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Jews and Arabs in Israel

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|  |  Student |
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|  |  Maksimenko Maria |
|  |  |
| Reviewer | Scientific Advisor |
| \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ |  |
| Name, Surname |  Andrey Kudelin |

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Today world speaks a lot about Arab-Israeli conflict. It started between the small Jewish and the much larger Arab community in Palestine during the rule of the Ottoman Empire way before the State of Israel was established.

Its roots are going far beyond the modern history, originating in the Arab-Jewish conflict in Mandate Palestine and even in an earlier period when the position of Jews in the Ottoman Empire and Palestine was determined by Islamic religious law, according to which the status and rights of religious minorities were lower than Muslim ones. The Jews were subjected to all kinds of discrimination from the local authorities, concentrated in the hands of representatives of the Arab nobility and from the local Muslim population. This situation could not but leave a mark in the relations between the two nations.

Besides that, the roots also lays in the clash of two mentalities: the Arab population, which was committed to the old religious traditions and way of life, believed in the spiritual authority of the state, and representatives of the Zionist movement, which brought with them from Europe a completely new way of life.

The conflict became more significant after the First World War, the publication in 1917 of the Balfour Declaration, in which the British government supported the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people,” and the establishment in 1920 of a British Mandate over Palestine on both sides of the Jordan River. During the next three decades, Arabs and Jews fought over rights and control, their conflict culminating in a war that broke out after the United Nations’ decision in 1947 to partition the country between a Jewish state and a Palestinian-Arab one.

For a better understanding of the relationship between Jewish and Arabs in Israel, it is necessary to go back to the Arab-Israeli dispute times and divide it into four independent problems.

1. National conflict between Palestinians and Israel. This part is basically dedicated to land claims and its name.
2. Historical and cultural side of the conflict. Jewish and Arab people’s identity, including national and religious aspects.
3. Bilateral clashes between Israel and neighboring Arab states – Egypt and Syria as the key actors.
4. The “Palestine question” is an international question – “Holy Land”, the Cold War, Soviet-American competition.

To make a long story short, the conflict appeared in 1947 after the creation of the state of Israel. It basically means the legitimate position of Jewish people on the land of Palestine. That could not but provoked Arab nationalism and hence the deterioration of relations between Palestinian Arabs and by the Jews. Arabs did not want to share the land they treat as their own national treasure.

For Arabs, who have lived in this territory for centuries, the emigration of Jews was an invasion of uninvited guests with dubious rights. As if strangers came into the house and said that their ancestors lived here under Rurik, so now this is their house. However, for Jews resettling in Palestine - the Land of Israel, this emigration was a returning home, gaining a national hearth after hundreds of years of humiliation and oppression. Moreover, they tried to do everything legally, in compliance with the legal norms of that time.

The argumentations of the both are understandable and, by and large, remains unchanged even now. For the Israelis, their country is a sacred hearth, stronghold and besieged fortress. For Arabs “Zionist creation”, the most radical even refuse to use the word “Israel”, a tumor on the body of the world and the apartheid regime, where the rights of the Arab population are systematically violated.

The current confrontation is an example of the modern biggest ethno-religious conflict. Some can argue that this is not an ethnical conflict, but a political one, that it is all about power, influence, territories and profits.

One of the definitions of “ethnic conflict” is as follows. One of the intermediate definitions is as follows. Conflict seems “ethnic” if at least one of the conflicting parties speaks on behalf of the ethnic group or if public opinion describes the rapists and their victims in ethnic terms. In some cases, active participants of the conflict can also speak on behalf of a political (state) community, if statehood is described and understood in ethnopolitical terms.

Conflict unites an ethnic group, but this does not mean that all its members are equally involved in it, or at least share the position of its active participants. That is why blaming the whole nation is so unfair. Determined views interfere with a clear assessment of the situation. The one cannot see beyond his or her belief, and usually the reality loose its functionality. This is very dangerous, and that strong belief caused many deaths and continue to threaten the peace. Let us go closer to the ethnic and religious conflict on the Palestinian land.

Appealing to biblical history, Christian Azuri stated that "neither in the time of Joshua, neither in the era of the kingdom of David and Solomon "Palestine" was never inhabited by people who spoke the same language, had one historical origin, professing one religion and possessing the same customs."

Arab states have always looked for their origins in more ancient times than the era of Muslim conquests, ethnically and religiously changing the Middle East. The preamble of the Iraqi constitution of 2005 identifies this country and “Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization, where it was writing was created, the foundation was laid for agriculture, numbers were invented and the first law created by man was adopted”.

In Syrian Ugarit, "…the oldest alphabet arose, giving rise to the Greek alphabet" (in Lebanese version of the "country" biography, this alphabet appeared in Byblos, associated with modern Jubail). “The history of Syria,” wrote its historian, “has world-wide features”: “Understand the history of the Roman Empire possible in Syria, not Italy; the development in Syria of religious, political and social teachings gave life to Eastern Rome ".

The conflict militarized the Arab countries – this process, justified by the confrontation of "Zionist aggression", contributed to the formation of the army's myth as a "savior of the fatherland." Into the public consciousness, this myth put army officers at the center of society, creating conditions for their advance to power. But it had a flip side: the armed forces (and state security agencies) opposed Israel countries turned into an instrument of conservation regimes.

Function of "the defender of the Fatherland" was losing importance – defeats in the "classic" wars with Israel were seemed inevitable. The role of the army as a pillar of the regime was ambiguous, the dominant officer who left its ranks the faction was afraid of it, reasonably believing that the army was a potential source of threat to its power.

Israel is a multi-religious state — of its more than seven million citizens, one-fifth (1.4 million) are Arabs. Of these, 81% are Muslims, most of whom belong to the Sunni branch of Islam. About 140 thousand Palestinian Arabs — a small minority — profess Christianity. It should be noted that since the creation of the State of Israel, the ratio of the Jewish and Arab population in it has not changed: in 1948, there were 800 thousand Jews and about 150 thousand Arabs in Israel. In this regard, it is important to consider the position of Islam as the religion of the Arab minority within Israel; the processes taking place among Israeli Muslims, and the forms of their interaction with the Israeli state and society.

In addition, the most important shrines of Islam in Jerusalem after the" six-day war " in 1967 for the first time in the centuries-old history were in the territory controlled by the Jewish state. Since that time, the struggle for Jerusalem's Holy sites has become an integral part of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Jerusalem as the third most important Holy place for Muslims, after Mecca and Medina, is at the center of pan-Arab propaganda that mobilizes the masses to fight Zionism. However, according to the Arabs themselves, the Arab leaders only remember Jerusalem from time to time to remind the people of the Zionist threat, as well as "to deflect accusations of failure to achieve its liberation".

Political interests often prevail over religious feelings in the question of who should own the territories where Muslim shrines are located. This approach has its own explanation in historical retrospect. For centuries, only in rare periods did Jerusalem become the center of the spiritual life of Muslims, and in the last stage of the rule of the Ottoman Empire, it generally occupied a peripheral position in the Islamic religious tradition.

At the same time, the rise of Islamic radicalism and the increasing politicization of Islam, both at the regional level and on a global scale, contributes to the strengthening of an ideologized approach to the solution of the Jerusalem problem as a whole. Palestinian representatives of radical Islam point out: "a territorial settlement with Israel is not possible until Jerusalem, the city where Muhammad ascended to heaven and which was liberated by Caliph Omar in 638, is returned to the control of the faithful (under the rule of Muslims)." Perhaps the secular Palestinian leadership could compromise with Israel on the issue of control over the Holy places, but the fierce competition from its political opponents from the camp of radical Islam makes this task very difficult.

The current state of the Arab-Jewish conflict is characterized by the strengthening of the role of the religious component in it. This is quite evident in the increased activity of religious extremists on both sides, who claim to be the only true fighters for national interests and defenders of the Holy sites located in Jerusalem. At the same time, both sides claim to possess the same territories, and the condition for resolving the conflict is the elimination of the presence of Gentiles on land that has a sacred status in the religious tradition of both Islam and Judaism. The conflict is thus translated into the plane of irrational, mythologized ideas about the special properties of the Holy Land and the religious shrines located on it, the possession of which is supposed to ensure the solution of national problems. Such mutually exclusive demands of the parties aggravate the conflict and are one of the factors that create deadlocks in attempts to resolve it.

In the context of the aggravation of the Israel conflict, the strengthening of Islamic extremism and the growing popularity of extreme forms of religious nationalist ideology among Israelis, one of the counterbalances to the growth of negative trends can be the education in society of a spirit of tolerance and respect for other religions and cultures.

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