



Yom Kippur's Impact on the Middle East Crisis

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Abstract

The article explores the ongoing global conflict between Israel and Arab countries in the Middle East, delving into key historical events that have shaped the region's geopolitical landscape. It examines the creation of the State of Israel, the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Six-Day War of 1967, and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, highlighting the intensity of the crisis between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Drawing from various studies, scientific literature, and political documents, the work underscores the dangers posed by ongoing tensions in the Middle East to both regional stability and global peace. In light of the escalating conflicts and the current political crises, the article advocates for the urgency of peace negotiations facilitated by leading global powers to address and resolve the enduring issues in the region.

Keywords: Middle East; Arab countries; Israel; USA; Egypt.

Introduction

The Middle East, a pivotal region in the modern geopolitical landscape, entered the 21st century carrying the unresolved legacy of historical conflicts (Khonelidze, 2015: 4). This was further exacerbated on October 7, 2023, when Hamas, on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, launched a large-scale attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip. This assault reignited hostilities between Israel and Arab countries, intensifying tensions and casting doubt on the feasibility of achieving a peaceful resolution in the region.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 181 (II), which proposed the partition of the British Mandate territory of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. This plan was immediately rejected by the Arab community. The establishment of the State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948, at 6:01 a.m., and Washington recognized the new state "de facto" just 10 minutes later. This unprecedented speed reflected Washington's strategic interest in leveraging the new state to bolster its influence in the region. The Soviet Union followed by recognizing Israel "de jure" on May 17 (Zabakhidze, 2023: 45-46).

The fate of the two states proposed in the 1947 resolution was uncertain from the outset. While the Jewish state materialized, the envisioned Arab state, encompassing Gaza, Jericho, and parts of northern Palestine, was never established. This unclaimed territory became a focal point of contention, with multiple parties vying for control, including Israel and Jordan, the latter asserting claims over the West Bank of the Jordan River. The adoption of the resolution sparked immediate and intense conflict between Jewish and Arab communities, escalating tensions in the region (Zabakhidze, 2023: 7)

Methodology

This article employs a range of methodologies from the humanities and political sciences, including case study, analysis, and induction methods. Additionally, the reconstruction method is utilized to piece together events and processes. Adhering to the historical research method, the study is grounded in factual evidence and past eve-

nts to build an argumentative framework for analyzing the Middle East's history and the ongoing conflict between Israel and Arab countries. The research draws upon primary sources, such as official state data and historical records, as well as secondary sources, including academic studies and political reports. This multifaceted approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the political dynamics influencing not only the Middle East but also the broader global context.

Discussion

On the night of May 14, 1948, just hours after the declaration of the State of Israel, armed clashes erupted between Palestinians and Jews, quickly escalating into full-scale war. The Arab League promptly intervened, and six Arab states launched an attack on the newly established State of Israel (Zabakhidze, 2023: 49). The first Israeli-Arab war of 1948-49 concluded with an Israeli victory, achieved through the heroism and determination of the Jewish people as they fought to secure the existence of their newly founded state.

The Six-Day War of 1967 (June 5-10) marked a significant turning point for the Middle East, a region where oil, water, and politics are deeply interconnected. With substantial support from the United States, Israel achieved a decisive victory, although this triumph did not bring lasting peace or security. One of the most notable outcomes of the war was the reunification of Jerusalem after 19 years, a symbolic and strategic achievement. The unexpected nature of the conflict and the rapid success of the Israeli forces have since been studied as exemplary in military strategy. The Six-Day War is regarded as the greatest military accomplishment in Jewish history, reshaping the geopolitical balance of the Middle East and leaving a profound impact on global politics (Gachechiladze, 2003: 333).

After the Six-Day War, a conciliatory conference was convened in Khartoum, where, similar to 1948, Arab countries rejected the possibility of establishing and reconciling an Arab state in Palestine. The well-known "three nos" of the Arab side were articulated: "no reco-

gnition of Israel," "no negotiations," and "no peace with Israel." This principle proved to be a significant setback for the Middle East, preventing any resolution to the ongoing conflict.

However, in the aftermath of Israel's victory, a peace treaty was eventually signed between Israel and Egypt, the largest Arab country, following Egypt's defeat in the Six-Day War. Despite this development, a sense of revenge deepened in the Arab world, leading to the 1973 Yom Kippur War, which marked the onset of another Israeli-Arab conflict.

The tense relations between Egypt and Israel, marked by periodic clashes around the Suez Canal in the early 1970s, were further complicated by the plight of the remaining 2.75 million Palestinian Arabs. Half of them had been displaced from the territory annexed by Israel during the 1948-49 war. Following the armistice agreement, the Israeli government refused to repatriate these refugees, fearing the presence of a large Arab population that could outnumber Jews in territories Israel had claimed. With no neighboring Arab state willing to permanently absorb them, these displaced Palestinians were "temporarily" settled in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian control at the time. They faced severe poverty and unemployment in these regions.

In 1967, the most politically active among them formed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which initially operated from Jordanian territory until 1970-71. However, King Hussein of Jordan, fearing that Palestinians would soon become the majority in his country, expelled the PLO. In the early 1970s, the PLO continued its activities from Lebanon, where its fighters resorted to high-profile acts of terrorism, including hijacking airplanes and the infamous murder of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics, in an effort to draw international attention to the Palestinian cause (Freedman, 2012: 17; Keylor, 2015: 502).

Arab states sought to leverage the Cold War to gain influence between the opposing blocs. From the late 1950s to the early 1970s,

the Soviet Union became a key tool for these states to apply pressure on the United States. The Soviet Union emerged as the primary supplier of arms and a diplomatic advocate for nationalist Arab states, which, in turn, supported Soviet goals in the region (Kissinger, 2020: 163).

However, this political orientation shifted in 1973-1974, when Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat realized that, while the Soviet Union could supply arms, it was unlikely to advance the diplomatic cause of recovering the Sinai Peninsula from Israel, which had captured it during the 1967 Six-Day War. Consequently, Sadat altered his stance, and Egypt effectively became an American ally, with its security now relying on American, rather than Soviet, weapons. Meanwhile, Syria and Algeria maneuvered to position themselves in a neutral stance between the Cold War blocs. As a result, Soviet influence in the region was significantly reduced. The one ideological issue on which all Arab states remained united was their opposition to the establishment of a sovereign Israeli state and its international recognition as the homeland of the Jewish people (Kissinger, 2020: 166).

Before this shift, Sadat had been unable to secure the offensive weapons from the Soviet Union that would have given Egypt a military advantage over Israel. Frustrated with the Soviet Union's lack of support, he decided to confront his less-than-accommodating patron. On June 18, 1972, following the Nixon-Brezhnev talks in Moscow, which had reaffirmed Moscow's commitment to East-West détente at the expense of its client states in the Middle East, Sadat ordered the expulsion of most Soviet advisers from Egypt.

In response, the Kremlin decided to supply Egypt with weapons. However, Sadat had already become convinced that a new armed conflict was necessary to draw the superpowers into the Middle East peace process and recover the lost Sinai Peninsula. This led to the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The Egyptian leadership recognized the importance of using the element of surprise to gain a military advantage, which pro-

ved to be a key factor in the initial successes of the conflict (Keylor, 2015: 503).

On October 6, 1973, during Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism, when most Israelis were observing the holiday and many soldiers were on leave, the Egyptian army launched a surprise attack. Crossing the Suez Canal, they attacked Israeli positions in the Sinai Peninsula. Simultaneously, Syria initiated a tank operation to recapture the Golan Heights. The Egyptian military forces advanced with a fierce infantry and artillery assault, successfully breaking through the Israeli Barlev Line, a series of fortifications along the Suez Canal.

Meanwhile, the Syrian army, equipped with 800 tanks, invaded the Golan Heights, an area that held significant Israeli settlements. After two weeks of intense fighting, the Israeli army mounted a counterattack with full force. They advanced into Syria, coming within 20 miles of Damascus, while another Israeli force moved across the Suez Canal. This operation successfully encircled the Egyptian Third Army in Sinai, cutting off its supply lines and preventing its retreat (Gachechiladze, 2019: 227).

Although neither Washington nor Moscow wanted to become directly involved in another Middle Eastern conflict that could destabilize the fragile Nixon-Brezhnev alliance, neither superpower was willing to be on the losing side in a war between their respective client states. As a result, both began supplying arms to their allied nations. The United States increased its support for Israel, while the Soviet Union provided military aid to the Arab states, particularly Egypt and Syria, in an effort to maintain their influence in the region (Keylor, 2019: 503).

It is interesting to consider the perspective of U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who argued that America's involvement in the Middle East was driven by a policy of containment, which sought to resist Soviet expansionism, and by a doctrine of collective security that encouraged the formation of alliances like NATO to address existing or potential threats. Despite this, Kissinger pointed out that most Middle

Eastern countries did not share America's strategic interests. Instead, many viewed Moscow not as a threat but as a useful lever to advance their own goals. Newly independent nations in the region often saw communist domination as a greater risk to their sovereignty than anything posed by the West, thus perceiving little need for American protection. Populist leaders like Egypt's President Nasser, in particular, resisted aligning with the West. They sought to present themselves as champions of independence and freedom, aiming to appeal to their people by prioritizing national sovereignty. For these leaders, non-alignment was not only a matter of foreign policy but also a vital domestic necessity (Kissinger, 2021: 678).

When it became clear that Egypt's defeat was inevitable after the Israeli army crossed the Suez Canal on October 16, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat requested that the United States and the Soviet Union cooperate to separate the warring parties. However, President Nixon refused to allow an unprecedented number of Soviet troops to enter the region. In retaliation, the Soviet Union threatened to unilaterally send its troops to the Middle East, prompting Nixon to place American military forces worldwide on nuclear alert. The Kremlin responded by doing the same. For a brief moment, it appeared that the desire of Moscow to exploit the Arab-Israeli conflict to gain a foothold in the region, coupled with the U.S. determination to prevent such a shift in the balance of power, could potentially escalate the conflict into a global confrontation, despite both superpowers' commitments to détente. The Fourth Arab-Israeli War was ultimately prevented from spiraling into a wider conflict by a compromise resolution passed by the UN Security Council on October 22. This resolution established a seven-thousand-strong UN peacekeeping force to monitor the ceasefire. In December 1973, Israel and the Arab states, under intense pressure from the superpowers, held face-to-face talks for the first time in twenty-five years at the Geneva Peace Conference (Keylor, 2015: 504).

The geopolitical consequences of the 1973 war were deeply influenced by the psychological effects it had on both sides. For Egypt

and the Arab world, the war was seen as a psychological victory, as they had managed to confront Israel more effectively than in previous conflicts. The sight of Israeli soldiers retreating created the illusion that Israel's military invincibility had been shattered. This perception was so powerful that it led to the creation of a special museum in Egypt dedicated to the war. The belief in this “victory” was ingrained in the Arab psyche, which helped fuel a sense of renewed confidence.

This psychological victory became particularly significant on the 50th anniversary of the war. On October 7, 2023, Arabs launched an attack from the Gaza Strip, marking a dramatic escalation in the ongoing conflict. The attack was characterized by extreme brutality and was framed as a continuation of the 1973 war's victorious narrative. It had the potential to shift the dynamics of the region again, not only threatening the Middle East but also carrying broader global implications. The attack highlighted the enduring volatility of the conflict and the psychological power of past military confrontations in shaping contemporary actions and strategies.

Conclusion

The Arab-Israeli conflict, with its deep historical, political, and religious roots, remains one of the most strategically significant and persistent conflicts in the world. As American diplomat Carl Saunders rightly observed, a resolution to the conflict can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the two nations involved, where mutual recognition and compromises are essential. Arab nations will likely not recognize Israel until the Israeli-Palestinian territorial disputes are fairly resolved, and the reality of military operations being unable to stop the national movements further underscores the need for peaceful political negotiations and agreements.

The growing influence of Islamist extremist groups in the region only complicates efforts for peace, as these groups often resist any form of political compromise with Israel, seeking to perpetuate the conflict. The dynamics of these forces make it even more urgent for compr-

ehensive and sustained peace talks to take place, with the inclusion of all stakeholders.

The words of King Abdullah of Jordan, suggesting that peace between Israel and the Arabs of Gaza is inevitable, reflect a growing recognition among Arab leaders that peace, although elusive, is an essential necessity. Over time, despite the ongoing hostilities and setbacks, there is an increasing sense that the path to lasting peace lies not in further military confrontations, but in cooperation and dialogue. As the region's political realities evolve, the broader international community continues to understand that peace in the Middle East is not just a regional issue, but one that affects global stability. A lasting peace will require difficult compromises, but the stakes are high-not only for Israel and the Arab world, but for the entire world.

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