

EASTERN CONFLICTS

settling in current conflicts

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introduction

The lack of knowledge in our generation, and even other generations, about Eastern conflicts, is amazing. To start with this workshop, I made a survey about what did people of many different ages know about this theme. Most answers were similar: "Israel...Palestine...wars...arabs...". However, anyone could tell a cause- and effect sentence, nor identify a problem. Therefore, the aim of this monograph is to make a general report about Eastern conflicts, which are not just Israel- Palestine, but many involved countries, due to territories, religion, oil and politics. It is important to know what happens in the other side of the world not only for a matter of general culture, but also for the level of violence and human rights violation here, alongside with the refugees who have to go away from their origin countries, turning eastern conflicts into a worldwide problem.

That is why in the next pages I will make focus on actual conflicts, Israel-Palestine, The Lebanon, Kurdistan and the civil war in Siria, that include historical conflicts involving countries outside the region, like United States or some European countries. Finally, at the beginning of each section I have outlined some important concepts to the understanding of each conflict, to facilitate the comprehension and be able to reach the aim of this monograph: inform and have a general understanding about the causes and consequences of some eastern conflicts.

Israel- Palestine

We are going to start explaining the conflict that, analyzing the survey, is the most famous one. With the need of explaining some terms first:

- Arab: it is used to refer to people who is born in a country where the official language is arab, it does not matter its religion or political idea.
- Islam: it is a religion
- Muslim: a person that practises the religion "Islam"

The opposition dates back to 135, after the Jews were expelled from their lands by the Palestinians (Muslims and Christians), who were also forcibly removed from there by the Arabs in the 7th century, making Palestine a part of the Ottoman empire.

Before this, the Jews who had dispersed around the world (act called Diaspora) started to return to their territory, and when, after the First World War, Palestine was proclaimed an independent state, many Jews who already inhabited the country started claiming for it.

After the Second World War, after the terrible Nazi holocaust and the horrors suffered, that caused empathy towards the world and especially the United Nations, a large part of Palestinian territory was ceded to the new Jewish state, Israel.

Its establishment in the Arab world was not easy, after only a day of having been proclaimed an independent state, it was invaded by Arab countries, such as Egypt, one of its leaders. This was known as "The Six Day War" because just in that time Israel defeated the opposition, thus gaining much of the Palestinian territory, such as the Gaza Strip. In 1973 Israel was taken by surprise by another attack led by Egypt, where it lost some territories but again triumphed with a powerful counterattack. Finally after an agreement in exchange of the Sinai Peninsula, Sadat, President of Egypt, recognized Israel as a legitimate state; this being the first agreement between an Arab country and Israel.

Meanwhile, after the aforementioned conflicts, Palestine was damaged. The Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank, territories that belonged to Palestine, were seized by Israel "for security". This is how in 1964 the "Palestine Liberation Organization" was formed, which led by Yasir Arafat (guerrilla) carried out several attacks on Israel in the 60s and 70s. In 1987 they started what was called "Intifada"; The first one is known as "The War of the Stones" due to the uprisings of Palestinian civilians throwing stones at the Israeli militars, among other acts of disobedience, demonstrations and boycotts; which led, given the pressure of the world to stop this violence, to establish peace talks.

This is how "the Oslo Accords" were signed, an accord where Israel agreed to give national authority for Palestine in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

However, this never reached its end of peace, Attacks between the two states continued for different reasons until today.

Some of the reasons for current conflicts are:

- The government of "Hamas", a group considered terrorist by both, the United States and the European Union, in the Gaza Strip, which is different from the government of the West Bank(governed by the Fathas group, against Hamas), and the constant attacks that take place in its territory.

- Jerusalem: This is a holy city for both Muslims and Christians (Palestine) and Jews (Israel). Reason why both claim this territory as their capital, despite the fact that East Jerusalem is in Palestinian territory, as stated by the UN, which is why the embassies of the different countries in Israel are in Tel Aviv. In 2018, Donald Trump moved the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, thus recognizing the city as its capital, leading to one of the bloodiest episodes between Israel and Palestine in many years.
- Settlements: Settlements are communities built by Israel in occupied territories, belonging to the Palestinian community. There are Israeli settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights (on the border with Syria). More than 600,000 Israelis have lived in 140 settlements since Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, lands claimed by Palestinians for the creation of a potential state. The problem is that these are not a treatable point for these two communities, and they are illegal before the world eye, since they lead to the impossibility of the delimitation of the territory and therefore a peace agreement.

These are just some of the conflicts and problems among many others, such as the high population density in the Gaza Strip, where 1.9 million people live, of whom 1.4 are refugees from Palestine. 80% of the population depends on humanitarian aid to live. It is clear that this conflict that dates back thousands of years needs to reach a peace agreement, but given the tragic history of terrorism and non-compliance with these agreements, the future looks dystopian.

LEBANON

Important concepts:

- Islam religion is divided in two groups:
- Shiites: They represent around 10% of Muslims. They have a more open representation of Islamic texts. They claim power for Ali, son-in-law of Muhammad (last prophet).
- Sunnis: They represent around 90% of Muslims. They claim that the visible head of the Islam religion must be a man from the Quraish tribe (where Muhammad was born) chosen by the community according to the indication of the sunna (set of precepts dictated by Muhammad).

The Lebanese state was based on an agreement between the country's main religions, that distributed power among them according to their demographic weight at all political levels in the country. Among these religions were Shiites, Sunnis, and Christians. And the parliament had a ratio of 5 Muslims to 6 Christians.

This order lasted until the 70s when civil war broke out. The first reason for this was demographic, in the 1970s the Muslims (mainly Shiites) already far outnumbered the Christian population, which is why they claimed to redistribute power according to demography.

The second reason was linked to the more traditional community leaders and the need for change after the crisis of the 1970s.

The third reason was the presence in Lebanon of much of the Palestinian community and the use of its territory to attack Israel, which made them part of the conflict and generated "resentment" by the Shiites at the Israeli attacks on their territory.

Therefore, Lebanon was dealing at the same time with a civil war and the Israel-Palestine conflict. In this situation, Syria enters. Why? After the signing of the peace between Egypt and Israel, the objective of Syria became to emerge control as a regional actor in the cause of the Arab countries against the Jewish state and to control the small states and sub-states, including Lebanon which, at war, destabilized the Syrian plan.

This is how the Syrians began to meddle in the affairs of Lebanon, an aspect that displeased Israel, which considered it as an excess of limits, and who decided, supporting the Christians, to invade, hence stopping the Palestinian attacks by having direct control of the south of the territory of Lebanon, reaching its capital. But after the response of the Shiites and the opinion of the Israeli people, Israel decided to leave the capital, Beirut, remaining only in the south.

Following Israel's withdrawal, Syria once again acted as central arbitrator in Lebanon, and faced the situation by proposing candidates for the presidency. With the support of the United States, a provisional government was put in charge of Aoun, a Maronite Christian; who defended the withdrawal of Syrian troops. But that caused a separation by creating two de facto governments, that of Aoun, to the east of Beirut, and to the west a Muslim government that considered the first to be illegitimate. Eventually, due to a number of factors, Aoun was removed from the Syrian forces and the Western Muslims.

Now the only problem left is the Israeli forces occupying southern Lebanon, which instead of being something to be dealt with by its government, came to be in the hands of Syria,

gaining control of Lebanon, but not the region , since Egypt ended up re-establishing itself in the forefront. Hence becoming a conflict that lasts until today, and that will not cease until the end of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA

Important concepts:

- Jihadism: it is a western neologism used to name the most violent and radical branches within political Islam or Islamism, being characterized by the frequent and brutal use of terrorism, in the name of an alleged jihad, which its followers call a "holy war" in the name of Allah.

If we must establish a year for the beginning of the Syrian conflict, it could be said that it was from the year 2000, when Bashar al-Assad, after the death of his father, took over the presidency of the government. Al Asad's mandate is characterized by a high percentage of unemployment in the country, lack of political freedom (dictatorship) and highly violent repression.

The outbreak occurred when in 2011 a group of teenagers painted revolutionary slogans on a wall, and were arrested and tortured by the security forces. Syrian civilians answered with many demonstrations, to which the government responded with fire. Due to such violence, the people responded by forming their own armed organization, which began as a method of defense and continues today with the aim of toppling Al Asad from power.

It is important to mention that the beginning of these demonstrations were part of something bigger that is known as the "Arab Spring", a series of demonstrations in different countries of the region fighting for democracy and social rights organized by the Arab population.

Now, why is the conflict still valid today? To understand the conflict, we must identify both sides, the government and the opposition, who have strong international support and many resources.

To start with, the opposition is made up of several groups. Most of them are jihadist groups. Among these, one of the most important is the Frente al Nusra, a branch of Al Qaeda (a terrorist organization internationally known for being held responsible for the attack on September first, 2001.) Then there are other more moderate rebel groups, and the Kurds. The division of all these groups, their different ideologies and their lack of mutual support, instead of being a great united body, allow us to understand a little why Al-Asad is still in power. Furthermore, most of the groups mentioned are Sunnis, an important religious factor.

Another essential factor to understand the continuity of this war is international support, the opposition has the support of Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the United States, among others. On the other hand, the government of Al Asad (Shia) has great support from Iran (also Shia) and Russia, whose military participation is essential for Al Asad to be on the offensive. In short, without the economic, military and political support of these governments, such a war would not be possible.

Finally, it is necessary to mention that the death figures until 2017 hovered around 470,000, not to mention the 5 million refugees who had to flee their native country, making this conflict a global problem to solve.

KURDISTÁN CONFLICT

You have probably noticed that the "Kurds" were mentioned in the Syrian conflict within the opposition. This is one of the largest ethnic groups in Asia, mostly Sunni, with generally leftist ideologies, located mostly in Syria and Turkey.

Why does this ethnic group stand out from the others? As I mentioned before, the Kurds are one of the largest groups not only in the region but also in the world that do not have an independent state; that is why its objective is to have autonomy, sovereignty and recognition as such. In Turkey they are not recognized, but in Russia it is where they are most accepted, a reason that could explain their leftist tendency.

On the other hand, the territory of Kurdistan would occupy the largest oil reserves in Iran and Iraq, and the source of the Tigris and Euphrates River, which is why its recognition seems to mean something impossible.

In addition, they often have religious divisions and internal rivalries that are the cause of continuous conflicts, that is why they used to be used by Iran and Iraq to destabilize each other in their own conflicts (1980-1988 war mainly for territorial issues, ending without a winner and with 200,000 deaths.)

CONCLUSION

Arguably, after this brief analysis we can already have a more general picture of what the current conflicts in the East are, despite missing some, such as the current problem of Iran with the United States, but which escapes a little more from the region. It is also essential to understand that all of them are related to each other, not only because some are contemporary; but also for sharing interests, as the triumph of a particular religion.

Another important factor is the fact that no conflict, despite being, for example, civil wars, escapes international influences, we can observe, for example, the United States present in each of them, without even being from the region; something that we can relate to the great wealth in oil from the east, causing conflicts such as the case of the Kurdish ethnic group, the need to have allies and control over the region.

In addition, to understand the problems of this region it is also necessary to understand each of the branches of the different religions, which are really important in political decisions, something that is not usual on our side of the world. Mainly distinguishing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, with its branches, the Shiites and Sunnis.

Finally, the most serious of all these issues, and the main issue for which they are in the world's eye, is the incredible number of deaths and refugees involved in each of these conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq war and the civilian war of Afghanistan, that although they were not mentioned because they can be considered already "closed" events, they have some of the highest death rates since World War II.

Concluding that the knowledge that we now have about the Middle East should be held by the entire world population in order to be able to cause enough pressure so that the resolution of these conflicts is by a political means, and above all, urgent.

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