Winter February 23, 2015

The Arab Fall: War of All Against All

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/muqtedar_khan/43/
THE ARAB FALL: WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL

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This article was first published in the Turkey Agenda on 02.23.2015
http://www.turkeyagenda.com/the-arab-fall-war-of-all-against-all-2028.html

Prior to social contracts and the formation of the state, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau and other enlightenment thinkers argued that human beings lived in a state of nature. In this state of nature, the individual has obligations to only the self and since there was no authority that could enforce order or rule of law, the state of nature was anarchical and in pursuit of security the condition that prevailed was a ‘war of all against all’. This is how the realist view the world and since they fear this condition of anarchy when one is at war with everyone, they dream of a powerful state – The Leviathan – that would maintain order, banish anarchy and bring security to all.

I am an idealist who believes in values, identity and normative aspirations. I believe in Islam, in democracy and peace. But when I look at the Arab World today, my heart sinks and all my idealism evaporates. I see anarchy, chaos, tragedy and barbarity. I begin to sympathize with Hobbes and pray for a moment of calm, peace, stability and order. The decline of US power and influence in the Arab World has created a power vacuum in the system which neither weak states like the regimes in Baghdad and Damascus, nor regional powers such as Iran, Turkey or Saudi Arabia are able to fill. In the absence of an authority backed by power, anarchy reigns.

Daesh is a Nihilist Force

There are many agonizing and perplexing aspects of Daesh -- the emerging state within the states of Iraq and Syria. The most perplexing aspects are what does it stand for and whom does it stand against? If it stands for Islamic governance then how does one explain the atrocities committed against innocent, unarmed and harmless Muslims who unfortunately come within their dominion? If they stand against the West and for the Muslim World, then why are they engaged in war with so many Muslim nations? What if any diplomatic efforts have they made to convince the
Muslim states that they are not against them?

The only conclusion that I can come to is that Daesh is a Muslim version of the nihilist movements. While it may value some religious authority it neither understands nor aspires for political authority, which can only come from political legitimacy, good governance and concern for those who are governed. Clearly Daesh is not aspiring for any of the key elements of a state or political authority yet they seek territory and power. It is possible that there is no clear political vision behind this movement and they are just going with the flow, satisfying all their political and hate appetites.

Nevertheless, vision or no vision, Daesh has brought the Arab world to the brink of a Hobbesian nightmare. As one watches the geopolitical terrain of the Arab World, one is amazed at how many players are at war. Jordanian air force is launching raids in the territory of its neighbors to kill essentially people who claim to be Muslims. Egypt is attacking Libyan targets and Iranians have been operating military missions in Lebanon and Iraq. Hezbollah, a Lebanese militia is now operating both in Syria and Iraq. The gulf nations too are now seeing their air forces engaged in combat operations. If one were to draw lines to indicate the trajectories of military ordnances deployed the picture would be horrifying. The bombs and bullets are flying in every direction.

**Prospects for Regional Collective Security Efforts**

It is not too difficult to fathom what needs to be done. The region has many deficits. Not only is there a power vacuum with the United States and regional powers unwilling to fulfill the responsibilities of powerful states, there are no regional collective security arrangements. The Arab and the Muslim World has failed, in spite of the tall rhetoric of shared Islamic identity and values, to create a NATO like institution that could protect the region and above all maintain order and stability within it. There are international organizations like the OIC, the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council, but they all are toothless and without any substance.

Even the tiny GCC, which has only six nations in it, cannot work cohesively even though the countries share, Arab identity, Islam, and regime type, they do not have political consensus. In fact Qatar and Saudi Arabia not only compete with each other for geopolitical influence but also
often find themselves on the opposite sides. The regional powers too, Iran, Egypt, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, often work against each other rather than in concert.

The non-Arab powers, Iran and Turkey, are stable, secure and to a great extent democratic. They engage the challenges in the region selectively and with diffidence. I don’t blame them. The less they get involved in the Arab chaos the safer they will be. The more they engage with the governments and the radical groups in Arab nations the greater the danger of spillover effect. It would be great if the four powers come together to wage a decisive war against **Daesh** and put an end to it. But that level of cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt, is sadly unthinkable. They may all be willing to drown separately rather than survive together. In the absence of meaningful regional effort the Arab Fall – that came after the Arab Spring, will be at the mercy of Europe and the US for deliverance.

I hate to end on such a despondent note. If President Obama can show some leadership and call for a regional security summit in the region and bring these key states to the table – Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and ask them to provide a large military force that can be deployed in Iraq and Syria and with American air backing then there is hope of tackling **Daesh**. This regional peacekeeping force could then be used in Libya and Yemen to pacify the Jihadi uprising and stabilize the region before political solutions can be enacted. But Turkey will probably try to keep Egypt out, Saudi Arabia will try to exclude Iran and **Daesh** will go to town.

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