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CATAclysmic MIDDLE EAST WAR LOOMING!

A conversation between Mark Bruzonsky and Hisham Ahmed



Since World War II major Middle East Wars have changed the history of the region and of the world – 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, Intifada 1987, 1991, Intifada 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008. The reality actually is one of ongoing rolling war throughout the balkanized region punctuated by cease-fires and temporary agreements during which rearming escalates. Today, 10 years after 9/11 and with revolutions, insurrections, and rebellions erupting throughout the region, a major potentially cataclysmic regional war is looming. The two greatest U.S. allies -- Israel and Saudi Arabia -- each want it badly, each for their own reasons. The Americans have heavily armed the Israelis with super weapons. They have also armed their Arab "client regime" with lesser but

still highly capable weapons. The Pentagon has major bases throughout the region; and the CIA is everywhere. Iran is today surrounded on all sides and from the sea by major American forces with a vast arsenal of Star Wars high-tech weapons including satellite-guided cruise missiles, drone bombers, aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines, as well as a new generation of super bunker-busting bombs with yields greater than tactical nuclear weapons. The historic confrontation ahead is likely to be a war far larger in scale and destruction than any before. It will continue in various forms for years probably for decades to come -- precisely what the gargantuan military-industrial-lobby complex desires. The coming war is to control the peoples, the wealth, and the territories of this critical region for many years to come. Furthermore it may take on still greater dimensions of a modern-day Judeo-Christian crusade against the Arab and Muslim worlds even as notable collaborating Arab regimes bet their futures on their U.S. and de facto Israeli protectors.

2 November 2011:

Mark Bruzonsky: Hisham, a few years after we met, you and I wrote an article together; it was August 1992. The peace negotiations were ongoing, Madrid had taken place the year before, Abdul Shafi was head of the Palestinian delegation, everyone was saying that these direct negotiations were going to achieve something. But you and I were already saying that Palestinians were being taken for a ride, and we wrote an article called,

Rabin's Deception: Autonomy for Palestinians. I want to read you the first and last paragraphs of the article:

“While the Palestinians always seek their independence and statehood, the Israelis and their American allies always twist the Palestinian demand into a vague concept usually termed autonomy”. Then at the end of the article we said, *“But even if the 'autonomy trap' springs further shut in coming months and years, it remains certain that the flame of Palestinian and Arab nationalism will remain alive and likely to return at some future date in more unextinguishable form. Those who today appear clever in continuing to suppress and brutalize Palestinians in their quest for independence and national*

dignity may find in decades ahead that they have once again turned the rage of the oppressed inward creating a furor that will explode in future years with compounded vengeance”.

That’s what we said then. A year later the Oslo ceremony took place on the White House lawn and everyone was saying that peace was at hand and that the process was irreversible.

So here we are in 2011 and the PA has gone before the UN and UNESCO, nations around the world are applauding and calling for Palestine’s recognition, the whole world is talking about Palestinian Statehood still, and yet the predicament of the Palestinians is far worse than when we wrote that article 19 years ago. What’s your take on all this?

Hisham Ahmed: Well, this is absolutely amazing. It is so helpful for one to revisit what one writes like this. It is truly unbelievable for this was a moment in history when everybody was celebrating peace, talking peace, eating peace, drinking peace while we...

Mark: Yet we were being told then that we just didn't understand and didn't want peace! Of course I was never against real peace, but I was afraid that what was actually happening was going to make peace

impossible and I think that's what in fact has happened..

Hisham: Let me try to make a kind of content analysis of the above mentioned paragraphs. First there was a warning that urged people not to rejoice unnecessarily; that what is unfolding is not peace but rather the imposition of more pressure and hardships on the Palestinians. In other words, I think we were very honest with ourselves and with others, when we said, 'don't be taken in by these celebratory moods whether in Madrid or in Washington'. Second is the linkage between what was being said then and what we might say today. We were already saying then, in spite of what we were foreseeing, that in spite of the immense hardship that we were predicting because of what the Israelis were actually doing 'on the ground' rather than saying, we were warning that they shouldn't rejoice because in the future the Palestinians and the Arabs and the Muslims would not keep quiet and they would find ways to revolt. What we were saying even then was that further uprisings are coming, that the Arab street will explode, that there will be transformative moments in the region in spite of all that was being done to deceive, to subjugate, and to suppress.

And, without self-congratulating ourselves, how prophetic we were! I think what these two paragraphs did was to combine a sense of responsibility, a sense of awareness, and a sense of optimism for the future. There was still optimism in the sense that people would eventually cease from accepting the nonsense being shoved down their throats, the brutalities of the continually expanding occupation, and the never-ending lies of the peace talks.

Mark: Now the challenge is to jump ahead these 19 years. Just a few weeks ago the PA president, who many feel is illegitimate for many reasons, gave his speech to the UN receiving a thunderous applause except, of course, from the Americans and the Israelis. In recent days, Abbas has taken a remarkable step by actually apologizing to the Israelis for the Palestinians and Arabs not accepting the 1947 UN Palestine partition plan; something I didn't believe until I read his own words which he purposely spoke in English. It's one thing to make compromises and concessions in a principled way; its entirely another thing to legitimize that the Americans and the Zionists and the UN were

justified in taking Palestine from the Palestinians and giving it to the Israelis. I couldn't believe this apology and we have yet to talk about it.. Where is all of this heading?

Hisham: This is exactly what I want us to do, jump ahead now from the past to the present. Let the second of these paragraphs be the nexus between then and today. Let me preface what I want to say by saying that we have known each other for more than twenty years now and I think that, even in the darkest moments, when things looked absolutely gloomy, I always had a considerable degree of optimism that policy change would come about no matter what. You would agree this has been my perspective all along.

Having said that, I would say that I have never, in my entire life, been as concerned about the future of the region as I am today. Indeed, these days, I am struggling within myself to gather and collect any remnants of optimism for the upcoming years.

Mark: I think we both see regional war and maybe even Palestinian expulsion ahead, right?. But this really is your world and I want to encourage you to really say what you are thinking.

Hisham: Yes, indeed, I have never seen the region as troubled as it is today. Yes there is Arab revivalism, there is the Arab Spring, there are changes taking place every day on the ground. It has been positive to remove those dictators who have really sat on the back of the people for so many years. But, at the same time, I do see a convergence of internal and international factors designed to truly choke the region to death. Let's take several factors and try to deal with them. Number one, we have absolutely no credible Arab power capable of defending the region or itself from attack in anyway, whatsoever. Almost all Arab states today are fragmented or about to be divided or face some sort of internal conflict. Syria is a case in point, Egypt is struggling with hard internal conditions following the revolution, Libya has been 'liberated' from a dictator only to be set for a very dangerous enslavement by powers that want to take over her rich oil resources. Syria is also being threatened with serious divisions due to the tenacity of the brutal regime there.

Mark: One quick addition. There is strong evidence that the Saudis, contrary to what's said in public, are working with the Americans and

the Israelis, and it seems to me, are very much involved in helping prepare the coming regional war against the one major power in the region that *is* building up strength and that *is* resisting.

Hisham: I definitely want to get to that, of course. So, Iraq is being practically divided now. After the occupation of Iraq there was a clause injected into the new constitution allowing provinces to split from the central government and this is what's happening now as one province in the north has declared plans to transform its province status into more of an entity, first under the federal system but eventually it might be an all-out split. Other provinces have threatened to do the same. In other words, we are about to see the practical 'Balkanization' of Iraq, possibly of Syria, and I think the danger is absolutely imminent.

Mark: And look at Palestine divided up into different little segments with countless Israeli check points and Jerusalem and Gaza now completely cut off.

Hisham: No, no. Over there we do not have 'Balkanization', we have Ghettoization.

Mark: It's the continuance of what happened 100 years ago at the Paris Peace Conference when the Arabs were demanding an Arab state, thinking the English had promised it to them, but then being subjected to the carving up of the Middle East by the western colonial countries using the League of Nations then for their purposes.

Hisham: Absolutely. So, Libya has a very high danger of also getting split into different parts, Palestine, as you said is being fragmented politically, and segregated into ghettos. When the Israeli occupation succeeded in separating Palestinians in the West Bank from Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians, themselves, fell into the trap of political fragmentation as the conflict between Hamas and Fatah broke out in Gaza which has not been resolved and which might never be resolved.

Mark: What's the big picture here? Where is this going? The Israelis do have a strategy, they are a huge military power backed by the United States, a country with its own strategy. Where are they taking us now?

Hisham: In the midst of this severe regional fragmentation and this situation in Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, in a way that defies and negates the Palestinian struggle for so many years, actually apologized for the

rejection of the partition in 1947!

Mark: I think many people could say his actions are traitorous and completely undermine the Palestinian struggle. What is going on?

Hisham: Well, to me, this is totally unacceptable and is a real condemnation of all that Palestinians have stood for. Even, if for pragmatic reasons, Palestinians might go along in some respects with the partition nobody should be apologetic about our history in any way. Abbas is only legitimizing Israel's taking of 4/5 of Palestine back in 1948. However, the danger in this kind of statement goes far beyond these words and is a prelude to recognizing Israel as a "Jewish state" i.e. accepting Netanyahu's conditions and demands for negotiations. So I think we should expect such a statement, which was aired on Israeli TV in English as you indicated, will be followed by a new era of negotiation and we shouldn't be fooled by UNESCO's recognition or any of these symbolic events that are taking place simultaneously.

Mark: It's like giving the Palestinians a sugar coated pill that will kill them.

Hisham: Exactly. Now, while one ought not to exaggerate the importance of UNESCO, it is still a symbolic reflection of the international support for Palestine. The fact that the French, at the very last moment, voted in favor of Palestine's membership in UNESCO signifies earlier attempts, by the French, to broker a deal; that is to stop Palestinians from continuing their bid for statehood at the Security Council whereby they would go back to the General Assembly and everything will be muddled and confused.

Mark: Let me put this into context again. The quotes I read you were written in 1992 in the midst of the international negotiations that were taking place in Madrid and a year later became known as Oslo. You and I immediately, like Edward Said back then, analyzed Oslo as a potential disaster and as each month and new agreement took place, we very quickly declared it to be a disaster. How could Arafat be agreeing to these demands we wondered then. Then years later Arafat realized what he had done and refused to go along further with the Israeli/American game. He was then isolated, imprisoned, and killed for this. But now, here it is, 2011 and we're saying the same things and it sounds like you

think there are going to be even greater explosions. Are we on the verge of a major war to put the US and Israel back on top for many more years to come?

Hisham: Yes I think a very huge storm is coming to the region and there is alarming recent evidence that Israel is truly preparing for a devastating attack against on Iran. The stage was set for such an action here in the states a few weeks ago with the headlined news of an Iranian assassination plot against the Saudi Ambassador. The Israelis, quite frankly, are taking serious measures in the direction of preparing public opinion for a very major war the consequences of which could be horrendous.

Mark: And Western public opinion is being prepared. Obama seems to have been outmaneuvered. War with Iran will be justified by a whole web of allegations about plots and nuclear weapons even though it was Israel that brought nuclear weapons to the Middle East and it is the Israelis that have the largest military in the region; a military they use with ever increasing confidence and in response to the slightest dissent. But it's not just Iran. A war with Iran means a war with Syria, Lebanon, Hezbollah, Palestine, and Hamas. So, it looks to me like this is going to be a war to wipe out all those powers that still stand in opposition to American and Israeli dominance in the region and to reinvigorate the client regimes from the Saudis, to the Christians in Lebanon, to the Fatahb PA people in Palestine.

Hisham: All we can do is look at the indicators. For one thing, every leader in the region, regardless of political leanings, is talking about war. Assad speaking of an 'earthquake' if Syria is attacked, Netanyahu is talking about the continuing Iranian threat, and Iran is speaking about being prepared to stand up to and retaliate against attack.

Mark: And the junior Abdullah in Amman has given a public interview saying that he fears that Egypt will end close relations with Israel and even end the treaty relationship and Jordan will be left isolated in its ties and peace treaty with Israel.

Hisham: That's true. Reports have come out from the Israeli press that Israel is interested in seeing to it that finally the Jordanian regime is

toppled so that Palestinians will take over, relieving Netanyahu from the head ache of the “Two-State solution”.

Mark: I really think this needs to be elaborated upon. Netanyahu, Lieberman, that whole crowd that looks to the ideology of what is known as Revisionist Zionism, are looking to Jordan for the answer to the Palestinian question. I actually think that this has been coming for some time. You seemed to have resisted the notion over the years but it sounds like you might be closer to that kind of thinking now.

Hisham: No, I’ve never resisted the notion but I have never seen the indicators as I do now. The Israelis are openly talking about it. In fact, Netanyahu even hinted to it at the UN when he addressed the General Assembly, blocking the idea of a Palestinian State on the West Bank and at the same time he kept talking favorably of establishing a Palestinian State; which leaves no place but Jordan.

Mark: This explains also why the Israelis would want a regional war. It would not only safeguard the notion that they remain the only major military power in the region for another ten or twenty years but would give them the excuse to implement the ‘Jordan is Palestine ideology’ which has been central to the thinking, and I think planning, of the current Israeli leadership.

Hisham: Candidly, Mark, I have never been as concerned for the region as I am today. I think the world is headed towards an extremely massive and devastating war the outcome of which nobody in the worlds can predict. Things have never been so foggy.

Mark: A cataclysmic war is what you are saying as am I.

Hisham: I hate to put it in these terms but honestly from the depth of me I have never been as concerned and that is only based on what I read and what I hear. The Israeli Defense Minister, Barak, around the start of the Arab Spring, expressed frustration with the removal of Mubarak because, to him, no one served the Israeli state more for the past three decades. But at the same time he said that the trend of democratization and Arab revivalism was to be short lived and it was going to be reversed and he never expanded more on that. It is our job to remember and to interpret these statements.

Mark: Well, there are other statements. Barak said that about Mubarak,

Peres and other Israeli leaders have declared in recent weeks that Abbas has been the best Palestinian leader in history for Israel. There must be a debate going on about what to do with Abbas and the PA, just as there was about whether or not to remove or kill Arafat.

Hisham: Well, about Abbas, this is very interesting as the Israelis are debating among themselves in public and well as in private. Just a few days ago Netanyahu blasted Abbas saying that he is obstructing talks and is posing an obstacle to the peace process. We've heard this before...about Arafat and others before they were done away with.

Mark: Well, Hisham, that represents the division within Israeli society. Some Israelis, establishment Israelis, are desperate that there be a controlled, stillborn, Palestinian State of some kind to to 'get that monkey off their back'. Others talk about a Palestinian State but what they mean is that such a State would be on the east bank of the Jordan, not the West Bank.

Hisham: Absolutely. This is an opportunity for the Netanyahu regime to further isolate the Palestinians. I am concerned about massive destruction and devastation that will target the entire region and I'm very concerned about massive relocations. Just look at Libya recently where entire cities have been gutted, destroyed, and their populations uprooted. Look at Iraq and Lebanon and Afghanistan and all the killing and destruction and refugees forced to flee.

Mark: Let me add one other historical dimension, being here in Washington for so many years. In the late '40s Truman was greatly pressured and accepted the creation of Israel, but there was tremendous pressure from his Secretary of State, George Marshall, and his Secretary of Defense, Forrestal, and from the intelligence agencies of the day. And even Nahum Goldman, in later years to be my mentor, was warning in those days against the establishment of Israel as a Jewish State because that would result in ending conflict with the Arab and Muslim worlds. But Truman reversed everyone and to my knowledge it was the only time in history where a president called the UN representative and countermanded the orders of the secretary of state.

I live in a Washington that's been even more deeply polarized in recent years over the equivalent issues today. The intelligence community bent

over backwards in the mid-2000s to come up with analysis that made it more and more difficult for the Bush/Cheney Administration to expand the war in the region to Iran. There is a huge division among the professional foreign policy people and the political people in Washington and, for a while, the professionals were winning. But now things have changed, and when Netanyahu recently went before Congress receiving 29 standing innovations, it's pretty clear whose winning. Congress has basically told his regime to go do whatever it likes – that Congress has Israel's back and will politically block, along with so many in the corporate media, any efforts to challenge the Israelis.

Hisham: Absolutely. You still find some voices here in the United States like, Cheney, giving interviews saying that Israel would be completely justified in launching an attack on Iran. Israel is talking more and more about its right to existence and survival and its foreign policy is concretely shaped around this rhetoric. Netanyahu has laid out three principles of foreign policy: if there is someone out there who wishes to kill you, kill them first, if there is someone out there who wishes to derail you, kill them first, and if there is a regional threat to Israel's hegemony, kill the threat.

Mark: Well Hisham, I guess we're just waiting then for the spark, we're just waiting for the excuse, we're just waiting for the next 9/11. And I think both of us conclude in a very sad and tragic way that this is where we're headed. Thank you for a tremendously interesting discussion today.

Hisham: I wish we could offer our audience some optimism but most of all we always have to be watchful and mindful and to stay on top of things and be as honest and thoughtful as we can.