

Whose War!

After the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 our borderlands were in turmoil and we had to do something about it. A few of us might recall that a good number, especially from the fired cartridges, a title affectionately bestowed upon former faujis, insisted that it was not our war. True or not, as it was raging on our territory, we had to fight it. India did a little better. Sometime back, as the Chinese were tickling with the LOAC in the Himalayas — Doklam and all — I asked an old friend from across, how come Delhi was so sanguine about the threat! “Because if we were to make any fuss we would have to take action against the big bad neighbour”. The problem is that the elephant in the room can only be ignored for that long and willy-nilly the Indian Army had to go up the glaciers.

The Crises in Gaza has raged on for nearly two years with no end in sight. Negation of its existence is thus not possible. But since many of us are at our wits’ end how to get done with it, making it our war did not seem to be a good idea. Once convinced that it was not our funeral, letting the devil take the hindmost was blissfully convenient.

Before moving on though, some *review of the situation* was in order – because that’s the SOP.

Let’s start with the myths that could now be mercifully buried.

The beast called the “world’s conscience” never existed. I learnt that from the late Yousaf Butch, one of our best Kashmiri intellectual and in his heydays a very familiar face on the New York’s diplomatic circuit. Churchill was more direct and asked for the telephone number of the International Community. For reasons unbeknown to me some of us continue to believe that in the inter-state relations the “Humanitarianism” counted for something. Brookings once went through a very elaborate process (I was part of it) to invent the recipe of Humanitarian Intervention. It was to help the US circumvent the troublesome UN and bomb countries on its wrong side. Yugoslavia had already been targeted under this cover – not because any humans were under fire in Bosnia and Kosovo but to establish the American writ in the Balkans. Field was now free to shoot at will and Ivo Daalder, the sponsor of this exercise was rewarded with the top diplomatic assignment in NATO.

Notwithstanding the good-hearted António Guterres at its head; the UN only serves to moan and groan from the highest waffling platform. International Law must be a joke. The Hague may decide whatever the hell it wanted to, but Israel and its backers would keep chasing even their own citizens pleading for the execution of the verdict or the culprit. Germans pride themselves as law abiding but invited Netanyahu convicted by the ICC all the same. Morality in inter-state relations was always for the birds and the OIC and Umma an illusion. Anyone invoking such clauses under the present circumstances could lawfully be hanged with the tallest tree in the Empty Quarters.

It was obvious right from the beginning that rhetoric was going to be our sole defence against the Israeli arsenal – *national interest* rationalising this choice. There is at least one institute of higher learning where such subjects were studied in depth. Before the turn of the century, the NDC, now the NDU, used to recommend that all our policies and strategies must flow from the National Purpose – intrinsically sublime, like creating a just and an enlightened society. National Interest was somewhere down the ladder and had to be in sync with the State’s *raison d’être*. The Establishment trivialises the concept by defining the volume of trade with the US or number of workers in the Gulf as determinants of national interest.

Statements like ‘a peace treaty was just around the corner’ ignore Israel’s compulsion to live in conflict. Otherwise, it would be thrown in the sea or buried in the desert. Threats to recognise Palestine if Israel did not accept a fuzzy two-state solution, is amongst many a ruse that keeps us

running after a mirage – the rear light of a truck in local lingo. ‘Israel was about to collapse’ was another. They still provide us the much-needed pretext to postpone the onerous task of making a hard choice. روز محشر کو ملتوی کر دو ہو گئی میکڈے میں رات مجھے: *Pend the day of the judgment, I’ve been at the bar the whole night*, was Addam’s hope to escape the retribution.

Some kinetic means were also employed – by Hezbollah, Houthis, and Iran – but have obviously not been enough. Iranian missiles were serving Israel right but its godfather, namely the United States, bombed back and proved too menacing for the lone country facing the Washington- Tel Aviv nexus; amply supported by their satraps in the West and the minions in the Arab World. Where does it leave us when we nominated Trump, the leader of the country that has pumped in twenty billion dollars to finance the Palestinian massacre, for the Nobel Peace Prize! That’s for the reader to judge.

All the above must be common knowledge and therefore no big deal if you ask me. There are many other facets of the Gaza Odyssey though, which are crying out to be acknowledged – unless we’re demented beyond repairs. Rupture between the State and the Society is almost unbridgeable – in every country. People may agitate till the cows come home but the leaders would at best get verbal diarrhoea. Democracy is merely a stunt to benefit the oligarchs, the kleptocrats, and the elected and unelected autocrats. Non-State-Actors are sovereign and therefore in the establishment’s crosswires.

Some of us must have been aware of the Israeli interest in Baluchistan over the years. Post 9/11, most of the Intelligence agencies with stakes in the Region had reasons to establish listening posts on this noodle point of the so-called New Great Game: described in the past as the battle of the pipelines but is now more about the global dominance. The war in the Middle East could have alerted us to things to come but hardly created a ripple in our corridors of power. When Al-Jazeera reported Mossad’s help to the Baluch Liberation Alliance, its Persian angle became all too obvious. Since we were reluctant to combat this threat when it was in Iranian crosshair, one day it had to pop up in our own country.

Our adversaries did what they believed they had to but the onus of response is all on us. Not forgetting of course that the ground zero of the impending battle would be in Baluchistan to deliver a death blow to the CPEC, arguably our lifeline towards economic autonomy – and the pivot of the NGG as already alluded to.

One instrument that almost always worked was that of the armed resistance. The Afghans and the Vietnamese succeeded against superpowers and the Algerians threw out the French. Holbrook, the architect of the Dayton Accord conceded that the settlement would not have been possible without countries like Pakistan keeping the Bosnian struggle alive till the US intervened. Azerbaijan could not have annexed an Armenian enclave without the help of the Turkish and the Pakistani undercover state actors. Then there were times when our pilots flew missions in support of the Syrian and the Jordanian regimes much to the discomfiture of Tel Aviv and Washington. There was indeed a cost but the frenemy provided us with the best of the arguments. I think it was an American National Security Advisor who when asked about the collateral damage of their support to the Mujahedin in Afghanistan that proliferated Jihad, simply shrugged his shoulders and said that in the bargain they got rid of the Evil Empire. Our foreign forays too came under cleavers but despite our yearnings no one came up with a better option – except that if we had buried our head in the sand, we would not have seen any threat.

Tablighi Jamaat was once, and may still be, the world’s largest religious movement. It survives by doing nothing – no harm to the enemies and no good to its friends. Whenever asked why couldn’t it mobilise its vast assets in service of the society, the stock answer was that its sole purpose was to preach but not to practice. Bloody convenient, even expedient, if you don’t mind. Asking people to

keep cities clean or the traders to make honest deals would have the doors slammed in their faces. Going around the world advising Muslims to stick to the rituals might have tempted our equally hypocritical rulers to use the pulpit instead of getting down to business.

Nevertheless, if one still wished to go beyond rhetoric to save the Gazans from extinction, here is a tried and tested formula: provide covert support to the resistance while it's still alive and kicking. We once went far and wide to help the oppressed but did need local support to make a difference. Clandestine Operations have the advantage that even if exposed, the state if it so wishes may deny culpability. Not that it matters. It's a global practice and there are enough number everywhere – especially amongst the NSAs – who know how to go about such acts. Incidentally, now you know why the enemy and indeed its fifth column within were more scared of our loose cannons than the nukes.

Someone somewhere but needs a stout heart.

PS:

1. I have no doubts that the above will not make any impression on rulers – anywhere. Those who do not believe in Divine Edicts like holding fast to Allah's rope, were not likely to be impressed by this half backed geo-political mumbo jumbo or semi-historic narrative. I'm still tempted to cite a few wiser heads on this subject. Pastor Niemöller warned us to stand up for the others otherwise we would be all on our own when came our turn. On the ownership of wars, we might like to take heart from Iqbal's **ہر ملک ملک ما است کے ملک ی خدا ما است** : "Every country is mine because they're all God's own". That makes every war ours – and strikes the right chord with Hemingway's "for whom the bell tolls – it tolls for thee". Quotes above are about the universality of things.
2. Assuming that some of our passionate commoners were still interested in bringing the carnage in Gaza to an end, I suggest they turn their guns inwards. Blaming others for our lack of spine was not a good idea
3. What happened to Qatar was foretold. The country has been making Faustian deals for two decades; precisely the grace period granted by Mephistopheles before he takes over your soul.

Asad Durrani
Lt Gen ®
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