

Fear Nothing but Fear Itself – The Middle East Conflict

By Costantine Magavilla

Published in S&C Magazine

Since the first Gulf War, the gravity and graphical nature of international conflicts has reached unparalleled heights. This can be attributed to the levels of sophistication, not only in military strategy and armament, but also in media coverage that enables us to see events in their rawest form as they unravel. Yet, there is nothing more common in the halls of history than conflict. It is also worth noting that there is nothing more common about history itself than the fact that it is written by the one who either wins or survives long enough to tell 'his' story. It is, as a result, much easier to make an account of events than to actually validate them.

The Middle East is no exception to this truth. So much so that unless you are a real hard line follower, it is difficult to know who is at conflict with whom, when and for what reason. Over the last century the Middle East has been ravaged by a myriad of conflicts. One of the hallmark conflicts has been that of Israel and the Arab Nations. Like the other conflicts in the world of recent time it is difficult to state what is driving this conflict still.

Despite the small physical space being covered, *this conflict*, dating back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1917, has been at the center of international diplomacy and media reporting and has attracted the undivided attention of all the world's super powers to date; the then British Empire, the then USSR and now the USA. For whatever reason, *the Middle East conflict*, as some would like to refer to it, has been a drawn out saga with multiple parties often holding

conflicting positions with time. The Israel/ Arab conflict, which now also includes the Israel/ Palestine conflict, has been characterized in many ways with some instigating that it is an underlying conflict of Western ideals versus those of the Islamic world. Others have reached the extreme of attributing the never-ending nature of *this conflict* to 'Global' interest on the oil reserves of that part of the world. Like in any other conflict there are pertinent issues at hand. For example in the Israel/ Palestine Conflict the main issues are 1) the status and future of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, which comprise the areas for the proposed State of Palestine, 2) Israeli and Palestinian security, 3) the nature of a future Palestinian State, 4) the fate of the Palestinian refugees, 5) the settlement policies of Israel, and the ultimate fate of settlements, and 6) Sovereignty over Jerusalem's holy sites, including the Temple Mount and Western Wall complex. These unresolved issues may validate the existence of a conflict, but one may wonder what is at stake to the extent that no real resolve has been reached in all these years...

There are cases where interested parties have justified conflicts and military advancements by using existing conflicts to an extent that they end up fueling these conflicts. The most controversial of all these, 'proxy conflicts', is none other than the war against terrorism. Terrorism has become a diplomatic and media 'catchphrase' that accompanies anything from the side street bomb scare to the avalanching assaults that have resulted into the devastation of societies a many. The recent use of immeasurable force by Israel to eliminate enemy forces (Specifically Hezbollah militia forces in Southern Jordan) was justified under the guise of attacks on a terrorist group and supporters of terrorism in the region. Anyone remember the attack on Saddam Hussein and his regime in Iraq that promised to unravel weapons of mass destruction and deliver

democracy to an oppressed people. No weapons of mass destruction found yet and democracy continues to be a catchphrase in the country. The Al-Quada, a largely Arab organization, on the other hand has time and again sighted *the Middle East conflict* as a justification for its attacks on the West, which have been largely characterized by as terrorist attacks. Given this 'egg and chicken' reality we may be in for a long hall still.

Many powers are at play in the world of today and it is often difficult to know who is calling the shots and for what reason. The traditional centers of powers have been religious bodies (namely the Catholic Church) and Nation States, but now we are seeing new centers, namely the rise of global media and fundamentalist groups. Mass media, for one, has always been a critical propaganda machinery tool representing interests both known and unknown. Mass media has traditionally been the source of news, but because of the instant nature of news nowadays, it has quickly evolved into a critical opinion forming body. Most of what the world knew about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, it heard first from the media. Most of what the world knows about Osama Bin Laden, it knows from the media.

Covert activity by our world's major powers has had the effect of putting everything in the open, but what people really need to know. The reality is that we are a world living in fear and to make things worse we do not know what we really fear. What are seen to be strategic assaults may in effect be motivated by fear unprecedented compelling even leaders of the most advanced nations to shoot and then aim. Some people may capitalize on our fears to drive other agendas without us being aware; just the mention of terrorists looming about, sends hairs rising in even the most remote villages of the world. The

combination of fear and conflict is almost natural and the two co-exist as a result.

There is nothing like a *Middle East Conflict* per se. The generalization of conflicts serves as a diversion from the true course of action in resolving these conflicts. What is clear is that the issues at hand (terrorism, war, religious fundamentalism, weapons of mass destruction) naturally invoke fear and the speed at which this information is disseminated compels us to respond in relation to that fear sometimes without really knowing the issues at hand. As a matter of principle, we need register the issues and understand them before taking a position lest we end up becoming fuel for the conflict to explode further.