

## **West Asian Spaghetti (Lebanon)**

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### **The Confusion State**

The concept of state as espoused popularly in the modern world or the evolution of the concept in modern nations has perhaps engendered late in the peoples of Arabia. The concept is a complete paradox for the Arab people and it seems that the rest of the world is out to enforce this notion on them. There has been an acceleration for the acceptance of the concept by the creation of the new state of Israel. Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Egypt were part of the Great Ottoman Empire and never existed as today, they were administered as cities.

Lebanon is a multicultural and multi religious state, where they have attempted to run the country based on confessionalism. Confessionalism has not really worked as the country declined into civil war many times and the system is prone to hegemonic influences. The country is well endowed with natural beauty and has enormous potential for creating wealth. Its citizens are proud people with great respect for their history.

Israel and Palestine are a state confused, for their identity remains clouded under historical dispute and interpretation. Yet Israel is far ahead in its endeavour for statehood as it can boast of a prideful position in the world as an economic, R & D, and military powerhouse. They are in complete control of the geographical area that they control and have a say in world affairs. Palestine on the other hand generally squanders away its wealth on attacking Israeli civilians, and is pitiful as a state. They are living on donations from rest of the world!!

### **Balkanisation and Belgianisation**

Both are illegal in idea and legitimate in practice. Legitimate, as the UN (United Nations) endorses various lines, even though the natives of the area share little in common; and others, where they are the same peoples, it divides. A combination of Balkanisation and Belgianisation is how Lebanon has been formed over the course of its fractured history. It's a homogeneous mix of eighteen religious denominations, the majority of whom are Sunni, Shiite, Maronite Christians and the Druze. All these people live in common ways but are intent on representation through their own kind, confusing governance and delaying government decisions (including annual budgets) to the peril of the country.

Historians have argued, with some cogency, that its inhabitants would have had a better chance of living in peace had it been incorporated into a Greater Syria, when the Ottoman empire collapsed at the end of the First World War.<sup>1</sup> Being parts of a larger whole might—but only might—have given the Christians and Druze and perhaps even the Shiite Muslims a good slice of autonomy in the areas where they predominate.

Yet the country is living as one, the people aggressively patriotic and nationalistic. Among all states in the region, Lebanon is the only one who has not assimilated the Palestinian refugees, leveraging their cause for personal aims, and perhaps maintaining their cultural identity.

Israel and Palestine are also Balkanised and Belgianised over the past six decades. Today, Israel has managed to make a country for themselves which is not fractured geographically, whereas the result has been that Palestine is fractured and Balkanised (West Bank and Gaza). As were in the Balkans, there are Arabs in Israeli lands who complicate the issue. Sprinkle over this the religious issues of Shiite, Sunni, Christian, and Jews, and it makes for a heady Ayodhya.

### **Palestinian Enigma**

The question this century, for the Arabs may be: Will they survive as an Arab people? Connected with this is the question: Will Palestine ever become a state? To answer these questions one may have to travel ahead into time to see the impossible!!

The Palestinian people are the modern Jews. They are dispersed throughout the world, away from their land, persecuted in some lands, and living as refugees. They are unwanted and a problem for all, and mostly blamed for petty crimes in their forced homelands. But they are a reality, and their final settlement and solution will help ease their long suffering and create a lasting solution for the Jewish state.

There are twelve Palestinian camps in Lebanon. These refugees are living in enclaves without any citizenry rights. They cannot buy land and neither can they vote!! The Lebanese are unwilling to assimilate them as they might tilt the fragile demographic balance in favour of Sunni. The Palestinian themselves live in hope to return to their homeland. But they have become a part of the Lebanese question.

The Palestinian people will not settle for anything less than what they have lost. If the Jewish people have waited for two thousand years for their promised homeland, it may be suggested that the Palestinian people may also wait for their time to come, to resettle in the homeland of their forefathers. This vicious cycle may have its solutions this century. In confronting environmental and existential issues, prudence may improvise a solution. Till then, the world at large has to wait for such issues to become more important for the world to create solutions for lesser causes.

West Bank and Gaza are not only tiny, but separated geographically. There is no corridor connecting the two and Israel is blocking all routes by closing the gates and fencing the boundary. Their contention that it has reduced rocket attacks only gives credence to their policy. But this has had a catastrophic effect on the economy and perception of the Palestinians living in the two enclaves. Given the present circumstances the Palestinians will take a long time to establish a potent state and also to do something about the Palestinian refugees.

### **Interests of Insurgents**

Ever since the dawn of civilisation, whenever people have risen against authority; without arms, we tend to call it a revolution; when with arms, an insurgency. The underlying factor in both cases is armament. In the former there is little need for conventional weapons for fighting, whereas in the latter, weapons and resources are a must. The access to weapons and resources comes from quarters looking for instability in these areas, hence the term 'Interest Insurgents', rather than 'Religious Insurgents' or 'Corporate Insurgents'. Insurgents in Lebanon are not really insurgents in the true sense. The Arabs have kept weapons at home and pride in them as an extension or depiction of male prowess and masculinity. They are swayed by emotion more than ground realities. Pride and Honour (of their own definition) are more important than truth and reality.

Interest insurgents in Lebanon root from interests in Israel, Iran, Syria, the EU, the USA, France and Egypt. The Palestinians are the main protagonists who play the part of interest insurgents, other than the Shiites, Sunnis, Maronite Christians, and the Druze. This heady mixture of different types of peoples ensures chaos at the macro level, whereas at the micro level there is much tolerance and bonhomie amongst villagers.

The Hezbollah has emerged as a powerful organisation capable of successful and conclusive guerrilla warfare. They have managed to overcome the usual shortcomings of Arabic military behaviour to shine against the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in the recently concluded Second Lebanon war. The Lebanese government's endorsement of the resistance group as a legal entity has created many problems for the International community trying to police Lebanon. Yet, it is Hezbollah that has been able to stand against the might of the IDF and not the Lebanese Armed Forces.

The endorsement of the Lebanese government of the legality of Hezbollah weapons will pose problems in the long run. It is yet to be seen that for how long Hezbollah can maintain its reputation as a potent force. The statements by Major General Claudio Graziano, Force Commander, United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), in New York at HQ UN, of the implementation of UNSCR (United Nations Security Council Resolution) 1701, in which he has bitterly criticised Israel for violations, whereas he has praised the Hezbollah for respecting the resolutions.<sup>2</sup>

### **Post Second Lebanon War**

The prisoner swap on 16 Jul 2008 marked the end of the 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel. The result of the war, though not conclusive for any long lasting peace or harmony, brought about a strong European contingent within UNIFIL in South Lebanon. This has ensured peace and harmony in the short term and has allowed both parties and residents some respite from violence. It is hard to say whether Hezbollah has benefited by this lull. Pro Israel lobby tends to conclude that this has led Hezbollah rearming and re-energising.<sup>3</sup> Suffice to say that it has brought the whole fragmented nation together under the Hezbollah banner and engendered pride and confidence. For the Lebanese, the results of the war were conclusive and they have celebrated thus.

For Israel, UNIFIL has wrought peace on its boundary. There is a clear absence of violence fed by different groups on Israeli targets on the border ever since. Yet criticism from the Zionist state continues unabated about UNIFIL inactions on UNSCR resolution 1701.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps, the Great Powers have brokered a deal with Israel to keep its Northern boundary in order for Israel to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions. UNIFIL has never been of such interest to the USA and the Europeans. There is no gold, diamonds, or oil to be found in the state of Lebanon.

### **An Unequal Contest**

Lebanese soldiers, military vehicles, and hardware, guarding road blocks all over South Lebanon, omnipresent in Beirut, look and feel like of World War II vintage. It is no secret that whenever Israel marches into Lebanon, the Lebanese armed forces leave their positions and rush back home without defending their positions. UNIFIL has never been forceful enough to contain the IDF behind the Blue Line against IDF aggression. Lebanese Air Force consists of two dozen helicopters and a navy of few patrol boats.

Comparing IDF with Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) is like comparing Goliath with David. IDF has complete control of Lebanese Airspace, both virtually and physically. <sup>5</sup> All airwaves in Lebanon are constantly interfered by Israeli equipment. The IAF is the most capable air force in West Asia. It can safely be assumed that it is one of the most capable air force in the world. The Israeli Navy is a modern fleet with corvettes, missile boats, submarines, patrol boats and support ships. This fleet's capability is beyond protection capability for Israeli 180 km coastline on the Mediterranean Sea and 10 km coastline in the Gulf of Aqaba.

The two neighbours are unequal in all aspects of state. The state of Israel has a common cause, powerful friends, is rich and has a lot of assets. Its people are well educated and modern in thought. In contrast, the Lebanese do not have a common cause, their friends and others are using them, and they do not have any assets to boast about. They are not well educated and are yet steeped in the past.

### **The Future**

On the eve of Israel's 60th anniversary, Time and the Economist, as also other publications dared to foretell how Israel would look like in the future. Most were optimistic, and a few were pessimistic; however, it is important to note that most commentators were westerners. It is likely that hard line Islamic pundits would be optimistic from their point of view, but unfortunately the moderate Islamic view is against Israel. It is important to note that even though the human race would will for peace on earth, what matters is History. The foundations of the state of Israel are questionable. It is for no reason that India had not recognised Israel for 45 years of its creation. Similarly the basis of foundation of Pakistan is questionable, hence, all the violence involved.

Jews from all over the world already view Israel as spiritually impoverished and uninviting.<sup>6</sup> And when Israelis look at their neighbourhood, they see looming threats: a potential nuclear bomb in Iran; one of the world's most powerful guerrilla armies in Lebanon; growing extremism among the Palestinians; and everywhere the rise of popular

Islamist parties that threaten to topple reluctantly pro-western Arab autocrats. For the first time since 1948, real existential threats to Israel, at least in its Zionist form, are on the horizon.

In contrast, Lebanon has only to look ahead. The infrastructure after years of civil war and Israeli bombardment needs to be rebuilt, and maintained. Its economy needs to be nurtured back to pre civil war era. Syria and Lebanon are demarcating their borders, hastening political solutions. There is much to do. All this optimism is not without its caution. Hezbollah will never be tolerated by the West as a legal entity. It perhaps needs to evolve into an acceptable form of politico-military structure with changes in its manifesto. After the recent clashes in Lebanon, Hezbollah has managed to get one third majority within the government and legalise its arms. All the funds from the poppy fields of Bekaa need to convert into funds from fruit, wine, and food from the fields of Bekaa. The Palestinians need to be integrated into the economy and given a say as per their franchise strength.

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