

Root Causes of Conflict in the Middle East Analysis and Solutions to the Conflicts

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Abstract: Middle east is not a precise geographical term. It's come from Eurocentrism and its full of superiority. It states which areas the western countries have entered in the east direction, and the problems arisen from these areas which western counties need to solve. Britain has so-called "Orientalism" and "Oriental Problem", which means to solve the problem of the Ottoman Empire, deeply means how to cut apart and distribute the emprise to extract maximum benefits. Nowadays, conflicts have constantly occurred worldwide. Indeed, conflicts are unavoidable in every society. However, no place experiences more disputes than the Middle East region. The Middle east is always a hot regional issue that has lasted for the longest time since the end World War II. Over the past 70 years, the Middle East has been a center of tension, uncertainty, and insecurity. Why the ancient human civilization always at conflict in modern times? This paper will analyse the Middle East, describe the root causes of conflict in the Middle East and provide solutions to the conflicts in the Middle East.

Keywords: Middle east, conflicts, Western powers, corruption, warfare

1. Introduction

Conflicts in the Middle East arise in actual warfare, political violence, lethal propaganda, disputes in resources, and failure of democracy. The conflicts further exist as longstanding regional disputes, military hostilities, and localized disputes. A primary example of regional conflict in the Middle East is the Arab-Israeli dispute that has existed and is still ongoing between the Arab nations and Israel. Other examples of conflicts include the Kurds vs. Syria war, the Iran-Iraq war, and other civil disputes in Syria, Jordan, Yemen, and Lebanon. So, whatever the form, conflicts have continually affected the Middle East region, causing unrest.

2. Overview of the Middle East Region

The Middle East region is essential because of its unique geographical and strategic position. Almost every great authority in history has sought to develop interests in the Middle East. Also, the Middle East is credited as the origin of significant religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Due to these significances, the Middle East exerts significant influence globally to the extent that any conflict towards the Middle East can affect global stability [1]. The Middle East comprises 25 states around the Southern and Eastern coasts of the Mediterranean Sea and the Arabian Peninsula.

In the past, it was defined as a region lying between the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and the Central Asian Lands. However, it has expanded to the Eastern Mediterranean and even North Africa. A more inclusive definition encompasses defining the Middle East as the MENA region, including the Middle East and North Africa. Simply put, the MENA aspect defines the Middle East as a critical geographical area that includes the Middle East and North Africa and other broader areas of Asia and Africa whose populations are prevalently Muslim. Therefore, the Middle East has various definitions that make it an essential region of consideration globally.

3. The Root Causes of Conflict in the Middle East

3.1 Invasion by Western Powers

The Middle East has often experienced conflicts over the years. Several causes are attributed to the cause of conflicts in this region. However, the prevalent cause of conflicts is traced to World War, when the Ottoman rule ended, and borders reshaped. Since then, artificial borders have been formed, and great power rivalries have been created to gain influence over the region and its resources. The Ottoman Empire was the leading geopolitical and cultural Islamic state that exercised powers over the Islamic state. However, its partitioning after the war led to the domination of the Middle East by Western powers and began the breeding of conflicts in the Middle East.

The invasion by the Western authorities did not consider the ethnic and religious divisions, creating divided nations engaged in constant conflicts. Notably, it is said that even without war, Ottoman's control over the Middle East was weakening, resulting in the emergence of new ruling entities. The emergence of the new entities or rulers created huge boundaries that could not be fixed. Additionally, after spending time under the Ottoman Empire, different ethnic and religious groups enjoyed freedom in the region without exceptions. However, once the Western powers invaded the area, many restrictions, such as trade restrictions through the Suez Canal, were placed, barring the free movement of people throughout the region [2]. Initially, people moved and traded freely. However, Britain realized controlling the Suez Canal would strengthen its presence in the Middle East and began issuing restrictions that caused conflicts in the region.² Therefore, the leading cause of the conflicts in the Middle East was the fall of Ottomanism. After that, other reasons emerged, causing more conflicts in the region.

3.2 Ottomanism and How Its Failure Caused Conflicts in the Middle East

Ottomanism was one of the best leadership and ruling styles in the Middle East. It was based on the compartmentalization of society, where there was freedom for different religious groups to govern themselves [3]. As a result, the Ottoman Empire provided a fertile ground for nationalists to seek and find support from other powers. Despite the significance of the Ottoman Empire, the nationalist movements began struggling for independence. They had difficulty gaining a territorial, national identity to have ethical, ethnic, and national identities. While encountering these struggles, other Western powers invaded the region, imposing rules against the Middle East people.

The Great Britain invasion was influential in shaping the post-Ottoman Middle East. Great Britain gained significant influence because it was active, explored the entire Middle East, and became interested in abundant oil reserves in the Middle East. Also, Great Britain based its policy on protecting sea routes to South Asia. Unlike other Western powers like

Russia and France under direct German threat, Great Britain's strategy sought potential gains. Hence, it was prepared in advance with detailed knowledge of the region. Under the Chairmanship of Sir Maurice Bunsen, a committee was created that enabled Britain to gain strategic control in the Middle East [4]. The committee suggested that the Ottoman Empire's power become decentralized because it would benefit it to remain the nucleus of the Turkish, Armenian, and Arab states.⁴ Great

Britain's strategy made the Ottoman Empire unable to maintain control over the Middle East territories. As a result, the British gained the freedom to restore and develop the buried wealth of Mesopotamia.

As this was happening, Arab nationalism emerged as an opposition movement to Ottoman control by the British. Also, the British failed to fulfil most of their promises, causing resistance and conflicts from the Arabs and other settlers in the Middle East. Most Western powers intended to control the Suez Canal joining the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Hence, they developed strategies and promised to better the Ottoman Empire, but they could not fulfil their promises, enabling conflicts to surface.³ Most foreign invaders saw their wealth and stature increases and highly benefited from the state of affairs. However, they reinforced tensions between the people of the Middle East and religious groups, many of which exist today.

3.3 The Rise of Islam and Sectarian Politics

Besides the invasion by foreign powers, conflicts in the Middle East also emerged because of religion and politics. These existed divisions within the Muslims in the Middle East for a long period, the central conflict existing between the Sunni and Shi'as. The struggle for power in the Middle East depended on competition between the authoritarian republics and the traditional regimes. The traditional regimes relied on cooperation between the Middle East states like Saudi Arabia and Iran, which had solid military power and large populations [5]. As the struggle continued, the Soviet Union backing the authoritarian republics highly supported Shia regimes like Iran and Syria, while the traditional regimes supported by the US supported the Sunnis 'who were former Soviet allies. As a result, sectarian conflicts emerged in the Middle East.

Therefore, the authoritarian governments created a hostile environment in the Middle East with the Islamic movements and politics they developed and supported [6]. Initially, the threats they posed ranked lower than the secular oppositions. They gradually became better organized and more powerful by perceiving a lower threat, receiving a vital advantage. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and the US supported these regimes and movements to create international networks. With the massive support and power, the authoritarian regimes at first managed to control the Sunnis and Shias, who often conflicted because of stereotypes among each other.

The Sunnis and Shias formed the Muslim folklore, a significant source of conflict in the Middle East. Ideally. The Muslim folklore shows the myths, stereotypes, and prejudices that caused communal relations and tensions in the Middle East. These relations and tensions have existed and passed over to generations. They have further been legitimized and supported by state media and authorities in the Middle East. The main religious groups included the Sunnis and the Shias in the Middle East. The Sunnis maintained that Shias were always a threat. Due to this, the core message of Islam was corrupted and led believers astray, creating disunity among the Muslims [7]. The Sunnis believe that the Shias are more loyal to Iran than their nations. Similarly, Shia Muslims hold stereotypical views of the Sunnis. The Shias mainly hold that the Sunnis are oppressive and prone to extremism. As a result, they highly blame the decline of Islamic civilization on the Sunni leadership. Due to these stereotypes, there are often conflicts between Muslims in the Middle East.

3.4 Poor/Weak Governance and Corruption

The colonial powers created a long-term impact in the Middle East. They led to the development of authoritarian regimes that had minimal interest in helping the public. In most cases, most nations in the Middle East are monarchies that are highly undemocratic with poor living standards. Further, due to the lack of democracy and political participation, most societies form anti-politics movements, causing unrest in the region. Although Western powers were highly blamed for causing

conflicts, the Middle East could not establish democratic regimes even after their exit. The independence from the colonizers ended up with the creation of British monarchs and authoritarian military regimes. Since then, authoritarian regimes have led nations and have often been accused of bad governance and corruption. Several countries, such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, have accused their leaders of bad governance and corruption, causing uprisings [8]. For instance, the Arab Spring uprising in 2011 happened due to the corruption and economic stagnation in the Middle East.

Poor governance and increased corruption fuel discontent and provide an environment for violence, hence why Arab Spring uprisings happen. In most Middle East countries, such as Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, the state apparatus is poorly designed and dysfunctional, causing the state systems to cease and be replaced mainly by chaos [9]. Indeed, bad governance in these nations has caused massive corruption, poverty, and unemployment, making people respond with violence and uprisings. Various dissatisfied and alienated groups have emerged and formed strong uprisings causing violence in the region. Therefore, weak governance encourages alternatives to identities such as sectarian or tribal identities to offer security and service to the community. However, this causes violence as different groups strike against perceived threats.

3.5 The Failure of Economic Development

The Middle East is known to be the largest oil-producing region globally. Due to large oil reserves, some states depend on oil revenues. Despite the high oil revenues, not every nation passes wealth to the public. For example, Iraq is the third-best country in the Middle East, with high oil revenues. However, due to increased civil unrest, it cannot pass wealth to the citizens. Also, other nations fail to transfer their oil wealth to the public in meaningful ways. As a result, the distribution of income and wealth in most Middle East nations is widening between the rich and the poor. Failing to pass the oil wealth to the public causes unrest because they demand an equal share of the wealth.⁷ Most nations use a privatization process that allows the state elites to redistribute national wealth and revenues to their pockets.

Therefore, the failure of economic development coupled with poor governance and state failures gives a breeding ground for instability in the Middle East. Turan [10] states that individuals participate in political violence due to their nation's economic situations. For instance, the Arab Spring and other uprisings in the Middle East are often associated with social and economic deprivation. Several terrorist organizations mention social and economic inequalities as the primary catalyst for their existence. An example of a nation with several terrorist groups is Yemen which has constantly engaged in chaos due to poor governance, poverty, and corruption. The wealth distribution of this nation was highly skewed during the reign of president Ali Abdullah Saleh. So, poor governance, poverty, and other economic factors spur radicalization, causing dissatisfaction and increasing terrorism opportunities, making it difficult for the governments to rule.

3.6 Radicalism and Theological Justifications

Radicalism arises when the public feels they have been repetitively humiliated. In particular, religious radicalism is a significant source of conflict in the Middle East. Religious extremism on the concept of jihad makes perpetrators engage in violent acts or recruit more people to cause violence. The Qur'an is a critical tool that legitimizes violence. It is often read in various voices and interpreted differently, producing intolerant, rigid, and punitive religious attitudes that cause violent actions [11]. The jihad concept is professed by peaceful Muslims as a struggle to receive the best gifts, such as education and technology. However, for the scripturalist Muslims, jihad means killing and a fight for weapons. Due to these differences, the scripturalist Muslims become religious

terrorists who are more dangerous and fanatical, causing violence, terror, and conflicts. They even go to the extent of forming groups such as the Islamic State (ISIS) and al-Qaeda groups.

ISIS or al-Qaeda consider those who disagree with their interpretations of the Qur'an as infidels. Hence, they promote religious conflicts and violence and cause a lot of fear in the Middle East. ISIS and most terror groups view Muslim states in the Middle East as having fallen into sinful unbelief. As a result, they use violence and killing to purify the community of the faithful. It is worse if they come across a member of another religious affiliation like a Christian. ISIS has often been blamed for killing many Muslims, refusing to swear their allegiance, and even beheading Sunni leaders for not supporting them [12].

Al-Qaeda has also killed several Muslims in Yemen who have different Qur'an or Muslim interpretations.

4. Solutions to Reducing Conflict in the Middle East

Indeed, there is a great need to solve conflicts in the Middle East to make the region flourish and habitable to most people. Although several causes of conflicts in the Middle East, it is best to solve the regimes' poor governance and corruption problems. The Middle East and MENA region governments must adopt broader reform strategies to solve the governance and corruption problems because this breed other social issues like poverty and terrorism that cause conflicts in the region. Therefore, the first reform entails an administrative development strategy, whereby nations devise proper development plans and use the accumulated funds to develop projects that help people. Secondly, a predictable transparent, and the fair regulatory system must be developed to link governance to growth [13]. In some states like Yemen, a national reform agenda has been adopted to improve the investment climate and strengthen democratic institutions. Further, within the main agenda of reforms lies enhancing transparency and fighting corruption by conducting a national anti-corruption awareness campaign, developing anti-corruption laws, and improving transparency in oil exploration. Good governance also entails the proper delivery of services through public-private partnerships. These partnerships will include the public companies working with private enterprises to mobilize private capital for upstream provisions. Besides that, good governance will require the development of a well-educated and healthy population. Notably, good reform will need to strengthen the workforce by developing a modern civil service law, creating appropriate systems for workforce planning, and creating new and appropriate training programs. The proper civil service laws make governments appropriately manage human resources, satisfying people and reducing strikes or uproars.

Another strategy for solving the governance problem includes introducing a multi-year budgeting framework, implementing performance budgeting tools and promoting better debt management [14]. Additionally, the rule of law should be reformed for proper governance. The law drafting organizations should improve the quality of law by building staff capacity in law drafting and using impact assessment tools, and consulting and collaborating with stakeholders to improve regulations and laws. Transparency laws should also be developed to increase the transparency of government operations and better consultation mechanisms designed to help the citizens and businesses.

Lastly, the information pillar should be strengthened by expanding the e-government system to manage information and communications. Fortunately, some nations like Egypt are already enhancing reforms like the ERRADA program to use information software from other countries to organize their laws, decrees, and regulations. The information pillar will help study areas experiencing high inequalities like the gender areas and find accurate data to develop the best gender equality mechanisms. The governments can also use citizen and stakeholder consultation to gather more reliable information and institute suitable performance measures [13]. Daily, societies

and businesses demand more accountability from the Middle East governments. Thus, the government should gather accurate data on what is occurring on the ground to notify the government and other stakeholders on the finest way to solve the impending issues. Therefore, addressing the governance and corruption problem will make most citizens satisfied with the governments and regimes to the extent of not thinking of engaging in conflicts.

5. Conclusion

The root causes of conflict in the Middle East are complex and often intertwined. It is necessary to understand that conflicts in the Middle East began decades ago after the Western powers invaded the region and took control of most parts of the region. As a result, the Middle East people retaliated with violence, causing massive conflicts. Besides that, other causes include weak governance and corruption, religious conflicts, and Secretarian politics. Of these causes, it would be best to solve the governance and corruption problems because they cause uprisings and violence in the region. They make the Middle East citizens unsatisfied, making them poor, and others even consider joining terrorism, causing conflicts and unrest in the region.

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