**Victims of geopolitics: Palestine and Kashmir**

Javid Husain

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The recent tragic developments in and around Gaza are a painful reminder of the deep and festering wound inflicted upon the Palestinian body politic by Western colonialism in connivance with Jewish Zionism and in pursuance of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which encouraged emigration to Palestine. Both Gaza and the West Bank basically have been under Israeli direct or indirect military occupation since 1967 despite the signing of the Oslo Accord in 1993.

The attack launched by Hamas against targets in Israel on October 7, which led to the killing of 1400 soldiers and civilians according to Israeli authorities, needs to be seen against the background of the continued indirect Israeli occupation of the territory, its land, naval and air blockade, and the innumerable atrocities and human rights violations committed there by the occupation authorities.

So far, the retaliatory Israeli air strikes have killed about 5087 Palestinians and injured many more in Gaza besides causing extensive material destruction. The strengthening of the blockade around Gaza, which has prevented the free entry of humanitarian supplies into Gaza, has increased manifold the sufferings of its people. The possibility of the escalation of the conflict through the involvement of other regional powers also cannot be ruled out.

Hamas may use the hostages – numbering about 220 – taken by it during its attack on Israel on October 7 for delaying the Israeli attack on Gaza and as bargaining chips in future negotiations. Four hostages have so far been released on humanitarian considerations. However, Israel’s threatened attack on Gaza or its campaign of death and destruction not only in Gaza but also in the West Bank will not eliminate the root cause of the Palestine issue and the tragic loss of life on both sides until a two-state solution of the Palestinian issue is arrived at through negotiations in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and international law.

It is a strange coincidence that both the Kashmir and Palestine issues, amongst the most important ones confronting the Muslim world, originated around 1947-48. Thanks to the clandestine support of the Western world, especially the UK, to the Zionist movement over the preceding several decades, Israel emerged as an independent state in 1948 after intermittent fighting between the Jews and the Arabs and the announcement of the UN Partition Plan in November 1947.

The US was the first country to recognize Israel on May 14, 1948 after its proclamation of independence on the same date. The subsequent wars between Israel and the Arab countries enabled the former to bring the West Bank and Gaza under its control.

Several factors played an important role in the creation of Israel in the heartland of the Arab world. The first and foremost, of course, was the Zionist movement established in 1897 with the goal of creating a Jewish state in Palestine. The movement fully exploited the political and financial strength of the Jews in Europe and the US for the realization of its goal. Further, as pointed out by Noam Chomsky, the creation of Israel also had the support of Christian Zionism which believed in the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine to hasten the reappearance of Jesus Christ.

Europe exhibited antisemitism over several centuries as part of its cultural and political ethos. The Holocaust under Nazi Germany obviously was the worst manifestation of this sentiment. So, in the case of some Western countries supporting the creation of Israel was partly meant to compensate for the past injustices done to the Jews in their societies. It may also have been a subtle way of exporting a difficult domestic social problem to a land outside Europe.

Above all, the situation in Gaza and the Palestine issue generally are the victims of geopolitical considerations. Undoubtedly, Israel is viewed by the West, especially the US, as its outpost in the Middle East which can be used to project its power and influence in the region. America’s close political, military, and economic ties with Israel are a testimony to the high priority that Washington attaches to its ties with Tel Aviv. The way in which America and other Western countries looked the other way as Israel was developing its nuclear weapon programme was another indicator of the West’s high stakes in the latter.

Washington has also encouraged various Arab countries to enter peace deals with Israel through the Abraham Accords. The Hamas attack on Israel has put on the backburner – at least temporarily – the signing of a peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Israel because of the rekindling of strong public support in the Arab world for the people in Gaza and the West Bank. Nevertheless, it is highly unlikely that Israel would agree to a reasonable peace settlement with the Palestinians in the near future because of the support of the US-led West that it enjoys, its huge military superiority over the Arabs, and the state of disarray and under-development in the Arab and the Muslim world.

Like Palestine, the Kashmir dispute involves the exercise of the right of self-determination of its people free of foreign or alien occupation in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions. Like their Palestinian brethren who face the military and economic superiority of Israel and the US-led West, the people of Kashmir are confronted with the superior Indian military and economic power. What makes the situation even more grim for both the Kashmiris and the Palestinians is that they are located on civilizational fault lines between the Islamic and Hindu civilizations in the case of Kashmir, and between the Western and Islamic civilizations in the case of Palestine.

However, the lesson of history is that no power can subjugate another nation through military means alone if its people are prepared to lay down their lives for the sake of their freedom. Vietnam and Afghanistan are recent examples of this experience in human history. What is needed is a carefully worked out long-term grand strategy to defeat the expansionist designs of the threatening power.

This has obvious implications for Pakistan’s Kashmir policy. Our policymakers must remember that national power in terms of political stability, economic and technological strength, and military might rather than hollow statements and mere moral and legal arguments plays the decisive role in determining the outcome of major issues of war and peace.

The writer is a retired

ambassador. He can be reached at: javid.husain@gmail.com