of order. Oil revenues in Libya, as in with ISIS, have helped other militias and terrorist establish sound financial groundwork while they pursue their greater goals. Therefore, the takeover of oil fields and the handover of administration to the NOC has also helped strengthen Haftar's narrative that he is Libya's bulwark against terrorism. In doing so it has emboldened the LNA and Haftar and has contributed to the group's rising confidence as they marched towards Tripoli.

On another front while the ISIS has been neutralized in the region, the ability of the organization to gain the strength that it did was largely based on whether they were able to fund their grand mission in building a Caliphate. ISIS soldiers would frequently capture new terrain and seize all oil assets, as they did in Raqqa and Mosul, and establish a monopoly on the extraction of oil. A vast market for unrefined black-market petroleum that has long existed across the borders in Turkey ensured that they had a constant stream of revenue. Black gold bought the terrorist organization a varied paraphernalia of weaponry, funded their propaganda campaigns and helped create an Islamic State. Ironically, the lucrativity of oil is perhaps one of the few reasons why ISIS was able to go beyond the typically adverse relationship state and non-state actors share. ISIS at its peak sold one million dollars' worth of oil to the Syrian regime every day, making it one of their biggest profit sources. In this peculiar instance it is clear that if there is one factor that the regional actors can agree on is how valuable a commodity oil is for all of them.

However, this is where one truly starts to understand the dynamics in the region. Different types of power play are not unknown to any region

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in the world let alone the middle east. And at the peak of its manipulation lies one key conception, that of Hypocrisy. These powers utilize the resources and any other leveraging point according to their own whims and fancies. While criticising one actor of exploitation or abuse they support another in similar scenarios. Syria and their indirect support for the ISIS through this illegal oil trade is not devoid of the same connotation, where on the one hand the government pronounced that it was fighting the extremist group, on the other, it was actually indirectly the groups largest source of revenue. Russia's silence on these Syrian activities clubbed with the Iranian government's continuing support for the Houthis heightens the fact that in pursuit of a state's motives they are prepared to use any means possible. And in a region such as the MENA where there are so many different powers, both regional and international, the complexity of these actions and motives only increases.

The fight for control over oil and energy thus only multiplies where the web of actors involved every year get more complicated in the Middle East. However, one thing is certain; most state goals in the middle east centre around the pursuit of oil and energy.

Therefore, hypocrisy through energy politics can serve as a crucial lens to better understand all interactions in

the area. Much like a carefully choreographed game, state and non-state actors interact with each other in deliberate ways to either encourage or curb certain actions. At times this means that state and non-state actors engage in the most unexpected and seemingly unholy of collaboration as in the case of ISIS and Syria. Thus, the complexities of the Middle East and North Africa are too many as almost all actors are intricately intertwined in their dealings with each other. However, if there is one factor that influences almost all of their engagements it is oil. One could say, it is not the Middle East that shapes the oil but the oil that shapes the Middle East.

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Image 1 credit: Michael S.
Williamson/ Washington Post

Image 2 credit: IDF
spokesperson via ynetnews.com

“In the middle east no resource can signify the power and strategic might of the owner better than oil. Therefore, alliances are fickle and loyalties fluid”





THE RUSSIAN ROULETTE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Amidst the tumultuous period of uncertainty that has plagued the Middle East over the past couple of months, Russia has managed to cement itself at the center of this inextricable morass. The reasons for this are manifold- from Russia's offensive military campaign in Syria to the US pull-out from Syria, the Kremlin has managed to widen its leverage and presence in West Asia. Ever since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia has trotted through the Black Sea into the Mediterranean with panache.

A major piece in this whole Russian Middle East jigsaw puzzle is Syria; sitting atop the Arab world, basking along the Mediterranean Sea puts it in a unique position; providing it with unimpeded access to Europe. Post entering into a civil war, after the Arab Spring of 2011, Syria emerged as a war-torn country in a near-Hobbesian state of nature where countless militant groups fended off against each other. This provided Russia with the perfect kiln

to mould its interests and bolster its position in the international arena.

The leadership trajectory that Russia has witnessed over decades; from the tsars through the commissars to modern day Putin- all have had to deal with the twin challenges that Russia's geography constraints itself to. Being a prisoner of its geography, Russia has had to deal with "extensive and vulnerable land borders coupled with choke points that, in hostile hands, can cut off Russia from engagement with the larger world."

Putin's growing focus towards the Russian Far East (RFE) as a national priority for the 21st century has not panned out the way he would have wanted. The billions of dollars of investment that had been pledged towards the development of the region, stretching from Lake Baikal to the Pacific Ocean, has been more inclined towards intent than real investment. This has contributed heavily towards halting Russia's ambitious plan of an outward reach towards its East. Although rich in

resources, the RFE would take much more than just investments to unlock its true potential; having other obstacles such as harsh climate, sparse population, outmigration and poor infrastructural gaps facilitate the underdevelopment of the region.

These challenges have led to the common belief amongst analysts that Putin has no choice but to try controlling the flatlands to Russia's west, thereby gaining an edge with enough room to manoeuvre. This came in the form of the annexation of Crimea in 2014, a baby step in Russia's outward expansion towards the Persian Gulf and the Asia-Pacific at large. The Middle East takes into consideration various variables of Russia's grand strategy towards countering its geographical curse. The region falls contiguous to the greater Black Sea and the Caspian Sea basins and is pivotal in ensuring Russia maintain its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) to the

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Persian Gulf as well as the Eastern Mediterranean Sea.

Having emerged on the winning side in the Syrian War which involved various actors such as the US, Iran and Turkey, Russia was able to kill two birds with one stone. Not only was it able to flex its military muscle in terms of tactics and state of the art technology but it was also able to ballast its position in the Middle East as a major power, rolling back to the days of the Soviet Union. US' pull-out has further bolstered Russia's claim to the Middle Eastern pie, allowing the Kremlin to take what it wants and be the major power which the region can look up to and engage with.

As the war has progressed and evolved over the years, so has the Middle East's outlook towards the major powers. It is here that Russia has consolidated itself as an important concluder to the post Arab Spring chaos that has mired the various countries in the Middle East, hurting their dialogue with each other. The complexity of the region; the various axis's present makes it a Pandora's box; with the Iran- Israel Proxy war, the Saudi- Iran Sunni Shia struggle, Erdogan's quest for revisionism and of course, the long-standing Israel- Palestine conflict. Though the plethora of complexities in the region has fostered continuous instability, Russia has circumvented the entire axis politics and acted as a partner to everyone but a friend to none.

Russia has managed what countries have historically failed to

“Though the plethora of complexities in the region has fostered continuous instability, Russia has circumvented the entire axis politics and acted as a partner to everyone but a friend to none.”

encapsulate. It has built relationships with leaders unable to come to terms with each other. Putin, through the Syrian conflict, has managed to hold a strong footing with Turkey's

Erdogan, Syria's Bashar Assad, Iran's Hassan Rouhani, Saudi's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Egypt's Abdel- Fattah El-Sisi and Israel's Netanyahu. The complexities brought on by these leaders has prevented dialogues permuting into constructive actions in all instances in the past. Interestingly, Russia could be a vital cog that can change the entire geopolitical landscape of the Middle East in the future largely owing to its sui generis position in the region.

The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, in all cases, Putin has backed the status quo in charge. Russia has

supported the regime in power and has been a consistent advocate against regime change. The only exception lies in its support of Libyan General Khalifa Haftar who, many can argue, controls more territory than the UN recognized government. This solidifies the Middle Eastern leaders trust towards Russia, whom they view as having enough oomph to not pull a fast one on them.

With the recent US pull-out from northern Syria; buttered by confusion, missteps and miscalculations, this has opened a new avenue for Russian influence in the region. Secondly, maybe of more importance, Russia has not been keeping pace with the human rights situation in the region, something the Middle Eastern leaders view as a welcoming change; a tectonic shift from the age-old western rhetoric that has coerced changes in Iraq, Libya and their attempt at bringing

about changes in the Levantine region. Russia's silence on the Kashoggi killing serves as a clear indicator of a change in approach towards the Middle East.

Now whilst Russia's current position plays to its strengths, its popularity still has a long way to go in order to be compared with the Western liberal model, often taken as the gospel truth for nation states; both in terms of hard and soft power. This could posit a systematic problem for Russia in the long run, if the West were to roll back their presence in the region with a

much more proactive participation in the matters of the Middle East. But that day has yet to arrive and Russia remains in this completely unique position, often seen as the diplomatic hunchback the different Middle Eastern countries can rely on.

How far this goes on to shape the region is yet to be seen with Russia having its own strategic goals to achieve in the Persian Gulf. Whether the

Middle East will mould Russia or will Russia sculpt its own backyard in West Asia is yet to be seen. Regardless, the Middle East has entered an important period where the winds of change could blow in favour of Putin. The Syrian war has its biggest victor; Russia. Thus, Putin holds the pen that shapes Middle Eastern politics, for the coming years at the very Least.

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Image 1 credit: Omar Sanadiki/Reuter

IDENTITIES AND THE NEW COLD WAR

The Yemen Crisis



Siasat Al-Jasaf

As the famous Constructivist scholar, Nicholas Onuf, has mentioned in his book “The World of Our Making,” individuals have a perception about the world which they live in, essentially constituting their ideas and identities which further govern their interests. Identities provide a base for interests of individuals and states alike. Ideas which are shaped by cultural and social backgrounds develop into interests and later, identities. This line of thought explains the exceptional nature of the new Middle Eastern Cold War.

The realist explanation about the Yemeni war through security dilemmas, arms race, state insecurity, power maximisation and material hegemony falls short when one factors in the role of international orchestrators like Saudi Arabia and Iran. The foundation of their rivalry lies in the prospect of achieving identitarian hegemony in the region. Realists see states as “black boxes”, driven only by the thirst for power and materialistic gains. However, constructivism has provided us with a lot of groundwork about state behaviour in Yemen and how identities and the ideas behind them have shaped how both Saudi Arabia and Iran have interacted with each other as well as with the respective Yemeni-side they support. The Yemen crisis took shape when the Houthi rebels belonging to the northern region of Yemen started a

Shiite movement and later captured the capital, Sana’a. One could very well spot a clash of identities here. There is a deep Shi’a-Sunni conflict which is already prominent in the Middle East. Needless to say, Yemen has transitioned from a civil war into a war based on two conflicting sects of Islam, the Shi’a-Sunni divide. This war is considered by many scholars to be one of the many proxy wars fought by Saudi Arabia and Iran due to their pursuit of constructing a dominant identity and norms as mentioned earlier. Iran sees itself as a Shi’a State. The Iranian identity is largely aligned with traditional Islam. Children and students in Iran are taught the values, culture and norms of Iran as well as about their unwavering loyalty (*Velayat-e-Faqih*) to the Iranian Supreme Leader as their duty. The Saudi national identity, however, is marked by the history of its valorous tribes. Arabs pride themselves in being associated with the birth of Islam. The Sunni majority state also perceives this ethnicity to be supreme. The difference in languages, namely Arabic and Persian, can also further contribute towards the strong separation between the two identities. This has led to the formation of concrete blocks of conflicting identities which further their rivalry in all walks of state policies, exporting violence and armed conflicts through bands of proxies and non-state actors. Yemen is one such victim; Syria, Libya and

Iraq being several others.

Yemen has fallen prey to Identitarianism between actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran because of their own conflicting identities as mentioned above. This has also been a reason behind the escalation of the Yemeni civil war to the extent that the world sees today. Saudi Arabia has played a huge role in extending Wahhabism to Yemen during the Arab Spring. Meanwhile they also marginalised the Houthis, who essentially belong to the Zaydism sect of Shiite Islam. When the rebel movement carried out by Houthis inherently overthrew the Hadi government, the Saudi government perceived it as a threat to their identity, which was based on their regional dominance. Therefore, in March 2015, Saudi Arabia and eight other Arab states attempted to restore the Hadi government by launching airstrikes against the Houthis. The region also espies a significant Arab

“Yemen has fallen prey to Identitarianism between actors like Saudi Arabia and Iran because of their own conflicting identities”

versus Persians conflict. This aptly explains one of the principal objectives of the GCC, which is to counterbalance Iran in the Middle East. The Arab-identity string ties

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this intergovernmental organisation together; the member-states of which also share a monarchical system as opposed to the Iranian theocracy with an elected President.

Meanwhile, the relationship between Houthis and Tehran is ever-increasing on the grounds of a common Shi'a identity and culture. Similar ideation has also ignited the Shi'a community of Saudi Arabia to keep a close watch on the events in Yemen, and perhaps even get inspired by those. In actuality, there has been a constant disenfranchisement of the minority Shi'a community in the Saudi state ever since it adopted Wahhabi teachings. The 2011 Shi'a protests in the al-Hasa region, termed as the 'Saudi Spring' were brutally repressed by the state. Hence, the question of Shi'a community always brings them closer irrespective of the nation to which they belong. Iran has sought to be the leader and saviour of Shi'a community worldwide and intends to project the same identity in Northern Yemen as well. The Houthi weapons are suspiciously similar to Iranian weapons. Whilst this charge is denied by Iran, many UN panel reports have suggested that Iran has covertly supplied the Houthis with weapons, logistical support and training. The collusion of both the parties is also highly likely due to their anti-imperialism and anti-West

ideologies, which has resulted in the common despise towards US, Britain and other Western or European powers.

Nevertheless, the recent developments in this region have portrayed that peace, in fact, is possible. Some of the southern separatist groups were backed by the UAE and when it withdrew its troops, Saudi Arabia installed its troops in the Southern city of Aden. However, the removal of Emirati troops from Yemen and Trump's lukewarm reaction to the events in Aramco oil fields may have led Saudi Arabia to reconsider its intervention in Yemen. The Riyadh Agreement brokered by Saudi Arabia and UAE was signed on 5th November which commenced reconciliatory measures and equal representation of the Hadi government and the Southern Transitional Council (a south-Yemen separatist group).

The war in Yemen began four years ago and resulted in a stalemate. Due to the number of deaths, food shortages and massive bloodshed, the UN has labelled it the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Thus, the signing of Riyadh Agreement has also heightened the chances of peace negotiations with the Houthis. The Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has been quoted saying, "It's a joyful day in Saudi as the two sides

come together." However, Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Abbas Mousavi expressed discontent and further claimed that this is not going to solve anything in Yemen, but only increase Saudi Arabia's occupation in the south. Houthis earlier in September also announced that they intend on initiating peace and there will be no further drone or ballistic attacks on Saudi. They also released over 350 prisoners, three of whom were Saudis. The Kingdom responded by decreasing its airstrikes and initiating talks for the peace deal. As far as the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia are concerned, a war between the two nations is highly unlikely.

While Iran has urged the UN to consider its Four Point solution to the crisis in Yemen, it has also stated that Iran is open to talks with the kingdom if it prioritizes its neighbour over the West. Clearly, this narrative has stemmed out of a long history of resentment towards America and its allies, increased due to the US sanctions against Iran. The Saudi-US alliance is also deteriorating since President Trump took office. The Saudi-Iran relations might look bleak, but there can be hopes of a truce now that Iraq and Pakistan have also offered to mediate. Though they are open to discussions via backchannel talks, both parties have usually maintained a tough exterior in the international arena.



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Image 1, 2 credits: Khaled Abdullah
/ Reuters

YEARNING FOR A HOMELAND

The Kurdish Strife for Kurdistan

The Kurds are an indigenous ethnic group in the Middle East who can be traced back to approximately 5000 years in the region. They speak Kurdish and have their own distinct culture and traditions. Nonetheless, they remain the world's largest ethnic group without a sovereign state. An estimated thirty million Kurds living in the mountains are interspersed in five nation-states- Turkey, Syria, Iran, Armenia and Iraq. Nearly fifteen millions of whom reside in Turkey.

The Kurds have had a long history of persecution, oppression, and marginalization in Turkey. This had resulted in them seeking autonomy within Turkey and more recently, complete independence from the country. They have risen to prominence since their successful partnership with the United States which helped oust Saddam Hussein from power in 2003. Recently, the Iraqi-Kurdish force- the Peshmerga,

and the Syrian Kurdish fighters played a huge role in fighting the jihadist Islamic State or Daesh. These militias have had contact and publicly supported the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) who are designated as terrorists by the Turkish, European and American authorities. Forty thousand people, mostly security forces and militants have been killed in the Turkey-PKK conflict.

History

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire during the time of the First World War, the Allied Powers divided the empire, disregarding the fragmented ethnonational aspirations of the local populace. Initially, in the Treaty of Sevres the Kurds were promised Kurdistan. Later, this Treaty was rejected by the Turkish Nationalist Regime that had resisted foreign occupation and was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. The Treaty of

Sevres had a lasting legacy in the Turkish National conscious and has thus made the state especially paranoid and sensitive over the issue of Kurdish Separatism. Turkey has been fighting Kurdish resistance ever since.

During the Iran-Iraq war, there was a resurgence of Kurdish Nationalism spearheaded by the Partiya Karkaren-i Kurdistan (PKK), the Kurdistan Workers' Party. The PKK headed by its charismatic leader Abdullah Ocalan found its greatest support in the South Eastern provinces of Turkey bordering Iraq and Syria. An area with high Kurdish concentration that is of great strategic importance for Turkey, since it holds the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

The PKK, is the most well-known and active party representing the Kurdish populace in Turkey, and has been waging a terrorist campaign against the Turkish Government since the 1980s. This means that the Kurdish Question is now inarguably the most serious internal problem in Turkey's seventy-year history.

Turkish- Syrian Relations

Before the Arab Spring, Turkey followed a 'Zero problems with Neighbours' Policy that aimed at positing the country as a bulwark against the tide of instability. Yet, seven months into the uprising in Syria, the Turkish Government severed diplomatic ties with the Syrian Government in support of the Arab Spring and publicly announced its intent to assist in the deposition of Bashar al-Assad. Since then, it can be observed that Turkey has fully committed itself to toppling the Assad Government in Syria. Initially, it called for international intervention in the conflict but later started to actively support and arm the Syrian opposition against Assad.

The year 2015 was a definitive for the Turkish-Syrian diplomatic relationship. Turkey under the leadership of Tayyip Erdogan had been negotiating a peace deal with the PKK. Only its actions in not allowing reinforcements to help the Kurdish forces fighting in Kobane, the ISIS besieged city, became the main reason for the failure of the peace negotiations between the adversaries. The same year, a Russian jet was downed by Turkey and a full-blown diplomatic crisis was eminent in face of Russia's public support to the Assad Government in Syria.

So, what exactly prompted this reconsolidation of interests and policy towards Syria and the Kurds in proxy? The reason is actually comically simple - consolidation of President Erdogan's authoritarian rule.

For years, he had been campaigning to transform Turkey from a Parliamentary system into a

Presidential system, concentrating all power into his own hands. He has positioned himself as an Islamic nationalist, completely opposed to Turkey's traditional political stance as a secular democracy.

In 2015, Erdogan's party, known as the AKP, had for the first time since its inception secured only 40.7 percent of the vote, failing to get a parliamentary majority. The party had been campaigning for the creation of a new constitution which could significantly increase Presidential powers. It was a position that Erdogan was seeking to **take up**. He managed to reverse the failure by targeting the Kurds, whose party the People's Democratic Party (HDP), had secured 13.1 percent of the vote share in its inaugural election.

It is most probable that Erdogan believed he would secure the vote of the pro-nationalists who consider the Kurds as terrorist anti-nationals, and he rightly assumed so. There was a surge in nationalist support in the snap elections held in November 2015 which secured him a majority.

Implications of Turkey's military advance into Syria

It can be postulated that there are four main objectives behind this incursion. The most important assumption being that, President Erdogan largely driven by domestic considerations, might be intending to provide a 'solution' for the 'Kurdish Question' while responding to the popular antipathy of the citizens directed towards the Syrian refugees.

It is known that Turkey presently hosts more than three million Syrian refugees who are considered undesirable by the state and its

The reality of the Kurds

Berivan Hassan's younger sister Shirin joined the Women's Protection Units of the Kurdish People's Protection Militia, better known as YPG, under the pseudonym Vian.

Personally affected by the murder of her father during the advent of jihadist forces in Syria, she believed that any death found while protecting her people would be a worthy sacrifice, a victory. On December 17th, 2014, after months of fighting the Daesh forces trying to lay siege to the Syrian city Kobane, Berivan received a call from her sister's number, informing her of Vian's death. Shattered, disbelieving but obstinate, Berivan searched through numerous ISIS sites and Facebook pages until she finally sighted Vian's face in a photograph.

Her darling sister, was 19 when she died. Her head hung on display in Jarabulus, a nearby northern Syrian city controlled by Daesh.

In September 2014, Turkey refused to let YPG Kurdish reinforcements through its borders in Syria. Eventually bowing down to international pressure, Turkey allowed 150 Iraqi-Kurdish soldiers to join the rest in imposed isolation. The YPG forced the Daesh forces to retreat in January 2015, lifting the siege and providing an important strategic victory for the US-led coalition. The YPG has been in control of the area ever since.

- Compiled from a report by Rudaw Media Network based in Erbil, capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Ankara is pretty much the loss of Turkey.

Tellingly, Erdogan now receives massive support domestically. Any opposition from the West only furthers the anger he has been stoking against them. Slyly implying that the West had broken up the Ottoman Empire before, now, they seek to do the same using the Kurds.

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Boudlal/Reuters



citizens. The President has been under pressure to quickly resolve the refugee situation by implementing a policy that facilitates their return back to their own country. The primary aim of this incursion is supposed to be the creation of a 'safe zone', supposedly innocuous in its approach, to resettle the refugees on land traditionally inhabited by the Kurds.

By rehabilitating the Syrian refugees, it stands to dilute the Kurdish majority in the region and reduce the land claimed by the Kurdish populace and forces. A lack of territorial continuity would undermine Kurdish aspirations for a nation state while simultaneously isolating them from the rest of their Kurdish neighbours in the South East, which is incredibly important. More significantly, it provides Ankara with a buffer against Rojava, the Syrian Kurdish autonomous state secured by the YPG.

To reiterate, Turkey considers the YPG, who formed the core of the Kurdish led Syrian Democratic Forces as terrorists who are ethnically and politically tied to their

own Kurdish minority and their representatives

While it's clear that the Turkish Government under the leadership of President Erdogan has had an ambivalent relationship with the Assad regime, if this move is successful Turkey could just about create an opposition to Assad's Syria. It can be regarded as a new contentious alternative to Syria under Assad, an ingenious decision especially since the north-eastern borderland region in Syria has never fully been integrated into the Arab Nationalist Syrian State. The biggest indication of its opposition to Assad being the name of the offense, quaintly termed, "Operation Peace Spring".

New reports have also emerged that ISIS might be using this as an opportunity to regroup.

Either way, the move can be considered a stroke of political genius, especially since the AKP had barely won its previous elections locally. General dissatisfaction against Erdogan manifested itself in the loss of Ankara to the opposition candidate Mansur Yavas. The loss of

IN THE SHADOWS BUT NOT FORGOTTEN THE BAB EL-MANDEB STRAIT

The current discourse in international relations seems to be enlivened by the Strait of Hormuz, courtesy to the flaring up of tensions in the strait due to a seemingly bellicose Iran. Readers of newspapers and magazines seem to be bombarded (like the Kurds currently are) with a hundred op-eds about the Straits of Hormuz. On a sub-textual level, a discourse which has been brought up as a result of the turmoil in the aforementioned strait is the safety and geo-strategic significance of Bab-el-Mandeb and more importantly, the freedom of navigation. While the gaze of the world remains fixed upon the Hormuz strait, it would be worthwhile if one could divert some of the attention to the Bab-el-Mandeb strait.

This strait is a sea route checkpoint between the Horn of Africa and the Middle East (West Asia), connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. In a larger context, it is a strategic link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Most exports of petroleum

and natural gas from the Persian Gulf that transit the Suez Canal or the SUMED Pipeline pass through both the Bab-el-Mandeb. As such, the security of the strait is of paramount importance to many States. The frenzy of security of the strait gets heightened due to the presence of states such as Djibouti, Eritrea and Yemen surrounding it. In the context of Yemen, the ongoing civil war has exacerbated the security concerns surrounding the strait. The most prominent concern is that of Iran backed Houthi rebels blocking the strait and thereby causing an adverse effect to global shipping. This concern manifested itself tangibly last July when attacks on two crude-carrying vessels were carried out by Houthi rebels. The attacks resulted in Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, temporarily suspending all oil shipments through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. Therefore, closure of the Bab-el-Mandeb kept tankers originating in the Persian Gulf from reaching the Suez Canal or the SUMED Pipeline.

Another state, which has explicitly expressed its concern regarding the

safety of navigation in the strait is Egypt. This concern of Egypt stems from the fact that unrest in Yemen has its toll on the maritime movement in the Red Sea, and consequently in the Suez Canal. It is worthwhile to note here that revenues received by Egypt via the Suez Canal amounted to 5.9 Billion US Dollars in the fiscal year 2018-19. The canal thereby also enables Egypt to earn foreign currency. Therefore, taking cognizance of its economic interests and their security, Egypt has been supporting Saudi led military actions in the Yemen conflict. Its main contribution has been the deployment of naval ships to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait as part of the blockade of Yemen, in particular, in countering Iranian vessels.

“The frenzy of security of the strait gets heightened due to the presence of states such as Djibouti, Eritrea and Yemen surrounding it”

The agency which states wish to employ in the strait is not just restricted to the states surrounding the strait, but in fact, pervades even to the great powers that are geographically far-off to the region. One such state that is exerting agency and power projection is China. The Bab-el-Mandeb strait fits into the strategic configuration of China's newly formulated 'far sea' strategy and

as part of China's larger maritime silk route and '1+2+3 strategy'. A tangible manifestation of this strategic interest is highlighted by China's construction of a military base in Djibouti. However, China is not the only great power to construct a base there.

The United States has already established a military base there, known as Camp Lemonier, which is their permanent military base in Africa. However, with China increasingly seen as a military competitor across the Indo-Pacific region, the Chinese military presence in the Horn of Africa is viewed as part of a potential threat to US access to the Red Sea and the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, and thus its ability to shift forces between different military theatres.

The presence of the Chinese forces around the Horn of Africa posits an extension of the Chinese military threat to India too, along Asian land borders into the maritime domain.



China's Djibouti base combined with its base in Gwadar create an axis which has the potential of cutting off Indian energy supplies from the Gulf and East Africa. Therefore, a state like India too, has started exerting its influence in the strait by carrying out regular patrols in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The projection of strength in the Indian Ocean as well as the Pacific Ocean by several European navies underscores the growing significance of the Red Sea and the choke point of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. France even has a military base in Djibouti.

In conclusion, the seemingly never-ending civil war in Yemen combined with Iran's belligerence to freedom of navigation in the region, as well as the strategic manoeuvring by states around the Horn of Africa result in a dangerous geopolitical cocktail, which threatens international shipping and navigational freedom through the Bab-el-Mandeb strait.

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**“THE CITY HAS
WITNESSED A TREND OF
SELECTIVE
MODERNIZATION BY THE
STATE, WHERE IT
ACTIVELY CHOOSES
ASPECTS OF THE SOCIETY
IT WISHES TO
MODERNIZE”**

**THE DUBAI FRAME
STANDS TALL,
BETWEEN THE OLD AND
THE NEW**

WORLDS APART SELECTIVE MODERNIZATION IN DUBAI

The Dubai Frame has recently been placed in the city, acting as a metaphorical and physical severance it separates the old part from the new part of towering skyscrapers and architectural marvels in the city.. This is the perfect allegory for the effect of social and economic changes taking place in Dubai today. There is this constant tussle between popular perceptions of the Islamic orthodoxy and the growing modernization of Dubai. The city has witnessed a trend of selective modernization by the state, where it actively chooses aspects of the society it wishes to modernize. One of the major proponents of this culture of modernization is the royal family and elites themselves, who have holdings in major companies. For them, modernity is capitalism. The city today has become a perfect example of neo liberal capitalism with tall skyscrapers, some in contorted shapes, to invite further foreign investment.

Just like any other state, in the early period of its modernization, there is a clear conflict between the old and the new. For instance, in 2017, when the government announced its plans to colonize Mars, it contradicted the fatwa by religious authorities against manned travel to the red planet. Further, today the government chooses to identify itself as an Islamic State and does not recognize conversions in any other religion other than to Islam. The latter is indicative of a coercive force, without any direct use of violence by the state. Apostasy, essentially the renunciation of one's religion, is

something that is not allowed by law either. In a country that is planning to go to Mars, forms of public display of affection, such as kissing, lead to deportation and homosexuality are illegal.

There are of course more explicit instances of selective modernization as well. The government recently released its own font, used for official correspondences, to present to promote the idea of freedom of speech in the city. Yet, the irony here is that the state has a strict policy on any sort of criticism towards the government. According to Amnesty International, the government “arbitrarily restrict the rights to freedom of expression and association.” Websites are blocked and critics are taken into custody. The Counter Terrorism Law of 2014 mentions the death penalty for those who “undermine national unity or social peace.” Sadly enough, the law fails to define both terms, giving state authorities leeway to detain whoever they deem a threat. Most critics are either given jail sentences for years or are forced to flee the country.

As a direct result of this selective modernization, the immigrants are the ones who suffer the most. On the outside, the city looks like the epitome of modernity. Yet, on the inside, there are deeper structural problems that indicate that the city might not resonate with its exterior image of modernity. With an ever-growing trend of lavish and extravagant houses in the city, there is an emergence of a growing faction of an extravagant upper class in the city. While the blue-collar laborers and domestic workers are shoved in quiet shady corners, invisible to the naked eye. A majority of whom have been brought to the country with the aspirations of high paying jobs. Yet when they do arrive, they are forced

to do manual labor, with their passports being taken away. This exploitation is aided by the state. The ‘*kafala*’, or sponsored visa system legitimizes the oppression of these workers. While it allows for employers to sponsor the fees of employees, it also entraps the latter into the systemic oppression. They cannot leave their jobs even if they wish to, at the risk of fines, imprisonment or even worse, deportation.

Therefore, while some parts remain the same, others usher in a new era for the city. This tussle is something that is natural for a city like Dubai, that has just begun rebranding itself. Socially, while the old forms of orthodoxy remain, economically it wishes to become a major hub for the technologically driven future, yet only time will tell whether Dubai manages to bridge these existing inconsistencies of development or accelerate the imbalances between an orthodox society and a “developed” economy.



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SYRIAN REFUGEES AND THE PERILS OF REPATRIATION

Hilma packs her bag and is escorted out of her two-room shanty by an imposing man in a Lebanese army uniform. The camp has been swarmed by them recently. She is stuffed into a truck filled with mattresses and other wear and tears from her home in the refugee camp. The men in the army uniform are a regular sight for residents of the camp in Aarsal. Almost every camp on the Syrian and Lebanese border has been encountering them since the government started the process of Syrian repatriation.

Much like Hilma was, thousands of men, women, and children have been driven out of Syria as their once-peaceful nights were now populated with sounds of a seemingly ceaseless war. They're now flooding into the bordering countries of Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan, which together host 80 per cent of the Syrian Refugees. To them, hopeless and displaced, political allegiances to the rebel coalition or Assad's forces are a luxury that comes after they find an intact hospital to mend their wounds. Unfortunately, regardless of many international conventions mandating the protection of medical facilities at times of war, they too have become a casualty of the war.

The perils of outbound migration from Syria, extensively covered by the international media, remind not only the international community but also the migrants themselves of how hard their journey out will be. Nonetheless, more than 5.6 million Syrians have made the arduous journey and found themselves in

FAR
FROM
HOME

refugee camps across the Middle East and some in Europe too. However, camps are marked by a stark dearth of medical supplies, educational facilities and work opportunities. It is a suffocating life, living in a constant limbo where leaving and staying are both equally dangerous.

Countries are getting tired of the hordes of refugees that come to their border hoping for a respite, creating insecurity among the refugees. Being unstable themselves, they can't take appropriate care of the incoming refugees. While Lebanon has resorted to forcefully bulldozing houses in refugee camps and denied the UNHRC access to camps, Turkey is detaining undocumented refugees and coercing them into returning to Syria. Seeing that sooner or later they will be forced to return to Syria, refugees are leaving to Syria of their accord. Therefore, repatriation becomes an inevitable choice, even if it is not a desirable one.

Refugees who've considered leaving are uncertain about what can be expected on the other side as camp rumours tell a narrative of the conditions in Syria that are poles apart. Some hearsay communicates that some government recaptured areas are now functional with water, electricity and security. Others tell

the opposite story of desolate land with thin security and sparse resources. Vetting is done by the Syrian government whose intentions always seem murky as it would likely prioritize its political advantages over the refugees' safety. Refugees often pause for thought because of these uncertainties and their distrust with the participants of the war.

Those who return to their former homes might just find that their old ghosts still haunt them. One refugee, Mohamed, spent months deliberating on his journey back only to be shot dead by a man holding a grudge against him 3 days into his return. This is likely the case for many Syrians who fought in the war, regardless of which side they took. Young men, who are often a family's only source of income, also fear being conscripted into Assad's army, pulling them back into the war that they fled from. Others have disappeared into the country's detention system without a trace after coming back to Syria. They are often picked up by government police, brought to the police station with promises of being back home in a few days. That, of course, never happens.

Aliens in a home away from home, refugees are some of the most vulnerable people groups in the

world. While the pressure the swath of them are placing on host nations is an understandable cause for frustration, it is unacceptable to deal with fellow humans like cattle to be disposed of on the other side of the border. It is the responsibility of all involved parties to ensure that living conditions in refugee camps do not remain decrepit. Syria must supply safe areas in the border regions that will serve as more than an under-resourced facade created to keep appearances with international agents. Repatriation must be a carefully monitored humanitarian process, not just a politically motivated, haphazard one that makes people the casualties of war.

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Image 2 credits: Antonio Masiello via
ZUMA Press



“Thousands of men, women, and children have been driven out of Syria as their once-peaceful nights were now populated with sounds of a seemingly ceaseless war”



TRAUMATIC TALES

YAZIDI WOMEN AND THE ISIS

In the heart of the mountain valley of Lalish, of the Shekhan district in Iraq, lies the holy temple of the Yazidis. Stemming from the amalgamation of religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zorastrianism, this sect finds itself caught up in the cross fires of faith and violence. This marginalised community is deemed as devil worshipping infidels due to their practice of idol worship of the peacock angel. However, ISIS does not simply stop at condemnation. A constant fear looms over their lives, as ISIS makes consistent attacks to tear families apart. Their agenda includes abducting women and children and trading them into sex slavery. While men are brutally executed, young boys are converted to Islam and made to fight as young soldiers of the ISIS.

Traded like cattle in the streets of Baghdad, 7000 women and children have been kidnapped and 3000 of them still remain unaccounted for. A systematic tyranny occurs in the name of Islam by the so-called soldiers of the religion. Seen as infidels or 'kafirs', the minority religious groups are forced to convert to Islam, in order to save their lives. The mistreatment of Yazidi women and children is a part of such a structured conversion scheme. The act of raping a woman is seen as a mechanism of escalating fear in the hearts of their relatives at the same time exercising control over their minds. Institutionalized rape is also seen as a method of recruiting young men in the name of Jihad. Islam, a religion which considers sex outside marriage as a taboo, the quick availability of women serves as a lucrative incentive.

But what serves as an inducement for some, proves to be a punishment for others. Even though the victims are being accepted back into the community, this reunion is not whole hearted. Children born out of rape and their mothers are repeatedly stigmatized by the Yazidi community. The Yazidis are a conservative group where the major decision-making power lies with the religious heads. Hence children born out of rape who are not completely Yazidi are considered to be a taboo. Women who undergo pregnancy upon return are repeatedly abused and shunned in public as well as private spheres of the community.

Such cold-shouldered behaviour leaves women with only two choices - abortion or adoption agencies. However, the women who chose to undergo the procedure, do not have the privilege to raise the child. The best option in such a case, is to give up the child for adoption, only to never see them again. In most cases,

A PERSISTENT EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AT THE HANDS OF THEIR CAPTORS LEAVES THESE WOMEN PSYCHOLOGICALLY SCARRED FOR LIFE



no follow ups are carried out, and mothers are left with no contact with their children for the rest of their lives.

The loss of a child is not the only trauma that they have to go through. A persistent exposure to violence at the hands of their captors leaves these women psychologically scarred for life. Many of the recently rescued women, face a hard time returning to their daily lives. Cases of PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder) are extremely high among the population, as many of them even refuse to leave their refugee camps and go back to their devastated homelands. However, the aid for their physical and mental well-being seems to be insufficient. Despite the Iraqi government working towards restoring the ruined cities, the assistance provided to victims are mainly centric towards redevelopment, and in most cases doesn't address mental health issues faced by the victims of war. Rarely a ray of hope appears for these women, when international NGOs choose to intervene in the matter.

The government too lacks to take the necessary action against the criminals. Some of the militants who have been under trial were accused of

war crimes and genocide but never for rape and other inhumane crimes that they might have committed. Given the extent of the mass exodus that occurred, procuring evidence against a particular criminal seems tedious, hence many of them are easily let down.

But the question is, is there hope for these survivors? With several political actors in play, the crisis faced by these women is being manipulated to serve the selfish purposes of leaders. The traditionalist outlook on part of the Yazidi community, only hinders the situation. However, many Yazidi women have broken barriers and defied traditions by taking up initiatives themselves. Among them are Nijla Hussin and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nadia Murad who have become the voice of these women at various regional, international forums and have contributed tremendously to this cause. However, the fight for justice must go on. Issues such as acceptance of children born out of rape and the mental health of the victims still need to be addressed. A global initiative and more active assistance from the government is what these women are looking for.

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Image 1 credits: Fadel Senna/AFP/Getty Images

Image 2 credits: Christophe Simone/ AFP2019

INTERNAL CONFLICT IN THE MIDDLE EAST



War isn't something anyone can particularly glorify by its gruesome and tragic nature; however, it is rare for citizens of the "developed nations" to classify it as a chronic fear. This statement is, regrettably false in the case of the Middle East. Within a community which had seen the horrors, war was a pervasive fear for every subgroup within the population, whether defined by class, ethnicity, political affiliation, sex or so on. This fear manifests itself in different ways. It may, on the outset appear to be an abnormal yet functioning city merely by the way people have come to terms with such an imperilment however it is important to note that people have a wondrous capacity for learning to walk with danger. Their behaviour may be adaptative, suppressive or simply survival-oriented but the true impacts of the threat go unnoticed by such an act. In recent times, the international community has become more acknowledging towards the mental health issues in the Middle-East. Lebanon has been a war-related zone for several years—starting with

the civil war (1975 -1990), followed prosperity, which has exposed approximately 70 per cent of its citizens to one or more conflict-related events. In terms of mental health in Lebanon, anxiety disorders (16.7 per cent), mood disorders (12.6 per cent) and suicide (4.3 per cent) had the highest prevalence rates in the nation. The Lebanese Ministry of Public Health, in collaboration with the WHO, UNICEF and the International Medical Corps, launched the National Mental Health Programme (NMHP) in May 2014 whose focus was to provide increased services to citizens' and introduce healthcare such as psychotherapy. The stigma around mental health poses a challenge to the successful implementation of external programs. Since the impact an action has on one's mind cannot be seen in tangible terms it is either ignored or mocked for a physical wound that can be quantified in severity. A programme that addresses and even promotes an active medical counselling for such a 'mental problem' would no doubt face problems from its inception in the

Middle-East. The costs of establishing a mental health program may appear to be enormous and returns seem minimal, but most people suffering from untreated psychiatric disorders have a limited ability to be productive. The family structure is inevitably affected by such a situation. State intervention would not just help protect from an uneconomic solution where an individual survives on familial economic and social growth but also change the society's perspective on mental illness positively.

The shortfalls that arose in the NMHP can also be traced back to a seemingly missing sense of government ownership which, as per workers within the project, led to a lack of accountability for successes and failures. The lack of specific and general legislation that could effectively encompass mental health despite its increasing urgency leads one to look at the international community and the contributions if made, towards demanding for the



integration of mental health into governmental purview.

‘STRENGTHS’ (Syrian Refugees Mental Health Care Systems), is an example of a project that seeks to first understand the plight and position of Syrian refugees and then provide specific health care externally. This program is organised by people outside the community but also focusses on training other Syrian refugees to help identify and provide mental health benefits to their friends

“State intervention would not just help protect from an uneconomic solution where an individual survives on familial economic and social growth but also change the society’s perspective on mental illness positively”

or family. The intervention model applied in STRENGTHS was originally developed by the World

Health Organisation and is called Problem Management+ (PM+) to fellow Syrian refugees. Interestingly enough, PM+ is a short programme that does not target a single disorder, unlike most other external projects. The model is structured so that it targets symptoms of common mental disorders and take precautions from an earlier stage.

When one looks at legislation and the implementation of the same at the international level, the impact of International Humanitarian Law cannot be ignored. International humanitarian law has the protection of victims at its very core and its purview can be further extended to include an extension of punishment for actions that either severely affects the mental health or are directed against populations that are already under tremendous mental stress. Similar steps can be taken within state laws and punishments to necessitate the protection of mental health victims and legitimize their problems.

Jurisdictional boundaries and the

sovereignty of individual countries may serve as a hindrance however, the change must start from somewhere. Acceptance of this problem by the Ministry of Health in Lebanon is the first step for the Middle East to move towards a well-rounded society. The evolution of NHMP and Lebanon’s act of publicly admitting that an increased governmental role would greatly benefit any mental health program must serve as an example for other countries to act upon. The popular slogan ‘No health without mental health’ effectively sums up the importance of mental health in today’s arena, all that is left to do is act with accountability.

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Image 1 credits: UNICEF MENA



RESEARCH PAPER ON THE US RECONSTRUCTION IN IRAQ

ABSTRACT

Iraq is a fascinating case study for anyone looking to study the influence of the western powers in the middle east. The country has gone through a myriad of political changes, most of them orchestrated by the western powers. Since the US invasion in 2003, a major reconstruction exercise was undertaken by the Foreign governments, and Iraq. This reconstruction exercise is widely regarded as being a failure. The major focus on the reconstruction process in Iraq has been on the involvement of the United States as the Iraqi reconstruction venture stands only second to Afghanistan¹ in terms of capital. This, however, is not the sole reason for US centrality in the issue. The primary reason that the United States' role is so focussed upon is because of the approach it undertook. The United States' endeavours are riddled with accusations of insensitivity to the Iraqi context, and of corruption and exploitation.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH ESSAY

The essay aims to cover two aspects of the reconstruction exercise undertaken by the US in Iraq. First is the contextual aspect and the second is the logistical aspect. The

contextual aspect entails the importance given to ethnicities during the transition period of the post-invasion Iraq and the logistical aspect refers to the reconstruction efforts conducted specifically by the US. Both these aspects are an extensive study by themselves therefore this essay does not aim to provide answers but to raise concerns leaving the stage open for further study and exploration.

INTRODUCTION

To summarize, one could say that Iraq's modern history is riddled with western influence. It began with the British imperial rule which was overthrown in 1958. This was followed by a period of instability which was reigned in when the Ba'ath party came to power through a bloodless coup in 1968. The Ba'ath party undertook an ambitious development plan for Iraq and backed it with oil revenues. This period saw an increase in the quality of life and social indices in Iraq, in addition to that, Iraq also succeeded in creating the largest and best equipped military force in the Arab World. The regime was, however, not as stable as it looked on the surface and in 1979, Saddam Hussein forced the then president al-Bakr to resign and became the president of Iraq. Saddam's rule saw many

military adventures namely the Iran-Iraq war in 1980 and the Persian Gulf War in 1990.

Saddam's rule resulted in a chaotic period for Iraq in the 90s. Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in August 1990; the UN Security Council passed resolution 660 condemning this invasion and demanded Iraq's withdrawal; On August 8th, Iraq declared Kuwait as its 19th province; a U.S. led military coalition intervened following this as the west began to feel threatened by Iraq's aggressive posturing in the region; the coalition's operations began on January 17, 1991 following which the Iraqi military crumbled after one week of fighting; Iraq withdrew from Kuwait and accepted the security council's resolutions.

Post 9/11 however, the American administration became very suspicious of activities in Iraq; this combined with the Iraq's constant refusal to entertain the UNSCOM's (United Nation Special Commission) efforts to verify the destruction of WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) and the 'One-percent Doctrine' (American government needs to act against a state even if there is one percent chance that it is harbouring terrorism) contributed to the invasion of 2003². The environment of fear created after the 9/11 attacks, intelligence reports that Iraq was looking to further its nuclear capability, and the assured low cost of the war (which was estimated at \$50-60 Billion³) helped appropriate the invasion to the American public. The military operations severely damaged the infrastructure in major Iraqi towns and cities and destroyed much of the Iraqi armed forces. This chaos caused a lot of social unrest and secessionist movements in the following years in Iraq.

Iraq needed reconstruction in almost every sphere including electricity supply, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and state structures. Reconstruction funds (according to 2012 data) came mainly from Iraq

¹ (Smith, 2015)

² (Seliktar, 2008)

³ (Boyle, 2013)

(\$138 billion- backed by oil proceeds), United States (\$61 billion), and other foreign governments (\$14 billion)⁴.

THE DEMOCRACY DILEMMA

According to Andreas Wimmers successful democratisation is important from the American foreign-policy perspective. He also states that the focus of war has shifted from elimination of dangerous weapons to regime change and handing over power to ex-generals or Ba'athist party officials wasn't an option for the US. The major deterrents to this process was the reluctance of the local political structure to adapt 'a secularised political system with a clear division of power'⁵ and the prevalence of Kurdish autonomy in Iraq.

The demography of Iraq is made up of 75% Mesopotamian Arabs, 17% Kurds, 3% Turkmen, 2% Assyrians and 2% Persians⁷. The Kurds had been following control over their autonomous region which was propagated by the 1991 and 2003 wars against Saddam Hussein. The Kurdish had a reasonably democratic government and a powerful army and was consequently looked upon favourably by the Bush administration. The administration was also committed to a unified Iraq under the Maliki government which was in contrast with the situation on ground where the Iraqi government had no control over territory claimed by the Kurds in Iraq⁸.

In addition to that the Shia and Sunni parts of the population were at odds with each other vis-à-vis democracy. The majority of the population the Shias wanted an Islamic state while the Sunnis believed that it was their right to govern Iraq. When Nouri al-Maliki became the Prime Minister of Iraq he was cooperative with the

Bush administration to the extent that his party let him. His party the 'Islamic Dawa party' was opposed to the presence of the west in Iraq but US's assistance in the form of money and military training kept the US presence alive in Iraq.

The US diplomat Paul Bremer while Drawing up the first transitional laws stated that "ethnicity has no place in the new Iraq, that the country's citizens were all Iraqis"⁹. To add to this the limitations of the consociational arrangement in Iraq namely lacked the two most important aspects of consociationalism which are the grand coalition and veto¹⁰. Grand coalition ensures power sharing among groups of a plural society and veto allows cultural communities to block any move that may be deemed as unfavourable to them. The absence of these aspects has decreased the acceptability of the system to the different ethnic groups in Iraq.

One could say that there is a societal aspect to reconstruction. This aspect aims to prevent the resurgence of violence so as to protect a society from slipping back into chaos. Therefore, one can say that US's dual stand on Kurdistan, and its inconsideration towards the ethnic aspects of the society prevented the integration of the society. In addition to that the rise of ISI and the subsequent involvement of the American troops in the war against ISI has been taxing on the Iraqi and American societies.

THE POLITICS BEHIND RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction of Iraq entailed a lot of contracts and in the US alone as of 2012 more than 70 American companies were awarded contracts worth almost \$8 billion¹¹. There was a disturbing trend observed in the companies that were awarded the

contracts, however. Out of the companies which bagged the contracts Kellogg, Brown & Root is the most controversial as it is the subsidiary of Halliburton which the then Vice President Dick Cheney led before taking office. Apart from Kellogg, Brown & Root there were other companies which too had good connections with either members of congress, or of high levels in the military.

Most of the US money was spent on creating and training security forces, and lost to profiteering, waste, fraud or on ill-advised projects. The prevalence of such practices in the reconstruction programs have led to the failure of many reconstruction goals. In 2012, Special Inspector General Stuart Bowen noted that "the record of what the U.S. built in Iraq and what we transferred to Iraqi Control is full of holes"¹².

Corruption on the Iraqi side has slumped major growth too. Local officials who were responsible for reconstruction projects regularly siphoned off money from the projects to private pockets. This resulted in the construction of inferior infrastructure and inefficient implementation of reconstruction programs. Further according to a SIGIR (Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction) a lot of the funds allocated for reconstruction has been used for military and security purposes. This showcases the attention given to militarization of the state, albeit an important exercise to protect the country from the insurgencies and rebel outbursts, instead of to the construction of basic infrastructure which in contrast have received much smaller sums of capital.

Another feature of the reconstruction in Iraq was the lack of outputs in the projects. State Department whistleblower, Peter Van Buren describes it

⁴ (Lutz, 2013)

⁵ (Wimmer, 2007)

⁶ (Wimmer, 2007)

⁷ (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2016)

⁸ (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2016)

⁹ (McWilliams & Piotrowski, 2016)

¹⁰ (Ltaif, 2015)

¹¹ (Beelman, 2012)

¹² (Lutz, 2013)

in the following manner “We measured the impact of our projects by their effect on us, not by their effect on the Iraqis. *Output* was the word missing from the vocabulary of developing Iraq. Everything was measured only by what we put in dollars spent, hours committed, people engaged, press releases written.” According to Van Buren such an attitude resulted in the spending on projects which were unnecessary and as a domino effect decreased the money directed to basic health care and infrastructure projects which in turn affected the public health and welfare increasing the costs there¹³.

CONCLUSION

The United States was unsuccessful in their attempt at reconstruction in Iraq both at the macro and micro levels. This in turn acts as a lesson to policy makers and academicians to be conscious about the on-ground effects of the policies and suggestions made regarding reconstruction of a state which do not take into consideration the on-ground realities of the state in question, in this case Iraq. This as a consequence can lead to devastating effects such as large-scale civil war and can also create a fertile breeding ground for trans-national terrorist organizations. In order to avoid such effects, it is important to take a more wholesome approach when it comes to peace building and reconstruction of a state.

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¹³ (Buren, 2011)

An aerial photograph of a mountain range with a winding river valley. The mountains are dark and rugged, and the river valley is a lighter, more textured area. The overall scene is in shades of brown, tan, and dark green, with a slightly grainy texture.

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