

## **Why the Middle East is So Far Away From Peace?**

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### **Abstract**

To start an article on the Middle East with such a negative and discouraging note may seem weird but it is the truth and nothing but the truth so it should not surprise anyone who has a bit of knowledge on the region. It should not come as a surprise either if I say “the only peaceful times were when the Ottomans ruled the region for about five centuries.” This is why David Fromkin’s famous book on the peace treaty of 1919 after the First World War is called, “A Peace to End All Peace.” In this article ,we focused on the Middle East peace in terms of regional and international relationship. It is unfortunate that this region is so far away from peace in many respect.

Keywords: Middle East,Water Peace,Jordan River,Middle East Future,Middle East Affairs

### **1.INTRODUCTION**

Leaving ancient history and thus the Hittites, Commagenes, Assyrians, ancient Egyptians, Iranians and others who were at war with each other at all times -and even petrol and gas were not known then- for some reason or other, the Middle East was and still is the most continuous conflict and war theatre of the world and there is little hope that this will change. This is despite the fact that The region, in general, is much more rich now. However, this richness brought by wast petrol and gas fields seems to cause even more problems then it has solved.

### **2.FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND INTERFERENCE**

One of the most influential factors in the destabilization of the region is no doubt constant and deep foreign involvement and interference in the region’s affairs be it domestic or external. It may seem to be a contradiction but this interference is brought by the rich resources of the region, namely petrol and gas. The ever-present and increasing competition among the leading industrial powers since World War I over who will dominate the Middle East petrol and gas is the main source of wars and even domestic upheavals in the region. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Middle East has become the favorite playground of Britain, France, and Germany. After the Second World War, the USA first replaced Germany and then gradually pushed back France and Britain. In the process, the USA found in Israel a good, valuable, and indispensable -for both sides-ally.

The Sykes-Picot Treaty between Britain and France effectively partitioned the Middle East between these two while The Arab Union despite its name was created again by the British, not as a unifying but dividing instrument of the new Arab states, the borders of which were drawn by the so-called archaeology -in fact, intelligence agent- Gertrude Bell. One may wonder what the Arabs were doing while all those were happening. They were for the first

and till today last time united against the retreating Ottoman Empire and in that they cooperated closely with the British! Remember Lawrence of Arabia! When King Abdullah I of Jordan, son of Sheikh Hussein of Jordan, the leader of the Great Arab Revolt realized what was in the making it was already too late.

### **2.1.State of Israel**

The end of the World War I saw also the creation of an artificial state made to measure; Israel. The very first steps that led to the Israeli state in fact taken by two Ottoman sultans. Sultan Selim, I overruled the AD 90 decision by the Senate of Rome which deported Jews from Palestine and prohibited their return. Suleiman the Magnificent for his part allowed a considerable number of Jews to return. However, it is the British who made the very first seeds of the Israeli state be sown and the USA pushed for more Jew migration to what was Palestine. The USA from the very first day saw the Jewish state as a convenient tool for its Middle East policy which was aimed at controlling the petrol fields and the Arab states that they belong.

Of course not all and always should be attributed to the ill will of foreign powers. Domestic peculiarities and weaknesses of the region and nearly all the newborn Arab states have contributed and still contribute vastly to the situation.

### **2.2.The role of the Arab states**

Most of these states are since their first days, governed by some kind of an authoritarian regime dominated by families. Good governance is something unheard of let alone accountability. Some of these countries are governed by religious sects of Islam founded on the most distorted interpretation of the religion. Secularism is despised by these rulers and democracy is just something that should be avoided and blocked at all costs in order not to bring the end of many ruling families. Except for a few like Jordan, the rule of law simply means the law of the ruling family. This makes these states easy prey for foreign powers as bringing under control the ruling family this way or other simply means taking hold of the country as a whole. Such a comfortable situation explains very well also why the foreign powers don't care about democracy, human rights, and rule of law and cooperate with the authoritarian regimes of the Arab countries. It also makes it much more easy for foreign powers to manage the Arab-Israeli dispute. It is not rare to have at least some even leading Arab states to support plans and proposals which undermine even the most rightful expectations of the Palestinians. And Palestine is the "common Arab cause" for all Arab states when it comes to posturing!

Egypt the most powerful and influential Arab state does not move even a finger without first weighing it from the point of view of how it will affect its "leader of the region and Arabs" policy and position. And when we speak of the leadership of the region we have to think about the other contender for the title, Iran. Here we face another crucial fact that makes the issue even more complicated.

### **2.3.Iran. The Shia enemy**

Iran is Shia while nearly all other Arab states in Maghreb and Mashrek are mostly belong to the Sunni sect. Nearly all Arab states see Iran as their most fearful enemy. The struggle

between these main sects of Islam goes back to the days of Mohammed and will most probably not disappear never. So another element that prevents Arabs from getting united around any cause even the Palestinian.

The war between Iran and Iraq took 8 years to bring to an end with a devastating human and material loss for both countries. The Iraqi occupation of Kuveyt on the other hand was a war between two Sunni states and paved the way for two USA Gulf Operations and brought about the end of unified Iraq. Destabilization of Iraq by the USA first using the Iraqi occupation of Kuveyt as a pretext and then the non-existent nuclear and chemical weapons for the second operation led to chaos not only in Iraq but in the region as a whole.

#### **2.4. Gulf Wars and their repercussions**

The first US Gulf War of the early 1990s created the Kurdish autonomous region in Northern Iraq to the detriment of the political unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. It also led to negative developments in Turkey and on its fight against the Kurdish separatist terror organization, PKK.

The Second Gulf Operation led to even more frightening developments like ISIL (The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) and destabilized Syria and Iraq with enormous consequences for all three countries and for the region as a whole.

Although despotic under Esad, secular and stable Syria is now a war thorn country divided into three distinguishable parts detrimental to the vital interests of not only Syria but Turkey too due to the YPG/PYD element raised and supported by the USA, EU, and Israel under the pretext of fighting the ISIL.

#### **2.5. The disintegration of Syria and Return of Russia to the region**

It is quite safe to assess that the Kurdish entities in northern Iraq and North of Syria are seen by the USA, EU and Israel and to some extent by the newcomer to the region Russia as a quasi-state that could easily be manipulated to promote and guard the interests of the said powers and further divide and destabilize the Arab Middle East.

Russia which had been absent from the Middle East scene since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact grabbed the once in a lifetime opportunity to make a strong come back to the region, a development which has already proved to be a determining factor and which will have long time repercussions on region's affairs.

Another element that adversely affected and still affects peace and stability not only in the Middle East but even in Europe is large groups of refugees fleeing from the Syrian war. Huge numbers of migrants put a great burden on countries like Turkey - though she is also responsible for this outcome- and Jordan and caused havoc in Europe. Like Palestinians that were pushed to Jordan after various wars between the Arab States and Israel, Syrian refugees most probably will keep on playing a negative role in interstate and regional affairs.

### **3. THE ARAB SPRING AND THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS**

In fact, all these developments have been also a result of the Arab Spring which was deliberately misplayed by the West, and when things went out of control instead of trying to

remedy the situation it was used to further destabilize the region. Libya and Syria are the most striking examples of this deliberate mismanagement. Arab Spring was a huge opportunity that was sacrificed to petty interests of big powers who proved through the years that despite all their might, they were either not willing or unable to bring peace to the region. Another of such lost opportunities was the Middle East Peace Process of the 1990s.

When in 1991 Israeli-Palestinian, Egypt-Israel and later Jordan-Israel Peace Treaties were signed the region, for the first time felt that maybe the peace was reachable. The assassination of Rabin and the rise into power Bibi Netanyahu in 1996 unfortunately swept away all hope once again. The new government in Israel was back to old and well known aggressive and expansionist policies and soon the Peace Process was in shambles.

Israel under Netanyahu refrained from implementing even the tiniest of all its undertakings making life very difficult for Jordan for example who had taken a lot of risks by signing a peace treaty with Israel. At the same time, the inter Arab footwork once again came to fore, and Egypt who had her own bilateral peace treaty with Israel kept on criticizing Jordan for signing a peace treaty with Israel. Childish acts like assassination attempt against Khaled Meshaal in Amman ruined all prospect for peace for good just when Turkey was trying to bring together Israel and Jordan and was shepherding activities within the Multilateral Peace Talks to build confidence and establish permanent channels of communication between the regional countries like Jordan and Israel.

### **3.1.Lack of intention and hidden agendas killed the Peace Proces: Jordan River case.**

Water had always been a valuable resource in the Middle East and it was and still is even more important for Jordan which is the driest of all Arab countries. For this reason, Annex II of the Jordan-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1994 included an agreement on the 'rightful allocation' of the Jordan River Basin water resources. The agreement was bilateral and the three other riparian countries Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine where the lesser tributaries of Jordan River, Hasbani, Banyas, and Dan were either originate and/or flow in Syria and Lebanon were not included in the agreement. Not including these riparians despite their importance to a comprehensive and sustainable agreement on water resources in the Jordan River Basin was a flaw from the outset.



**Figure 1.** Jordan River Basin, including the upper catchment north of Lake Tiberias and the lower catchment south of the lake. The upper catchment is shared between Lebanon, Syria and Israel, the lower catchment is shared between Syria (Yarmuk), Jordan, Palestine and Israel.

The Yarmouk River the largest tributary of Jordan River has four tributaries in Syria and one in Jordan. It forms the borders between Jordan and Israel (Fig.1).

Annex II specifies allocations of the Yarmouk River that Israel may extract during the summer and winter periods for its needs. In exchange, Jordan is allowed to store water from the same in Lake Tiberias during the winter; Israel is to release this water back to Jordan each year during the dry season. The same Annex specifies also that Israel may maintain extraction levels on the Jordan River, equivalent to its level of use in 1994, and Jordan may withdraw an equal amount when there is sufficient supply

The Annex allocates specific amounts of groundwater to Israel south of the Dead Sea and it allocates certain spring water to Jordan near Lake Tiberias. It also stipulates that Israel and Jordan will cooperate to "find" an additional 50 million cubic meters of water for Jordan. A Joint Water Committee was formed where Jordan and Israel cooperate in fields like water storage technology and the Annex II allowed Jordan to build new storage dams. The two sides would jointly seek new sources of water for Jordan through the use of new technologies such as desalination. In 2005, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority endorsed a plan to build a water conduit to carry water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, which is rapidly shrinking due to the extraction of water from Jordan River. However, nearly none of the stipulations of the Annex were realized due to mostly Israeli unwillingness to implement them. While in Amman as Ambassador of Turkey (1995-1998) I have witnessed how Israel dragged its feet to avoid her undertakings.

#### **4.ROLE OF TURKEY**

In 1990s Turkey was a respected but above all a role-model country for most of the Arab nations if not for the Arab rulers as a democratic, secular country with a strong and growing economy; one of the leading members of NATO with the third strongest armed forces in the Organisation and a prospective member of the EU. It had a long experience in the then CSCE (Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.) now OSCE (Organisation of Security and Cooperation in Europe) and a party to the CFE (Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe). Its experience in Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM's) could be beneficial also in the Middle East where a "crisis of confidence" was the rule not only between Israel and the Arab states but even more than that among the Arab states themselves. Turkey was ready to share this experience of her's with all the interested parties in the Middle East and successfully did so in the course of Peace Process Multilaterals.

Turkey also had a very valuable resource namely water and a better knowledge of its optimum use. That was something extremely important for Israel and nearly all Arab countries except maybe Irak. And Turkey was ready to enter into cooperation with countries like Syria and Irak to make optimum and reasonable use of water that flows in her transboundary rivers possible. In other words, water from Turkey could be an element of peace and prosperity for the region. Turkey had even well-thought plans that took into consideration the reasonable needs of her neighbors and other projects such as transporting water from Turkey to Israel and Jordan via pipelines.

Efforts by Turkey to bring together for instance Jordan and Israel to build confidence between these two countries were quite successful until Netanyahu Government came to power. Similar undertakings by Turkey to spread this cooperation to all Arab states taking part in Arms Control and Regional Security Group (ACRS) had also paid well. However, the Netanyahu government and the ever negative and sabotaging attitude of Egypt prevented further steps.

#### **5.CONCLUSIONS**

Middle East today is a much more complex and difficult area in comparison with the 1990s for instance to bring peace and stability.

Israel once again under Netanyahu who is now politically much weaker and dependent on radicals is following the most aggressive and expansionist policies since the founding of the Israeli state. Its main ally and supporter, the USA which had always been and still is the main player and broker in peace initiatives is supporting Israel blindfolded and taking steps like recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and preparing plans which will leave West Bank of Jordan River to Israel, make even the slightest hope for peace to vanish.

Irak and Syria are disintegrating. Egypt has no power to bring together let alone lead Arab states against Israeli aggression and expansionism. On the contrary, it has joined forces once again with Israel in the Eastern Mediterranean intending to exploit the gas fields. Saudi Arabia is following the footsteps of Egypt. Jordan has no other choice but to join them which she is doing also in Libya.

Russia's come back has changed the balance of power rather deeply and will influence the region even more in the near future. With Russia present achieving peace between Palestine and Israel is now more difficult if one takes into account also the Russian-Iranian relations/partnership and Iran's opposition to Israel.

Turkey unfortunately is now only an onlooker which has more or less no leverage either on Israel or on any of the Arab states. She is at odds with nearly all of them and with Israel too. Turkey's contribution to future peace in the region in security and economic -especially cooperation in water issues- fields may only be feasible when Turkey could revise its foreign policy stand vis-a-vis the Middle East and if and when the situation both domestic and external in the region change drastically.

Unless many if not all of these circumstances take a positive turn, peace in the Middle East will be a faraway dream still for a long time to come.

## **References**

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