

The six-day war and Arab/Israeli tussle in self-determination issues

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Abstract

Israel has a history of wars. Their being or not being is determined by the wars. In AD 70, the worst happened to Israel when the Roman Empire besieged and destroyed everything that defined its statehood and they lost their homeland. What is more is that they were scattered all over the world. There was a twist of events as the Balfour declaration of November 2, 1917 came into being. One even led to the other and on November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine. On May 14, 1948, the Sovereign State of Israel had come to be. This met with aggressive reaction from the Arab League and series of wars to abort the statehood of Israel started. The goal of the wars was never to be achieved and Israel has remained strong on all sides even in the midst of enemies. This discourse calls attention to the fact it is exactly 50 years since the end of the six days war that established Israel in her stead and unmovable and as Israel works out her Golden Jubilee, which to her is a celebration of survival and continued existence in the region, she should pay attention to calls for the achievement of a lasting peace in the region. It is recommended that the UN and other world governing bodies the efforts to bring a lasting peace in the Middle East since it is a known fact that peace in the region greatly contributes to peace in the world. Moreover, Arab League should know that there cannot be peace without compromise. They

should make efforts to concede reasonable grounds to facilitate peace and stimulate development that would benefit them and other nations of the world.

Introduction

The History of the Middle East from the period of the creation and the declaration of the statehood of Israel on May 14, 1948 has been one full of wars and conflicts. The Jewish people have had continuous and unbroken occupation of the land throughout the centuries, even after majority of them were forced into exile almost 2000 years ago. Hence, it is safe to say that the establishment of the state of Israel is a renewal of the Jewish independence. The renewal of the independence of the Jews was welcomed with her first war which could be termed her *war of independence* and, from then till now, there have been wars one after another to date. There have also been failed attempts to broker peace by the international governing bodies with the consequence that Israel have continued to fight, conquering and expanding its coasts in the region.

The creation of the state of Israel

The people of Israel (the Jewish people) had always been in existence in the very geographical territory they are in today. They ceased to exist as a unified people in this territory in AD70 after they were besieged and routed by the Roman Empire, and from this very point they lost their homeland and consequently were scattered all over the world.

The creation of the state of Israel has its origin in the famous Balfour declaration of November 2, 1917. It was named after its

author Arthur James Balfour, the foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom. It was written to Britain's most illustrious Jewish citizen, Baron Lionel Walker Rothschild expressing the British support for a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. A part of the letter states,

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.

The right for the establishment of the Jewish state was re-affirmed by the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection of the Jewish people, with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their national home. The Nazi Holocaust which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe proved anew the urgency of the establishment of the Jewish state, which would solve the problem of the Jewish homeless by opening the Palestinian gate to all the Jews and lifting the Jews to equality with other nations.

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution for the establishment of an independent Jewish state in Palestine, and called upon the

inhabitants of the country to take such steps as may be necessary non their part to put the plan into effect. This recognition by the United Nations makes it apparent that it is the right of the Jews like other Nations to own its Sovereign State. In one of the final Ceremony of Government house in Jerusalem on Friday, May 14, 1948, a small military band played, “God save the King”, and the British quietly departed. The Union Jack was lowered and a Red Cross flag flew in its place. The declaration of the Jewish Independence and creation of the Israeli State reads,

ACCORDINGLY, WE, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and Zionist movement of the World, met together in Solemn assembly today, the days of termination of the British mandate for Palestine, by virtue of the National and historic right of the Jewish and of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations, **HEREBY PROCLAIM** the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called **ISRAEL ...**

The declaration of the Independence was read and signed by David Ben-Gurion and others in the Presence of other Jewish leaders and some two hundred specially invited guests. David Ben-Gurion was the Zionist leader who later became the first Prime Minister of the Nation of Israel.

Arab's reaction to the Israeli existence

The creation of the State of Israel was immediately met with the mobilization of armies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Trans-Jordan, and other Arab nations. Only an all-out war between Arabs and Israelis would determine the outcome. Very desperate days were to begin for the new nation.

One week after Israel officially became a State, it ignited a far wider battle in the region. The Jewish Community accepted the idea of partition, but the Arab League rejected the plan because they were adamantly opposed to a Jewish state. Within days, Arab armies marched in from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Members of the Arab League galvanized, threatening to drive Israel into the Sea. To the Jewish people, this was a war of independence, and they were forced to wage it on several fronts. The newly formed Israeli Defense Force (IDF) managed to prevail after fifteen months of war. Finally, a cease-fire was signed in February 1949. Israel now held a large position of what was originally to be Arab Palestine. The idea of the two states was no longer possible. The Israelis controlled everything except Gaza, which belonged to Egypt, and the West Bank, which was in the Hands of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan. Arabs who fled in 1948 went to Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza. All were in refugee camps. The UN passed resolution 194, saying 'refugees wishing to return to ... live at peace with neighbours should be permitted to do so'. However, no such permission has ever been given.

The six day war

Almost all aspects of Israeli life in 1967 were dominated by the explosion of hostilities on June 5 when the war began. Two decades of Arab-Israel tension culminated in a massive combined Arab military threat, which was followed by a swift mobilization of Israeli's citizen army and, after a period of waiting for international action, by a powerful offensive against the Egyptian, Jordan and Syrian forces, the greatest victory in Jewish military annals was recorded.

On Monday, June 4, 1967, Moshe Dayan the newly appointed defense minister presented his battle plan to the Israeli Cabinet. It was a preemptive strike. During the first few days of June 1967, President Nasser announced that his entire Egyptian army was on full alert. In his view, this was a battle to end all the battles threatening to, once and for all, crush the fledgling State of Israel and drive it into the sea. Nasser was at the peak of his popularity, and it seemed hysteria had seized the entire Arab world. Jordan, Syria and Lebanon had partnered in alliance for this historic confrontation plus contingents from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and Algeria, who had pledged to join the fray. Israeli army totaled about 250,000 men, 1,000 tanks and 1,500 armoured personnel, but ground troops were not to be the answer. Israel also commanded 286 combat aircraft and at 7:14 am, the next day, Israel planes launched surprise attacks against the air forces of Egypt, destroying roughly 300 enemy aircraft- most of which were still on the ground. "Within the first few hours of Monday morning air-strikes, nineteen Egyptian airfields were hit, and most of Egypt's MIG-21s were destroyed. That same morning, Israel sent word to Jordan that it did not wish to engage in any military confrontations in the West Bank along Israeli's

system border where Jordan had amassed its troops. But Jordan's King Hussein received false information from Egypt and immediately launched simultaneous attacks on Israel. Jordan's military shelled civilian suburbs of Tel Aviv and attacked the Israeli towns of Netanya and Kfar Sava. In west Jerusalem, civilian locations were shelled indiscriminately including Hadassah Hospital and the Mount Zion Church, along with Israeli's parliament building (the Knesset) and the Prime Minister's office. This opened a second front in the war and led to Israel's entrance into and eventual conquest of the West Bank. By the Second and third days, Israel had destroyed hundreds of Egyptian aircraft and Egypt's one hundred thousand man army was full of retreat.

The six days war ended on June 11 1967, Israel had not only won the conflict, but they also had captured the Sinai Desert and the Gaza strip from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and from the Kingdom of Jordan. They seized control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem including the famed Western Wall of Solomon's temple. The Jews three- thousand year old claim to the city of Jerusalem had come full circle, and it was once again under Jewish rule. A total of 777 Israelis died in the battle, far fewer than the 6000 casualties of the 1948 war. At the end of the war, the Soviet Union announced the rupture of diplomatic relations with Israel, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia followed suit.

Self-determination question and the conquered territories

The right of people to self-determination is a cardinal principle in modern international law, binding, as such on the United Nations as authoritative interpretation of the Charter's norms. It states that

people, based on respect for the principle of equal rights and fair equality of opportunity, have the right to freely choose their sovereignty and international political status with no interference . This principle can be traced to the Atlantic charter, signed on August 14, 1941, by Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States of America and Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who pledged The Eight Principal points of the Charter. It is also derived from the principles espoused by the United States. President Woodrow Wilson in his fourteen points following World War 1, after which some new nation states were revived after the dissolution of empires.

The Golan Heights was the region that Israel gained over from Syria after the six days war. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 actually supported the establishment of a national homeland for the Jews, however, at the condition of not subduing the rights of any existing communities in the land. This means it approved the co-existence of the Palestinian Arabs and the Jews on the same Land. The Arabs never agreed with the Balfour Declaration as they felt betrayed by the British Soldiers during the World War 1. The question then was, would you kick out half a million Arabs whose ancestors had lived in Palestine for more than a thousand years? How could people with opposite cultures and religion live on the same homeland?

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict can be reduced to one basic question: Who owns the land? To the Arabs, it was seized from them after the World War II by Pro-Israeli International governing bodies. To the Jews, the land is rightfully theirs and was given to them by the Almighty God. And, they believe they have the right to claim the land as their permanent home. However, religion is not to be out ruled as a causal factor of the

crises in the Middle East. The three Major religions of the world (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have their origins in the Middle East and their ancestry in Abraham. How could these different peoples with varying religious ideologies co-exist peacefully? The Jews accepted a dual Statehood on the same land; however they had some expansion after the war; conquered Gaza from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria and West Bank from Jordan. In response to the war, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 242 which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict, thus implying that Israel had to return all conquered territory, termination of all claims or states of belligerence and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force. This has been the basis for all the subsequent conflicts and peace moves as Israel rejected the resolution to cede the conquered territories.

Before now, the Arabs who lived in these conquered territories had considered themselves Palestinian Arabs. However, because they were subjected to other Arab Governments, there was not a push for Palestinian nationalism, nor was there fervour to form their own nation. But now things had drastically changed. Suddenly, these Palestinian Arabs woke up to find the land on which they had been living, controlled by a foreign government, whose systems and language were different from theirs. This led to the stirring for nationalism and before long, several new Palestinian Militant Groups joined the PLO in seeking the world's attention in an attempt to bring about an independent state.

The question of self-determination is an issue of intense importance to both the Arabs and the Israelis. To the Israelis, the conquered territories were a historic move for her self-determination in the Middle East. The main aim of the Zionist Movement before 1967 was the establishment of an independent Jewish Palestinian State. But by the eve of the war, that objective had already been achieved. This created two trends and a big division between those who accepted that the division of Palestine was a solution and those saying that these territories were integral part of the land of Israel. However, the Arabs saw the loss of the territory as the loss of their homeland for which they must fight until they reclaim, hence, the continuous conflicts on these conquered regions till date.

Implications for world peace and security

For the past 50 years, Palestinians and Israelis have been subjected to the uniquely corrosive institution of belligerent occupation. For fully 25 of those years, they have been subject to the most equally scarring peace process that tried to end it. The peace process managed to stimulate and intensify the centrifugal narratives on either side: it motivated Hamas's steady escalation in brutality, the corresponding- and, for peace prospect, devastating- Israeli public disillusionment, and the anxious race by the ideological settlement to expand Israeli settlement deep inside the West Bank in anyway it could. It brought all the anxieties, terrors and resistance of a real peace-without delivering the sides any closer to reconciliation or resolution .

The implication of the six days war and Israeli-Arab tussle in self-determination issues cannot be overstated. This can be explained and understood using the Systems Theory of

International Relations. This can be used for an overall view of the relations among nations which are actors in the international System. This theory seeks to analyze international relations as a system of interactions which are interdependent and interrelated. It studies international actors. This means that states as units are part of the complex system. Hence, when one unit of the system is affected, the whole is affected as well.

The Middle East as a region has been an international boiling point, which has drawn the attention of who is who in international politics. From the period of the creation and declaration of state of Israel, the region has been from one crisis to the other and one peace move to the other. One cannot then state that the world is peaceful and secured when the region remains in constant conflagrations.

The region being an oil-rich region has won the attraction of major world of powers that have entered into alliance with each of the states of this region for personal interests. The Arab nations who are all in the Arab League, sharing some ancestry, beliefs and religion all ideologically tilted towards the east during the cold world war and at present. While Israel, the odd nation out, was pro-west both during and after the cold war. The alliance, which was one of the causes of the World Wars I and II, remains focal; even till date, political analysts predict that if there would be a World War III, the Middle East would be the war theatre. So, whether this would happen or not is dependent on the outcome of the peace moves in the region between the warring nations.

Conclusion

According to the times of Israel magazine, the US says that the Israelis and the Palestinians will be forced to the compromise in

order to achieve US President Donald Trump's goal of brokering peace between the two sides. According to Rex Tillerson, the Secretary of State, 'Trump was very forceful with both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas during his trip to the region last month, in which he sought to jump start negotiations'²⁵.

It is exactly 50 years since the end of the six days war and Israel works her Golden jubilee which to her is a celebration of survival and continued existence in the region. This strengthens the fact that it is time to get to the table and negotiate so as to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

We recommend, as it is expected, that the UN and other world powers should not relent in their efforts to bring a lasting peace in the Middle East since it is a known fact that peace in the region greatly contributes to peace in the world. Moreover, the Israeli authorities and the Arab League should know that there cannot be peace without compromise. They should make efforts on both sides to concede reasonable grounds to facilitate peace and stimulate development that would benefit other them and other nations of the world.

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