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Conclusion of Debate on
**The present day turmoil in the Middle East & North
Africa has its roots in the European Colonial era**

by

THE MUSLIM DEBATE



The research based think tank **MUSLIM Institute's** debate forum, "**The Muslim Debate**" concluded its debate on Middle East Turmoil, with its motion being, "**The present day turmoil in the Middle East & North Africa has its roots in the European Colonial era**" which took place online from 20th October, 2014 to 9th November, 2014. Defending the motion was Dr. Mark N. Katz, Professor of Government & Politics at George Mason University – USA, whereas Mr. Tarek Fatah, who is a Writer, Broadcaster and Columnist at The Toronto

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Sun – Canada, was opposing the motion. Former US Ambassador to Syria & Saudi Arabia, Mr. Richard Murphy also joined the debate as a guest, together with Former UK Military Intelligence Officer and author of Times Book of the Year 2011 'Losing Small Wars', Mr. Frank Ledwidge. Moderating the debate was Dr. Iqbal Hussain, who is currently the President of MUSLIM Institute – UK Chapter. People from over 80 countries participated in this debate via votes and comments.

Opening Session

Monday 20th October
Statements

Friday 24th October
Guests

Dr. Iqbal Hussain commenced the debate by shedding light on the present day turmoil in region of Middle East and North Africa. He elaborated how since the rise of Arab Spring in 2011, the region has been a battlefield of bloody civil wars and military conflicts resulting in millions of innocent lives being lost. He then set out some questions regarding the current turmoil having its roots in the European Colonial era, letting the debaters answer them with their justifications.



Dr. Mark Katz, while defending the motion, firstly argued that one of the main reason behind present day turmoil having its roots in the European Colonial era is "...the borders that they drew." Elaborating on the same point he further says that the borders were 'highly arbitrary', this is because after independence, many major groups such as Kurds, Berbers and various African groups in southern Sudan found themselves to be persecuted minorities in larger countries. Furthermore, Dr. Katz goes on argue how the legacy of European colonialism had a negative impact on the prospects of democratization in the region. He says, "...the European-drawn borders, as well as the ability of minorities which collaborated with colonial rule to retain

power after it ended, have posed the most important barriers to the progress of democratization in the Middle East and North Africa."

On the other hand, going against the motion, **Mr. Tarek Fatah** denies the claim that actions of European Colonial powers led to the current turmoil in Middle East. He divides up his argument into three parts: 'The rise of the Islamic State, Daish in Syria & Iraq', 'Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Darfur & Western Sahara' and lastly, 'Palestine and Israel'. Starting off with the first part, Mr. Fatah compares the Islamic history with contemporary Islamic world and argues that conflict amongst Muslims existed well before the Colonial powers got to the Middle East. Secondly, while highlighting the Darfuris' massacre in Sudan (2003-2005), he claims that the conflict was amongst Muslims killing each other and there was no Colonial power involved. Lastly, while discussing the Israel-Palestine issue, Mr. Tarek Fatah argues that Muslim leaders were given many opportunities to avoid the long lasting conflict by agreeing on various proposed agreements, particularly, 'The Faisal-Weizmann Agreement of 1919', 'The Peel Commission Plan of 1937' and 'The UN General Assembly Partition Plan of 1947'.





Ambassador Richard Murphy while joining the debate as an opening guest, said that it would be an 'overstatement' to say that the current turmoil in Middle East & North Africa does only have its roots in the Colonial era. Although, he adds, "Older patterns of conflict are still present. History is a continuum where the stronger, whether in military, economic or ideological terms, has continued to impose its ways on the weaker." Talking about the ongoing crisis regarding the Islamic State and their declaration of erasing borders, Mr. Richard Murphy considers it to be, "the latest attempt in the Arab World to end what might be termed the Colonial Legacy." In conclusion of his remarks, Ambassador Murphy also says that the negative impact of Colonial

legacy on the present day turmoil might be limited, nonetheless, he believes, "The assertion that colonialism and nationalism represented historical steps towards modernity but prevented democratization through preserving authoritarian rule is more persuasive."

Rebuttal Session

Tuesday 28th October
Statements

Saturday 1st November
Guests

Going live with the rebuttal session on 28th October, 2014, **Dr. Iqbal Hussain** mentioned a headline of that day's Reuters about suicide bombing taking place on the outskirts of Baghdad, and again highlighted upon the severity of this turmoil in present day Middle East & North Africa. He then summed up what has already been put forward by the debaters and opening guest for the audience just joining the debate.



Dr. Mark Katz in his rebuttal explained the mistakes made by colonial powers by countering the objections against the motion. He challenged Mr. Tarek Fatah's arguments with an assertion that the colonial powers should have created those minority states, which are now being accepted to a varying degree, before vacating the power of authority. This was reflected when he provided examples of the cases like Kurdish Regional Government in Levant, Darfur & South Sudan in Africa and Morocco & Mauritania in North Africa. Furthermore, he also highlighted the effects which occurred when the colonial powers were weakening as the evidence suggests in the case of Palestine and Israel and referred to "...failure of Britain's own effort to reach a compromise between the two communities through the Peel Commission's 1937 recommendations."

The pivotal point of this debate surrounded the claim that majority of the mistakes were made when the maps were redrawn. However, **Mr. Tarek Fatah** argued with conviction that, "...not a single Arab State in the region has questioned its neighboring Arab State over the borders drawn up by departing European colonial powers." He further illustrated, "The straight lines drawn between Yemen and Oman, or Egypt and Libya, or Morocco and Algeria let alone Syria and Iraq have produced hardly any border conflict of the type that has pitted India and Pakistan along the Kashmir Line of Control." Additionally, Mr. Tarek Fatah advocated that European Colonial powers are not to be blamed for the absence of democratization in Middle East & North Africa by quoting examples of India being "the world's largest democracy in a society of minorities."

Later in the rebuttal session, we were also joined by **Mr. Frank Ledwidge** as a rebuttal guest. He validated Dr. Mark Katz's arguments by referring to Sykes-Picot agreement and Balfour Declaration, respectively. However, by agreeing partially with the opposition, Mr. Frank Ledwidge believed that, "the underlying roots of some of the turmoil today are found in the contemporary world not in the ghosts of the past." Furthermore, he maintained that Western policy-makers need to understand what their contemporary involvement in the region, whether it be militarily or diplomatic, means. "We fail to appreciate how others see us", Mr. Frank Ledwidge further enlightened us with his experiences in the Iraq War (2003-2011) when he said, "The truth is that we were clueless as to how we were perceived by Iraqis."



Closing Session

Wednesday 05th November
Statements

As the debate concluded, **Dr. Iqbal Hussain** highlighted large difference between the protagonists and the close nature of voting at the time with only 9% to separate the two sides. He then moved on towards pointing out some of the main arguments put by the debaters and guest during the rebuttal session.

In the beginning of his closing remarks, **Dr. Mark Katz** pointed out that two of Mr. Tarek Fatah's statements claiming that "not a single Arab State...has questioned its neighboring Arab State over borders" and "entire Arab World joined hands with Europe & America to reset border drawn by departing Britain" were both incorrect. He claimed this by providing references in both cases. Regarding the first statement, he said that borders between Saudi Arabia on one hand and Oman, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait on the other are still a source of contention between these states. He also cited the conflict between Libya and Chad in 1970s as to justify his counterargument. In response to Mr. Tarek Fatah's second statement, Dr. Mark Katz argued that when Saddam invaded Kuwait in 1990, both Jordan and Yemen refused to condemn Iraq's actions. Furthermore, in response to Mr. Tarek Fatah's claim that failure of democratization in Arab World is not due to European Colonization as India is a successful democracy, Dr. Mark Katz argues that India might be a democracy but is intolerant of secessionism. He then highlights the cases of Muslim majority in Kashmir and as well Sikhs wanting an independent state. In other words, he said, "India's democracy has not resulted in its being able to resolve the problem of some regionally dominant minorities seeking secession from the colonial-era defined state", which he believes is the same reason in Arab World if it were to democratize thus making it a 'far more frightening prospect'.

Mr. Tarek Fatah initiated his remarks in the shadow of horrifying tragedy that struck at the time, where a suicide bomber blew himself up in Pakistan on the border with India killing over 50 people and injuring many more. Highlighting another terrorism attack in Canada on 20th October, which included the killing of a Canadian soldier, he explained how the Canadian-born terrorist came about joining this ruthless terrorist network. After mentioning the two incidents, Mr. Tarek Fatah then argued that both these attacks although on opposite ends of the earth "make it abundantly clear the turmoil we face around the world, not just in North Africa and the Middle East has little or nothing to do with what happened a 100 years ago." Furthermore he reasoned, "While European Colonial Rule may have played a part in the 19th and 20th centuries in dragging modernity into traditional agrarian monarchies, which cannot explain the anger of two White Quebecois Muslims towards their country of birth or that of a Taliban jihadist blowing up 50

fellow Muslims in Pakistan.” Ending his statement, Mr. Tarek Fatah again emphasized the claim that the roots of the present day turmoil lie nowhere other than in the Arab World itself and that Muslims should focus on correcting their own mistakes.

Comments on the Debate Floor

Many people from around the world also participated on the debate floor through their valuable comments. To mention a few, Ms. Afshan Fahim in the early stages of the debate sided with the proposition and supported Dr. Mark Katz’s argument that the Colonial powers were ‘highly interventionist’ and ‘arbitrary’. She also highlighted the political complexities of colonialism in Egypt by laying down the timeline of its colonizers, i.e. France, Ottoman and lastly, Great Britain. Her stance was also shared by Mr. Mark Parsons, although for a different reason. He believes that the world is based on a ‘nation state based ideology’ and that apart from the more developed states, third world countries like in the Middle East ‘still linger with the ideology of differentiation by culture or religion.’ He moreover elaborated by stating that during the rule of Ottoman Empire, people of the Middle East were more prone to interaction and intermingle in order to spread the religion. However, this changed when the European Colonial powers took the power of authority hence resulting in the everlasting internal and external rifts amongst the people and nations of Middle East.

Baz Man commented “....To base the Middle East turmoil of today, entirely on the aftermath of European colonization, would be turning a complete blind eye to our own follies as a collective nation. The European colonizers simply capitalized to the maximum, the void that existed due to a vision-less Muslim leadership, and a complacent public....”

Agha Farooq supporting the motion described that “....The historical, tribal and racial conflict dynamics aside, the magnitude and intensity of the deepened fault lines lay in the policies and interests of the colonial power. The conflict pattern transformed merely by three factors, firstly; oil and gas, secondly; geo-economics, thirdly; the competition among the ABRAHM's religious followers. These factors squarely dictated the colonial ambitions, persuasions and strategic policy ends....”

Ian Timothy commented, “European Colonialism was a catalyst of capitalism which was enforced to the weaker nations through brutal force, deception and trade agreements..... after carving up the Ottoman Empire into insignificant state lands, for over a century the west has installed and supported a string of despotic rulers who have acted as the greatest obstacle in the path of the Muslims re-establishing Islam as a way of life and being truly liberated....”

Mr. Adnan Hanif, Mr. Atif and Abu Tahir Haqeeqi also shared somewhat the same opinion. That is to say, the colonial powers are to a much extent be blamed for the roots of the current turmoil in Middle East and North Africa, nonetheless the current rulers in the region are also responsible for this situation. As Mr. Abu Tahir Haqeeqi mentioned in his extensive yet insightful comment, “However, we must not ignore those elements in Muslims who for their small benefits compromise interests of whole Muslim world.” Also, as Mr. Adnan Hanif says in the conclusion of his comment, “...responsibility of current turmoil in Middle East rests on the shoulders of Colonial (powers) and to some extent tyrant rulers of the region.”

After twenty days of vigorous debate on the present day turmoil in the Middle East & North Africa and its relation to the European Colonial era, the moderator announced final results, i.e. 49% For & 51% Against the motion. Since its inception, the debate has been very unpredictable till the last moment. In the early days, increase in votes was seen 'FOR' the motion but after the fifth day, votes 'Against' the motion increased rapidly. In the closing phase of debate, the votes 'For' the motion once again rose rapidly and it reached upto the 52% before one day of closing but on the last day when result was announced, it was on 48% 'For' the motion. To view the full arguments made by both sides and the input from our featured guests please visit The Muslim Debate website at: www.themuslimdebate.com.



Voting in 20 days

