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AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAJOR CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF THE ARAB- ISRAELI CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the origin and development of the Arab – Israeli conflict and the challenges of the entire feud. It also analyses the historical peace processes carried out to bring to an end the conflict. Using the historical descriptive research methodology, findings show that, the creation of the state of Israel was the beginning of the crisis which exacerbated to seasonal wars. The paper concludes that war cannot solve the Middle East impasse but a peaceful resolution and a peaceful solution to the Arab- Israeli conflict desperately needs the establishment of a road map that would be based on mutual compromise and confidence- security building measures. The perpetuation of the conflict in the Middle East is a threat to global peace and security. The paper also recommends a two-state solution for perpetual peace to reign and sincere international engagement under the United Nations according to the 1973 border lines definition, among others.

Keywords: Analysis; Arab; Israel; Conflict; Challenges; Prospect.

INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the lengthiest conflicts that have bedeviled the world system for decades. The persecution of the Jews in Europe and subsequent relocation has made the Arab-Palestinians refugees in their own soil. Their lands have been confiscated and territory occupied in what looks like apartheid regime. The United States' backing of Israel has continued to unleash terror and suffering among the Palestinians and has displaced the people of Palestine all over the world. The evils of international politics have been apparently showcased on

Palestine and made to be a theatre of war from the sounds of guns to aerial bombardment, deployment of men in boot and killing of innocent women and children.

The Arab-Palestinian conflict would have come to an end whenever the world powers especially the United States would look at the Israeli leaders and tell them enough is enough and be serious on that for humanity to thrive and for international peace and security to reign. Israel is seen as a regional hunting dog and as a police in the region representing the American interest hence the military support and other forms of aid given to Israel by the United States in order to perpetuate balance of terror. The objective of this study is to focus on the origin and development of the Arab-Israeli war, looking at the causes, the cost, challenges and possible prospects.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Middle East has been one of the most volatile and violent subsystems of the international political system since the end of the Second World War. Postwar history in the Middle East has been punctuated by an unusually high number of full-scale, inter-states wars, like the Yemen war of 1961 – 64 and the Iran – Iraq war of 1980 – 1988. The largest and the most devastating war in the Middle East as known in history today is the Arab – Israeli conflict which include among others the 1948 Palestine war, the 1956 Suez war, the June 1967 Six-Day war, the 1969 – 70 war of Attrition, the October 1973 Yom Kippur war, the 1982 Lebanon war, and the 1991 Gulf war (Ngaire, 1996).

Ngaire (1996) further asserts that the conflict between Israel and the Arabs is one of the most profound and protracted conflicts of the twentieth century and the principal precipitant of wars in the Middle East. There are two major dimensions to this conflict; the Israel – Palestinian dimension and the Israel – Arab dimension. The origin of the conflict go back to the end of the nineteenth century when the Zionist movement conceived the idea of building a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. This project met with a bitter opposition on the part of the Arab population of the country. The upshot was a dash between two national movements for possession of Palestine. There were two peoples and one land, hence the conflict (Ngaire, 1996).

In an intellectual piece, Sheriff (2014) argues that “with the emergence of the state of Israel, there has been a great danger posed in the Middle East.” This, according to Sheriff (2014) was engendered as a result of the persecution of the Jews in Europe and exiling them to the Middle East. There was an exodus of Jews from all over the continent of Europe into the land of Israel. Population increase has also led to Jewish expansion of settlements and perpetual conflict and killing of innocent Palestinians remained the order of the day.

There is agreement between Sheriff (2014) and Bell (2001) in the origin and instigating factors of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Just as Sheriff believed that the establishment of the state of Israel has been the major cause, Bell (2001) asserted that the declaration of the Israeli independence on 14th May, 1948, triggered the bloody and the hostile conflicts between Arabs and the Jews (schulze 1999). Bell (2001) added that the British foreign policy and consequently the United Nations (UN) policy regarding the Middle East after the First World War also contributed to the crisis. After the First World War, both sides (Zionists and Arab nationalists) believed that Palestine had been promised to them by the British (Schulze 1999). Therefore there were inconsistencies in the British policy as neither side knew where they stood. After the Second World War, Britain held the mandate for Palestine.

For Freedman (1979), the political tension was a military conflict and dispute between a number of Arab countries and Israel as one of the deadliest in the world. He saw the root of the modern Arab – Israeli conflict as bound in the rise of Zionism and Arab nationalism towards the end of the 19th century. Territory regarded by the Jewish people as their historical homeland is also regarded by the pan – Arab movement as historically and currently belonging to Palestine and in the Pan – Islamic context, as Muslim lands. This ignited the sectarian conflict between Palestinian Jews and Arabs in the early 20th century, peaking into a full – scale war in 1947 and transforming into the first Arab – Israeli war in May 1948 following the declaration of the establishment of the state of Israel.

Freedman (1979) further observed that the nature of the conflict has shifted over the years from the large scale regional Arab – Israeli conflict to a more local Israeli Palestinian conflict, peaking during the 1982 Lebanon war. John (2001) attributed the cause and origin of the conflict to the outcome of Hitler’s role in the lives of the Jews in Europe. He said a large number of Jews responding to the horror of Hitler’s systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe attempted to save their lives by creating a state of their own. They established it in a land that had been occupied by Arabs for centuries at the precise moment when the Arab people were emerging from the crucible of western colonialism and were rediscovering their own national destinies. Thus Jewish nationalism clash head – on with Arab nationalism in Palestine.

Out of the many theories used in social science, political realism stands unique in explaining the Arab-Israeli conflict. Political realism as a theory takes its assumption that power is the primary ends of political action, whether in the domestic or at the international arena. In the argument of Saleh (2013), the realists believe that the pursuit of national power was a natural drive and that those who neglect to cultivate power actually invite war. The realists uphold that the sovereignty of a nation – state justifies its right to pursue power and rely on the

balance of power system to constraint the competition among states. Leading exponents of the realist school include Morgenthau, (1984), Carr (1939), Thompson (1958) and Kissinger (1984) among others.

The realist ideas on the international system and politics involve systematically the following (Sheriff, 2014; Saleh, 2013):

- i. That history teaches that human beings are by nature sinful and wicked
- ii. That under such condition, international politics is as the English philosopher; Thomas Hobbes put it as a “struggle for power,”

The realist school of thought therefore recognized the quest for state’s supremacy and acquisition of military might and strength to fight against perceived threats, world injustices and defend the territorial integrity of the state.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICTS

It is pertinent to understand that notable wars and violent events have taken place between the Arab states and Israel since after the first Arab – Israeli war in 1948. Some of these wars and events are as follows (Sheriff, 2014; IMEBS, 2016):

1948 – 1949 – First Arab – Israeli War

This was the first war fought between the Israeli and the Military Coalition of Arab States occasioned by the Arabs and the Jews since the creation of the British mandate of Palestine.

1951 – 1955 – Reprisal Operations

This was the reprisal operation carried out by the Israeli forces in response to frequent attacks during which the Arabs attacked Israel from Syria

1956 – Suez War

This is also called the tripartite aggression or the Kadesh operation or Sinai war. It was an invasion of Egypt by Israel followed by the United Kingdom and France, so as to regain the Western control of the Suez Canal and to remove the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

1967 – The Six –Day War

This was known as the month of June war fought between the two parties (Arab-Israel) within 6 days. The war was between Israel and Egypt with her neighboring states of Jordan and Syria.

1967 – 1970 – War of Attrition

This was fought between Israel and Arab States of Egypt, Jordan and their allies. It was aimed at forcing out of Sinai through military action. The war was inconclusive and both sides claimed victory.

1971 – 1982 – Conflict

This was a conflict initiated by Palestine militants in south Lebanon against Israel which evolved into the wider Lebanon war in 1975

1973 – Yom Kippur War

This was also known as Ramadan War. It was a war fought by a coalition of Arab States led by Egypt and Syria against Israel on the holiest day in Judaism to force Israel to reopen the Suez Canal.

1978 – First South Lebanon Conflict

Known as the Security Zone conflict, it was a war between the Lebanon Christian proxy militias SLA supported by Israel and the Lebanese Muslim Guerrillas led by Iranian-backed Hezbollah brigade.

1982 – Lebanon War

It was known as operation peace for Galilee by the Arabs. This was when the Israeli Defense forces invaded Southern Lebanon after repeated attacks and counter attacks.

1985 – 2000 Second South Lebanon conflict

This was the war after the earlier Lebanon civil war. It also include Israel invasion including operation Litani, when Israel attempted to eradicate PLO bases from Lebanon and support Christian marinate militias.

1987 – 1993 – First Intifada

It was a Palestinian uprising against Israel occupants of the west bank.

2000 – 2004 – Second Intifada

Also known as Al-Aqsa, was the second Palestinian uprising against Israel.

2006 – Operation Summer Rains Second Lebanon War

It was a military operation of the Lebanon war of armed engagement when on the first day of the conflict Israel bombed the only electrical power plant.

2008 – 2009 – Gaza War

Refers to three conflicts between Israel and Hamas on controlled Palestinian territory in Gaza.

2012 – Operation Pillar of Defense

Was an eight day Israel Defense forces operation in the Hamas-governed Gaza which began with the killing of Ahmed Jabair, Chief of Gaza Military wing of Hamas.

2004 – 2014 Israeli Gaza conflict

This was part of the conflict between Israel and Palestine for the control of Gaza strip.

COST OF THE CONFLICT

According to the Strategic Foresight Group's report (SFG, 2018), the opportunity cost of the conflict for the Middle East from 1991 – 2010 was at \$12 Million. The reports calculated the peace GDP of countries in the Middle East by comparing the current GDP to the potential GDP in times of peace. Israel share is almost \$1 trillion, with Iraq and Saudi Arabia having approximately \$2.2 and \$4.5 trillion, respectively. In other words, had there been peace and cooperation between Israel and Arab league nations since 1991, the average Israel citizen would be earning over \$44,000 instead of \$23,000 in 2010.

In terms of human cost, it is estimated that the conflict has taken 92,000 lives (74,000 military and 18,000 civilians till 1995 alone).

CHALLENGES IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

There are so many challenges that made things difficult and adamant towards achieving a peaceful process in the Arab – Israeli conflicts. Over the years, several efforts have been made by the international community and some regional bodies to broker a truce between the two warring factions, but all efforts went to no avail. According to Sheriff (2014) several attempts were made by the Arabs and international community to restore order and settle the peace impasse between Israel and the Arabs, but one major concern about the peace process is the perpetual expansion of settlements by Israel on Palestinian soil.

This factor is one of the greatest challenges in the resolution of the Arab – Israeli conflict that has lingered for several decades. Israel continues to build settlement quarters in areas originally regarded as Palestinian territory. Similarly, Sheriff (2014) further observed that the continuous support Israel gets from the United States and lack of co-operation among the Arab states is another major challenge that renders peaceful resolution futile. Sheriff (2014) has also outlined some of the peace processes that took place in order to bring to an end the conflicts. These processes include the Oslo accord, the Camp David summit, Taba summit, the Madrid conference, Hebron Protocol, Shamel Sheikh Memoranda, Annapolis conference among others, yet peace has not been achieved between the Arabs and the Jews involved in the conflict. Ngaire (1996) supported Sheriff's argument when he stated that certain domestic concerns of both the Arab and the Israelis, particularly the Palestinian nationals, issues from state institution building and secular – religion divides, to coalition politics and educational reforms, all have strong implications for the broader conflict, and for international efforts towards a peaceful resolution.

Ngaire (1996) stated further that despite the resumption of direct talks between Israelis and Palestinians in September, 2010, focus on the conflict became centered once again on government – to – government peace process efforts and the paradigm of bilateral – and in some cases multilateral – relations and negotiations. Such an emphasis, while key to efforts to resolve the ongoing Israeli – Palestinian and Arab conflict, can obscure the multitude of challenges that the individual parties face internally and the socio-political dynamics that contribute to the life of the conflict yet potentially offer opportunities for resolving it. Whether relations in Israel between Jewish and Arabs citizens of the state, deepening political and ideological divides between secular and religious segments of the society, the split in Palestinians leadership between Hamas and Fatah, factions politics within ruling parties or the challenges of building a state, or pursuing a peace agenda within such a fractures and fraught context will continue to be serious reasons for concern.

Another challenge, according to Ngeire (1996) that significantly hammers the revival of peace talks in the Arab – Israeli conflict is the lack of domestic unity of the two sides, Israel and Palestinians. For instance the political system of Israel favors the participation of many political parties. The winner party of the elections is extremely difficult to win the majority of the parliament. The two sides often exaggerate in some cases to promote their national interest and to win the support of the international community, which made the settlement of Israeli – Palestinian conflict more complicated due to the national interest of the regional powers.

The rise of radical Islamist groups among the Arabs is also an obstacle that hinders peace process. The radical Islam groups pose serious and important threat to Israel and the West. Some of the socio-political groups in the Palestinian side, like Hamas, are seen as terrorists by Israel, and cannot stand to have any meaningful discussions with each failed peace accord, each round of negotiations that encounters numerous sticking points, and internal political strife among the negotiating parties, it seems as if any road map to peace just becomes a road block to peace (Ngeire, 1996).

THE PROSPECT FOR A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

According to Ngeire (1996) Hamas attacks on Israel won't achieve much but further taint Hamas' already discredited image in the World Community and, increasing among the Palestinians of Gaza as well, Israel's attacks on Gaza won't achieve much either but discredit the Israel military while pointing out the limits of Israel's iron-fist strategy. The solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict remains and will always remain a genuine political will from the two sides, the regional bodies and the international community who could see an end to the logjam. This must be pursued 'faithfully' and vigorously by all parties and observers (George, 2001).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

War cannot solve the Middle East impasse but a peaceful resolution and a peaceful solution to the Arab- Israeli conflict desperately needs the establishment of a road map that would be based on mutual compromise and confidence- security building measures. The perpetuation of the conflict in the Middle East is a threat to global peace and security.

To work towards achieving a peaceful resolution of the Arab – Israeli conflict, the following recommendations are significant:

- i. There should be a declaration of an undisputable truce by the two sides and the end of the siege of Gaza to allow for meaningful negotiations.
- ii. There should be a control in the activities of all extremist groups in the Palestinian – Arab – Nationals which continue to pose serious threat to the nation of Israel.
- iii. the creation of a common committee involving Israelis and the Arabs (Palestinians) who shall meet on monthly basis in order to prevent tension, to checkmate uprising groups and to resolve any potential problem that could be identified.
- iv. The operation of the two – states system promoted by the United States under Barak Obama as a means of resolving the crisis is also an interesting step to. The Obama framework can be used for a lasting peace.
- v. Finally, the United Nations which is an international organization with the assistance of regional bodies like the Arab League, the AU, EU, the US and many other influential parties in world politics could revive all peace talks that will lead to peace in the Middle East under the banner of the United Nations.

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