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QUDS REVISITED

COMMENT

THE Israeli blitzkrieg on the Egyptian airforce in 1967 marked the low point for Muslim morale in the post World War II era. It also opened up several possibilities for the Americans to bolster Israel and nudge it towards acquiring more Palestinian territory.

The process was eventually to lead to the Camp David Accords and followed through with the Fahd Plan for accepting the implantation of Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. Indeed maintenance of Israeli security became a prime objective of US foreign policy in the region. In order to achieve this, it sought to have a *de facto* alliance with Middle East leaders who are conservative, anti-communist and willing to cooperate with multi-national corporations, American banks and to *limit their opposition to Israel to a rhetorical level*.

The efficacy of the policy was demonstrated when even after Israeli annexation of Jerusalem little effective protest was heard from these 'moderate' Middle Eastern leaders. In the case of Iran under the Shah, it became one of Israel's major trading partners and key suppliers of oil. Clearly friendship with America implied acceptance of Israel even if Jerusalem were to be lost to the Zionists.

What seemed to be a pretty well irreversible fate after the 1967 and 1973 wars, also led to a fundamental rethinking on the part of the Muslims. The Islamic revival throughout the Muslim countries owes much to this soul-searching. The desecration of the pulpit in the Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem briefly sparked off a wave of protest in the Muslim world, but on the whole the US had succeeded to convert the issue into an Arab-Israeli one. Indeed, with Egypt's defection non-Muslim sympathisers could not be held back from establishing relations with the Zionist state. Even the UN forums lost their vigour in condemning the encroaching annexation of the West Bank by Israel.

The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 marked the first definitive reversal of this strategy. A non-Arab Muslim country, hitherto a close ally of Israel, had not only shaken off the US but was now championing the cause of the liberation of Jerusalem (Quds) from the standpoint of its Islamic commitment. Clearly, this is a potent force and is capable of igniting the imagination of the whole of the Muslim world.

While Iran is embroiled in defending itself from Iraqi aggression, it is hard-pushed to give definitive shape to this objective. However, its large investment in Lebanon and Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazari's efforts to revive the issue in the Muslim imagination by declaring the last Friday in the month of Ramadan as Quds Day, are perceptive steps in the right direction. The Hizbollah in Lebanon are now dedicated to the liberation of Quds and vast demonstrations and gatherings are held in many Muslim capitals to reaffirm the Muslim desire for regaining control of Masjid al-Aqsa.

It is to be expected that these initial moves have so frightened the superpowers that they have joined hands to thwart its success. Nevertheless, the issue of the sovereignty of Quds is once again wide open.

M Iqbal Asaria