ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICTS: A THREAT TO GLOBAL PEACE: BEING A PAPER PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF MUSLIM LAW STUDENTS OAU BRANCH ILE-IFE: ON 19" AUGUST, 2003 BY: YUSUF O. ALI ESQ: SAN

Introduction

The world is ridden with crisis in all the main regions. There are crisis in the north, south, east and west, It appears that no country is spared the paintbrush of crisis either man made or wrought by nature.

The events that culminated into the attacks on the twin buildings of the World Trade Centre in New York City of USA on ***11th September, 2001*** had thrown up new dimensions to the crisis riddling the world. Africa has had its fair share of the trouble. The raging fires of Australia almost decimated all the forest of the country. The un-abating earthquake and flood that ravage most of the Asian countries and Mexico also contribute to the crisis in the world. The list is virtually endless and this leads us to the topic of this discourse. The organisers have singled out the simmering crisis in the Middle East for our dissection. One must quickly add that the organizers would appear to be settled in their view that the crisis in that horn of the world has been sustained by the conspiracy of the rest of the world. By the time we finish with our analysis of the situation, we shall all be in a position to agree or disagree with the organizers in their conclusion on the matter. In this paper we take the view that the organizers wants a discussion on the perennial blood bath that is the daily occurrence between the Israelis and Palestinians.

The Origins of the Crisis

In dealing with this sub-topic, we should bear in mind that one can safely state that the crisis in the Middle East has both the historical origin and modern day developments of the present crisis rocking that region of the world.

Historically, the Jews and the Arabs could be traced to the same ancestor, who was a son to Noah (ASW) by the name of Shem. From that line, they are both regarded as descendants of Ibrahim (ASW), The Arabs came from the

tree of Ismail (ASW), while the Jews belong to the **Is-haq's** lineage. Incidentally Judaism and Islam share the same monotheistic fervour. It is a fact of history that for centuries, Jews did fare better in the Arab world than in Europe. In fact many of the classical thinkers of the Jews like the **Poet Judan Bin Halevi** and the philosopeher **Maimouides** Used Arabic as their mother tongue.

It is apt to point out that even at those periods almost beyond human memory, the relationship between the Jews and the Arabs was at best that of cat and mouse due to mutual recriminations and suspicions.

The seed of the modern state of Israel and the perennial one man called Lord Balfour who was Britain's foreign secretary during the 1" world war.

The story was told that about 1916 at the height of the 1st world war, Britain was running out of natural ***acetone*** with which ammunition was manufactured for the war.

A man who was a Jew emigrant by name ***Chaim Weizman*** was a leading chemistry teacher at ***Manchester University***. This man was introduced to the then British Prime Minister ***Lloyd George*** who hired the former to find artificial substitute for ***acetone***. ***Weizman*** within a short period, succeeded and he thus saved Britain from imminent defeat at the war. Also Britain desperately wanted to bring United States into the war on its side and thought of a way of lobbying Jewish Americans to secure such backing from the United States.

On **2nd November, 1917** Lord Balfour came up with the now famous ***Bal four Declaration*** which was to serve as a reward to ***Weizman*** and to encourage the

American Jews to support Britain's war effort. The text of that declaration which was to change the geographical configuration of the world in 1947/1948 was worthy quoting. It went as follows:-

> "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, It being clearly understood that, nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country."

Unfortunately, Britain made other over lapping commitments to the Arabs as a way of getting them to support the war against the Turks. As soon as the Turks were defeated, Britain went back on its words to the Arabs, rather it divided up the region between France and itself.

In 1948 they finally pulled out of Palestine without any clear cut authority of the Arabs over Palestine and they left the Arabs and the Jews to fight it out amongst themselves. All the above were preludes to the event of 1947 which irreversibly set the tone of the crisis in the Middle East. The General Assembly of the United Nations on ***29th November, 1947*** voted with 2/3 majority to partition Western Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State. The land was to be divided in a rough 50/50, proportion. As to be expected, all the Arab countries in the United Nations at the time namely ***Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria*** and ***Yemen,*** vehemently opposed the partition.

Before the partition, there were Jew settlers in Palestine who met the Palestinians in the Middle East.

The first physical confrontation between the settlers and the Arabs started on **15th May, 1948** when regular troops from **Egypt, Syria, Transjordan and Iraq** entered Palestine to join and support the local Palestinian Arabs thus a war was born.

It was thought that the invading Arab force of about 21,000 would over- whelm the Jews who were thought to be fewer in number. That was a grave error since the settlers could muster between 40-60,000 fighters. The fighting continued till ***January,*** 1949 when armistices agreements were made and became fully effective in ***July of 1949.***

The war however left the new state of Isreal victorious and with ***80 percent*** of the total land in the territory that was to have been divided equally with the Arabs.

At this period, the population of Arabs in Israel dropped from 700,000 to 165,000. What was left of Palestine territory was taken up by other Arab countries. Egypt took over the Gaza strip, Transjordan took over a sizeable portion of the West Bank which included old Jerusalem. Three other wars in 1967, 1973 and ***1982*** between the Israelis and the Arabs, left Israel with almost 90% of the total land area.

The Jews policy of "Aliyah" which literally means ***"coming up to the land"*** which had been in existence since the ***19th century*** received renewed impetus from 1948 when the state of Israel was created. The effect of this policy was to encourage Jews from all over the world to migrate from wherever they were back to Palestine. The following statistics demonstrates the success of the policy and the annoyance of the Arabs.

Within the first year of the creation of the state of Israel, about 203,000 Jews from 42 countries arrived in the Middle East.

In 1952, every Jew was given automatic right to return to Israel from wherever. About 1984 Israel embarked on a secret mission code named ***Operation Moses*** by which Ethiopian Jews were spirited into Sudan and then to Israel. About **7800** Ethiopian Jews were so smuggled into

Israel. Later Israel embarked upon operation ***Solomon*** in a massive effort that in 36 hours and 28 flights transported nearly ***14,200 Ethiopian*** Jews into Israel. In 1994 another ***6,800 Ethiopian*** Jews were ferried into Israel. Now more, than 52,000 ***thiopian*** Jews are in Israel.

From the former Soviet Union, more than a ***million*** Jews had migrated to Israel and up-till now about 65,000 **Soviet** Jews still migrate to Israel yearly. This translates into 170 everyday.

The effect of all these is that more and more land area is required to settle these emigrants.

This accounts for the massive housing estates put up by the government of Israel on land belonging to the Arabs in the Middle East. The effect of this development is better imagined having regard to the tenuous relationship between the two brothers.

The antecedent of the modern day crisis in the Middle East could be conveniently positioned in the year 1987. Before that year, it is instructive to note that for about ***20 years*** from that date after the Arab/Israeli war of 1967, Israel captured more Arab land and lorded it over the Palestinians in those territories.

On 6th December, ***1987,*** 6 Palestinian workers were killed in the Gaza strip when an Israeli ran into them with a truck. The Palestinians thought it was premeditated.

Three days later, a Palestinian youth picked up a stone from the ground and threw it at an Israeli patrol vehicle. His friends followed suit and soon hundreds joined in. This was the beginning of a revolution that came to be known as ***intfada*** which freely translated means the ***revolution of the stones*** which literally means "a shaking". This was taken up by Palestinian intellectuals as the shaking off of the yoke of Israelis humiliating colonization of 20 years.

Barricades were set up throughout the Palestinian territories, bon fires were made and the Palestinian flag outlawed by the Israelis was hoisted in areas liberated by the youths.

The reaction of Israel was predictable, brutal and violent. The then Israeli defence Minister ***Yitzhak Rabin*** a hardliner adviced the security forces to break the bones of the youths detained as a result of the uprising. The Israeli forces were at their repressive worse and they took the advice to heart.

The casualties were high. About ***1300 Palestinians*** including ***300 children*** were killed and this prompted worldwide condemnation from all the corners of the world against the Israeli government.

Women and old men would gather the stones with which the Palestinian youth would bombard the oppressors. The exiled Palestinian leadership took up the gauntlet from that point.

Eventually in 1993, the popular uprising galvanized the international community into finding a permanent solution to the problem in the region and this culminated in the **Oslo agreement of 1993.**

Under the agreement, the Arabs were enjoined to recognize the state of Israel and the state of Israel was to agree to an independent Palestinian state in a phased process. Israel was to withdraw from all the Arab land captured in the 1967 war and withdraw its forces from all the places.

This agreement in- spite of hiccups was working reasonably well until Sharon in 2000 decided to turn the hornet's nest by visiting the ***Al- Aqsa Mosque*** much to the consternation of the Palestinians, thus the beginning of the current face off between the two neighbours.

It is estimated that not less than 2000 lives had been lost on both sides in the last three years with the Palestinians suffering the higher causalities. To capture the extent of the tragedy, all you need to do is to pick up any newspaper and turn to the foreign pages to see the extent of the problem. This is to be expected, since the only weapons of the Palestinians were stones, slings and suicide bombings, compared to the use of tanks, combat helicopters and sometime the use of aerial bombings by the Israelis.

The insistence of the Israeli leadership on one hundred percent cease fire before peace talks could hold has not helped the horrendous tension in that region.

The World Community and the Crisis

It is discernable from the historic presentation of the crisis that the rest of the world had played and is still playing less than altruistic roles in the crisis. The culpability of the rest of the world in the sustainance of the crisis is not in doubt.

The double standards of the United States in the crisis is worthy of mention. The lack of focus and unity of purpose among the Arab nations is a serious contributory factor in the crisis.

The overbearing influence of the Jews in industry, commerce, technology and other spheres of life in the western world has ensured that, the governments of the countries of the West could not but pander to the dictates and interest of the Israelis.

The greatest pointer to the hypocrisy of the countries of the western world is their apathy to issues concerning the crisis whenever raised in the United Nations or the Security Council. On occasions too numerous to count, the United States had vetoed many resolutions passed by the Security Council to call Israel to order on the excessive use of force on civilians and the expropriation of the land of the Palestinians.

The world economic order is made in such manner as to weigh against the interest of the Palestinians and their sympathizers all over the world. Anyone of them that show unnecessary radical or total support for the Palestinian cause is whipped into line by arm twisting economic policies.

There is also a well orchestrated plan to subdue, and if possible destroy any nation in the Middle East that could pose a military threat to the

state of Israel. The recent events in Iraq cannot be totally divorced from this settling

In the days of the cold war, the Middle East was the theatre where the then supper powers were testing their influence and new weapons. The United States also promoted in fighting among the Arab nations and on more than one occasion promoted war among them like it did between Iran and Iraq in 1980.

The crisis in the region also benefit the makers of arms and ammunition with which Israel has been oppressing the Palestinians. While it is legitimate for Israel to import any type of weapon of destruction, the Palestinian Authority cannot buy ordinary guns. There has been a criminal silence from the rest of the world on the Israelis flagrant breach of the ***Oslo agreement*** and other agreements reached with the Palestinians.

Any attack by the solitary Palestinian suicide bomber is termed as a terrorist attack but the use of sophisticated weapons of mass destruction by the state of Israel against civilian targets is termed as self defence. The injustice being perpetuated against the Palestinians by the rest of the world is unfathomable. It passeth all rational understanding.

It is important to note that the United States of America has now put forward what is now commonly referred to as "road map to peace" in the Middle East. In the last few weeks, this road map is being worked on. It is hoped that the road map will eventually lead to the creation of a Palestinian nation and peace in that region of the world. This can only come about if the hardliners on both side sheath their sword of war.

Solutions to the Crisis

The two main parties to the crisis in the Middle East that is, Israel and Palestine should observe the letters and spirit of all agreements reached especially the new road map put together by USA. The earlier the state of Palestine is recognized the better because its leaders will then be better able to cope with and deal with the few groups and individuals that are opposed to the existence of the state of Israel. De facto and de Jure the state of Israel is real.

Religious meanings should not be read into the crisis especially along Christian/Muslim divide since most Israelis are Jews. The Jews as is well known, do not respect nor observe all the sacred teachings of the Christians including the authenticity of the mission of Jesus. The world powers should desist from their double standards and stand firmly on the path of justice on the matter of the crisis in the Middle East.

The Arab nations should be united and unanimous on their stand on the creation of a Palestinian state. They should use to advantage their God given natural endowment and wealth in charting the cause of their brothers in Palestine. That is what the Jews in diasporas are doing effectively, for the Jews in Israel.

The United Nations must stand up to uphold the ideals of the Organisation among which is the equality of all persons and the right to self determination of all people which is being denied to the Palestinians. The new resolution of the Security Council that calls for the existence of a Palestinian State is a welcome development.

The Security Council should ensure that all its resolutions passed concerning the crisis in the Middle East are implemented by all concerned.

The Israeli public and electorates should dump all hard-line leaders who encourage intransigence that promote violence in that region.

One cannot but agree with the editorial comment of the ***Daily Independent*** of March 25-31 2002 when in part the newspaper opined thus:

> "A ray of hope has however come from the United Nations. The Security Council has issued a resolution calling for the existence of a Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel. The resolution, appropriately titled "Affirming a vision" and supported by 14 of the Council's 15 members, calls for immediate cessation of all acts of violence, and demands a restructuring in the region such that Israel and Palestine live side by side within secure and recognised borders."

The current face off in the region has once more proved that all the weapons in the world cannot conquer a determined people.

Conclusion

In this paper we have called attention to the history, causes and solutions to the crisis in the Middle East. We have also called attention to the attitude of the rest of the world to the crisis. This paper in the main, set out to raise consciousness on the lingering problem in that region and its potentiality to snow ball into a world war if not properly handled.

We should all be concerned about the crisis and one thing that should task our collective consciousness is the question, why is it that the region from where virtually all the revealed religions of the world came from is in perpetual turmoil. Is that the wish of God or the evil work of Man? You are entitled to come up with your own answer.

I thank you for your attentive listening.