

Western Leadership in the Unending Crisis in the Middle East: A Realist Perspective

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Since man came into being, towns, communities, and nations, have at one time or the other embarked on wars against one another thus justifying the “Force of Theory “of the origin of the state. Factors precipitating these wars have been traced to territorial control, self-determination, exercise of socio-political and economic rights. Relying on documentary method, the paper approached the protracted crises in the Middle East from the realist school of thought. The paper examined the role of western leadership in the region. It concludes that the prospect for enduring peace is a herculean task but the ugly trend is not irreversible while the intervention external powers in the region is largely based on economic gains rather than bringing an end to crisis. The study recommends that the sincere search for spiritual intervention and the reduction in the hope that external forces could midwife peace are indispensable.

Key words: Self- determination, War, Intervention, and Peace

INTRODUCTION

Of all the conflict affecting the world today, none is more problematic, more irreconcilable, and likely more difficult to solve than the one in the Middle East. It combines emotion with limited territory and years of bloodshed with sworn enemies. Strauss (2002:27)

Since man came into being, states, nations, towns, as well as communities have one time or the other embarked on wars against one another thus justifying the “Force of Theory” of the origin of the state. Factors precipitating these wars have inter alia been territorial control, acquisition, self-determination as well as exercise of socio-political and economic rights. History is littered with phenomena of strong towns and communities embarking on wars of territorial conquest and annexation of less powerful or weaker communities by powerful or stronger ones. Whenever such military expeditions are successful against less powerful states, the powerful states annex their territories and institute/establish political administrative structures and authorities there, while the defeated states become subjected to accepting the political, legal and economic wills of the new authorities.

There are senses in which one might be justified to accept the above as a truism when conflict vis a vis theories of the origin of the states of the world, inclusive of those of the Middle East, are critically looked at. This is with a view to tracing their implications on the world peace and security on the one hand, and the nations’ resources-(human and material) on the other hand.

The contemporary international political milieu is such that power manipulation, to coerce and subjugate the less powerful nations into submission to the dictates of the powerful is the other of the day. Modern nation-states are alert to the imperative of safeguarding their territorial boundaries as their mark of juridical statehood and political sovereignty.

Conversely, since conflicts, crises and wars are part of human existence, contemporary nation-states, especially the world powers have continued to engage in wars of territorial conquest, annexation (Iraq and Kuwait case readily comes to mind) and expansion in an attempt to exploit and distribute economic wealth of the less powerful nations.

Inferring from the history of the ancient days and territorial conflict, crises and wars being inter alia the means of leverage in the international relations, it follows therefore that Israeli–Palestinian territorial conflict falls among the instances mentioned above, but with a unique type of territorial conflict. Unique, because opinion varies along realism and dispensationalist, as to the ownership of the land in dispute, and whether or not it is the source of the conflict.

Since 28 September 2000, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has taken a new turn. A qualitatively more dramatic phase has characterized relations between the Israeli occupation authorities and the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Needless to say that, tensions have reached a watershed and the calamity of the situation has become almost unprecedented. This is directly resulting from, and in response to, the crippling of the Palestinian economy and chokehold on ordinary people’s lives at the numerous Israeli ‘checkpoints’ during the arduous seven-year-old political process known as the Oslo Accords (Hisham H. Ahmed,2008). On the other hand, the Israeli have suffered series of

suicide attacks and both physical and psychological attacks from their hostile neighbours. The unending crises in the Middle East particularly between the Palestine and Israeli motivate this study.

METHODOLOGY

An article of this topic could not but be one who's methodological leaning is documentary. The study combined descriptive, analytical and historical perspectives of the Middle East enduring crises. Relying heavily on academic published books, the paper examined the creation of the State of Israel and the controversies thereafter; Israeli-Palestine history of conflicts, causes, socio-political relationship and the roles the outside world played in it.

RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study stems at once from the urgent need for students of Peace and Conflict Studies, International Relations and Political Science to comprehend the causes and the consequences as well as various dimensions of the territorial conflicts between Israel and Palestine, which has led to destruction of lives and property. It would also elicit understanding of the role the United States and international organizations play towards peace by means of round table negotiations.

BRIEF PALESTINIAN-ISRAEL LAND HISTORY

The history of the Palestinians and the Israelis dates back to many centuries. Judea was the home of the Jewish ancestry. Judea was conquered by the Romans and renamed Palestine. Palestine was later conquered and inhabited by the Arabs for over a thousand years. The Zionist movement arose to restore the Jews to Israel ignoring the existing Arab population.

Towards the end of World War 1, the British government decided to endorse the creation of a Jewish home in Palestine. The decision was made public in a letter from Lord Arthur Balfour addressed to a lead British Zionist, Lord Rothschild. The contents of Balfours's letter, latter became formally known as the "Balfour Declaration." The Balfour was drafted with the assistance of United States, President Woodrow Wilson, who was a strong supporter of the Zionist Movement.

However, the first authoritative, reliable and divine resource material (literature) on the origin of the state of Israel is the Holy Bible. This fact is an incubator of high emotion among scholars and people of Middle East extraction and regarding the authenticity or otherwise of the claims Israelis are laying to the land they presently occupy, since only Christianity (among other popular religions) embraces the Holy Bible as the only inspired account of the origin of man.

The first mention of Israel is found in the Bible which records that Israel is an important part of fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. According to the Bible, in Genesis 12: 1-7, God promises to bless and increase Abraham by making him into a great nation. As a part of these promises, God pledges to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's descendant (12:17).

This Abrahamic covenant is held to be a unilateral, unconditional covenant to which God bound himself by his promise. The foregoing is adumbrated by Hays, Duvall and Pate, (2007) thus:

Because the abrahamic covenant was a unilateral covenant or a covenant of grace, it plays a critical role in Israel's relationship to God, especially when the people are disobedient. For example, in Exodus 32, the people built and worship a golden calf while Moses is receiving the Ten Commandments. God's anger burns against the people and he tells Moses he intends to destroy them {ex.32:10}. Moses, however, argues with God, using the Abrahamic covenant as a basis for asking for grace:"remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel to whom you swore by your own self:"I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land. I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever" {32:13}

However, generations after Abraham, and soon after the death of King Solomon, a civil war broke out and polarized the nation of Israel into Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The continued apostasy and blatant disobedience to covenant and precepts of God led to series of wars captivities the countries suffered. As Strauss (Ibid) noted:

War thereafter became the standard operating procedure in this part of the world:

- The Assyrians conquered Israel in 722 or 721 B.C.E
- The Babylonians conquered Judah in 587 or 586 B.C.E, destroyed Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, and exiled a large number of Jews.
- The Persians then conquered Babylonian about 50 years later and they ruled the area from about 530 to 331 B.C.E.
- The Seleucids later ruled the area around 200 B.C.E.

Later about 61 B.C.E, Roman troops invaded Judah and destroyed Jerusalem, the land came under Roman control and they began to call the area Judea. The Jews in Judea rebelled against Rome. The rebellion was crushed ruthlessly and over 600.000 Jews were killed. The Romans drove the Jews out of Jerusalem, and then renamed the area "Palaestina", or Palestine (Strauss, Ibid; Hays, J. D, Duvall, J. S, and Pate, C. M, 2007:218).

PERSPECTIVES REGARDING THE MODERN STATES OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

One of the more popular views among Christians in the United States and Canada is that the creation of the modern State of Israel is a literal fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy. As noted by Hays, J. D, Duvall, J. S, Pate, C. M, (2007: 219), in this view, a literal understanding of the Old Testament prophecies of the end times demands a physical State of Israel in Palestine; thus the creation of this State after hundreds of years is seen not only as a fulfillment, but as a sign that the end times are drawing near.

Several writers, primarily classic dispensationalists, posit that with the formation of modern Israel, the world political stage is set for the unfolding of end-time events. Some early writers argued that when Israel was created in 1948, an end-time's "time clock" began that would be fulfilled within one generation. They anchor their understanding majorly on Mark 13:30, where after speaking of the end times, Jesus stated that "this generation will not pass away until all these things have happened".

However, another view of how modern Israel fits into biblical prophecy posits that one should be cautious jumping to end-time conclusions regarding the events of 1948. The view note that the present State of Israel may or may not play a role in the end times or be a sign that the end times are imminent. This is stemming from the fact that Israel was disobedient to God in the Old Testament and thus lost the land. In the same vein, Israel rejected Jesus the Messiah in the first century, and thus once again the Jews were scattered and exiled, losing the land. The present State of Israel appears to be one of the most hostile countries to the propagation of the gospel today.

Conversely, a modern and popular view regarding the contemporary State of Israel holds that the church today is the “new Israel” and hence, maintain that that the church fulfills the Old Testament prophecies regarding the gathering and restoration of Israel. State of Israel has no consanguinity with the Christian understanding of biblical prophecy.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE UNENDING CRISES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

There is plethora of theories, each of them claiming authoritatively adequate explanation of international relations that are both conflictual and cooperation. The study is situated within two theoretical explanations: realism and historicism. It should be noted at once that realist theoretical framework is a traditionally conservative analytical tool for the study of international relations. Claiming to see the world from the stand point of what it is as opposed to what it ought to be. Its development is a point of departure from a liberal tradition (idealism) which stresses international organizations, international law, conventions, treaties, morality, rather than power politics, as the determining factors underpinning international activities. Realism became revived following the inability of the League of Nations prevent the outbreak of Second World War

Goldstein (2010:43-44) captures succinctly the long tradition of realist explanation of international interactions from the Chinese strategist Sun Tzu to the 20th Century Hans Morgenthau’s argument for national interest defined as power. **What one could regard as one of the earliest developments of realist theory was offered by the Sun Tzu, who lived many centuries ago, in his advice to the political class the states to survive in an era when war had become a systemic instrument of power for the first time (the warring states period).** He was of the opinion that moral argument was not very useful to the states rulers of the day, who had to contend with armed and dangerous neighbors. Coinciding with the same period, Thucydides accounted for the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B. C.) with emphasis on the relative power among the Greek city-states. He stated that “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept”....

Similar to the thought of Sun Tzu, Niccolo Michiavelli urged Princes to concentrate on expedient actions in order to retain power and to give a pride of place to war above all else....Thomas Hobbes in the 17th Century discussed the state of perpetual war in the absence of authority where people pursued their self-interests without minding if such interests infringed on others’ rights. The German military strategist Karl von Clausewitz said that “war is a continuation of politics by other means.” Realists see in these historical figures evidence that the importance of power politics is timeless and cross-cultural. After the World

War II, scholar Hans Morgenthau argued that international politics is governed by objective, universal laws based on national interest defined as power....He reasoned that no nation had "God on its side" (a universal morality) and that all nations had to base their actions on prudence and practicality.

However, historicism is hinged on the assumptions that natural laws govern historical events which in turn determine social and cultural phenomena. It holds that each era in history has its own specific beliefs and values inapplicable to any other so that nothing can be understood independently of its historical context.

The foregoing captures aptly both the internationalization of the middle-east internal enduring conflicts and the internationally motivated crises. From Zionism (the national movement that agitates for the return of the Jewish people to, the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in, the Land of Israel), and the roles the outside world (U.N., U.S.-Soviet Union, U.S. Britain, etc.) has played in the middle-east, the quest for actualization of national interests is evident. This is observed by Balaam and Veseth (2008:288) thus:

Non Middle Eastern powers have been searching for control of the Middle East for centuries. Their "meddling" has often had terrible consequences. Slicing up territories or combining different ethnolinguistic and religious communities to create new states, the great powers often ensured future strife. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States struggled for dominance in the region by sponsoring different political forces, the superpowers support for their proxies played a role in stoking the Arab-Israeli conflict. Staunchly anti-Israeli regimes in places such as Syria found the Soviet Union eager to sell them military equipment. On the other side, monarchs such as King of Jordan and the Saudi royals looked to the United State for a security umbrella against pan-Arab socialist regimes seeking their overthrow. Turkey and Israel earned aid and weapons from Washington to touting their front-line role in the struggle against communism. Although Iran turned rabidly anti-American after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Egypt under Anwar Sadat warmed up to the United State in the 1970s. Given the United State's deep military penetration of the Middle East, countries trying to defy the hegemon face potentially heavy cost. For example, Arab States have squandered billions of dollars in their unsuccessful wars against Israel. U.S. weapons and economic assistance to Israeli nearly forty years have helped ensure that there is no fundamental change in the Arab-Israeli balance of power. In addition, the United States and its allies have imposed a variety of economic sanctions on Middle East countries. These mercantilist penalties have included cutoffs of aid, denial of World Banking Financing, Freezing of assets in the United States, trade embargos, and prohibitions on Western investments.

In analyzing the roles of the outside world further Kaarbo and Ray (2008) noted that the U.S., preoccupied with containing Soviet influence in the Middle East, saw in the new state a potential strategic ally and was first to recognize Israel in 1948. Egypt, the strongest Arab state, was the self-proclaimed leader of the Arab world and coordinated the resistance against Israel. Gamal Abdel Nasser became Egypt's leader in 1954 and looked to both the United States and the Soviet Union for assistance. However, when Egypt formed a military alliance with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen and recognized Communist China, in 1956 (two years into Nasser regime), United State responded by withdrawing an offer to fund the building of Aswan Dam there.

Again, a critical examination of the enduring crises in the Middle East reveals a fundamental fact that the region is caught up in a web of exploiting diplomacy and struggle for power and resources. This is what Brown (1984:16-18) has in mind when he observed

that the Middle East (has) got locked into a system of international diplomacy called *Eastern Question Game*, in which outside countries continuously penetrated the region and jockeyed for power. The consequent of this mercantilist game was that Middle Eastern political leaders tended to favor “quick grabs,” eschew bargaining, and treat politics as a zero-sum game.

Against this backdrop, and alluding to Hans Morgenthau’s injunction that no nation had “God on its side”, there is a sense in which one is justified to assert that crises in the Middle East, whether internationalized or internationally motivated, are realist politics. This is even more evident when one examines the futility of the various Peace Accords, series of cease-fires created by United Nations between Arabs and the Jews, to bring about peace.

Many in the Middle East have mistrusted the world’s hegemony and condemned it for caring more about its interests than about what is good for people in the region. This has, mostly from among Arabs, bred extremist Islamic movements and terrorist groups using religion as a political tool for leverage. Balaam and Veseth (2008) observed, much has been written about the motivations and actions of violent Islamists. Some of the roots of these movements this study argues can be found in economic troubles and political repression stemming from enslaving foreign policy of the world hegemony and its blind support for Israel. Rising unemployment and inequality after the 1970s pushed many poor Muslims to become foot soldiers in extremist movements. Almost all Palestinian movements or groups are founded with declared aim of destroying Israel by violence, and have a history of terrorist activities.

Also the suffering of the Palestinian people under Israeli occupation, which has resulted in the displacement of Palestinians; the refugee camps constructed since 1948 in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and inside the occupied territories, is the greatest source of Palestinians’ alienation from, and disenchantment with, the West, and the system of international relations generally. For a long time the struggle of the Palestinian people for what they regard as their historical and political rights found little understanding at the grassroots level in the Western world. Palestinian felt they were alone in their struggle for national rights, particularly after signing of the Camp David Accords in the US in 1978, which symbolized the rise of a new environment in the Arab region (Mohamed El-Sayed Said, 2005). Only the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) has renounced this aim officially. In 1993, the PLO signed the Oslo Declaration of Principles, renouncing violence and agreeing to honour UN SC Resolution 242, which implicitly recognizes the right of is Israel to exist. (<http://www.mideastwed.org/nutshell.htm>).

CONCLUDING EVALUATION

Having traced the historical background, taken both biblical and realist perspectives of, and examined foreign intervention in the Middle East enduring crises, the study in the final analysis concludes that it requires divine intervention. The history of the Middle East portrays that there are numerous injustices. These are resulting in many lingering grievances that are fueling crises in the region. To be abreast of why the region is littered with subsisting interstate and intrastate violence, we must examine the political forces operating at the

international and domestic levels. We must make bold to state that Middle East is not just one incubator of crises or an “Axis of Evil.” Amidst the perennial crises are many punctuations of interstate cooperation. By analyzing patterns and causes of both conflict and cooperation, we can better appreciate the prospects for enduring peace that has eluded the region years.

Tracing the causes of the Middle East crises is a herculean task. This is because of the factors identified by Balaam and Veseth (2008):

...the causes of violence are as much domestic as they are international and as much ideological as they are material. Conventional wisdom holds that ancient hatreds-traceable to Biblical times, the Crusades, or the Sunni-Shi'a split in early Islam-are at the heart of the conflicts. This “clash of civilization” explanation of global problems-popularized by political scientist Samuel Huntington-is tempting, especially when we look at the current war on terror. Although modern-day combatants frequently use imagery from history or holy texts to justify their struggle, we should be wary of accepting their worldviews as a basis for explaining conflict. It is more accurate to tie regional insecurity to four contemporary political factors: (1) the search by external powers for influence in the region; (2) adventurism by regional leaders; (3) oppressive regimes; and (4) the politicization of cultural and religious differences.

RECOMMENDATION

There is no doubting the fact that the crises in the Middle East are as old as the early beginning of man that both Islamic faithful and Christians will readily traced to Abraham and his immediate off springs. The study argues that external intervention cannot bring about lasting peace between the Israeli and the Palestine since those parading themselves as arbiters are more or less interested parties in disguise. Therefore as both parties to the conflict claim to believe in God, the present generation should pursue the course of peace with sincerity of purpose hoping to bequeath on their coming generations societies better than the way they met them. The study therefore recommends divine intervention when they honestly call on God not minding Genesis 16:11. In addition, the parties should minimize politicization of religion as God pronounced blessings on the region that conflicts and crises have not allowed the potentials to be realized. The study further recommends that the Western Powers need to be sincere and honest in their intervention and minimize blind support for Israel and conspicuous hypocrisy like the selling of arms and ammunitions by US to both Iran and Iraq when the two Arab countries were at war. Finally all the parties involved in the conflicts as well as ‘arbiters’ should understand that the possibilities of today are not assurances of tomorrow, therefore, there is the need for concerted effort to see peace as not negotiable.

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