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# CONTENTS

## ***Editorial***

*Ishtiaq Hossain* 513

## ***Special Articles***

Politics of Forced Migration and Refugees: Dynamics of  
International Conspiracy?  
*Md. Moniruzzaman* 519

Roots of Discrimination Against Rohingya Minorities:  
Society, Ethnicity and International Relations  
*AKM Ahsan Ullah and Diotima Chatteraj* 541

Exploring Ways to Provide Education in Conflict Zones:  
Implementation and Challenges  
*Kamal J. I. Badrasawi, Iman Osman Ahmed and Iyad M. Eid* 567

Political Settlement Analysis of the Blight of Internally  
Displaced Persons in the Muslim World: Lessons  
from Nigeria  
*Ibrahim O. Salawu and Aluko Opeyemi Idowu* 595

## ***Research Articles***

Women's Work Empowerment through "Re-upcycle"  
Initiatives for Women-at-home  
*Rohaiza Rokis* 617

The Islamization of the Malaysian Media: A Complex  
Interaction of Religion, Class and Commercialization  
*Shafizan Mohamed and  
Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman* 635

Rise of Central Conservatism in Political Leadership:  
Erbakan's National Outlook Movement and the 1997  
Military Coup in Turkey  
*Suleyman Temiz* 659

Language Policy and Practices in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions <i>Maskanah Mohammad Lotfie and Hartono</i>	683
A Novel Critique on ‘The Scientific Miracle of Qur’an Philosophy’: An Inter-Civilization Debate <i>Rahmah Bt Ahmad H. Osman and Naseeb Ahmed Siddiqui</i>	705
Duties and Decision-Making Guidelines for Shari‘ah Committee: An Overview of AAOIFI <i>Muhammad Nabil Fikri Bin Mhd Zain and Muhammad Amanullah</i>	729
Waqf Institutions in Malaysia: Appreciation of Wasatiyyah Approach in Internal Control as a Part of Good Governance <i>Nor Razinah Binti Mohd. Zain, Rusni Hassan and Nazifah Mustaffha</i>	749
Muslim Jurists’ Debate on Non-Muslim Religious Festivals and Its Effect on Muslims in the United States <i>Ali Ahmed Zahir</i>	765
Archaeological Analysis of Arabic-Malay Translation Works of Abdullah Basmeih <i>Azman Ariffin, Kasyfullah Abd Kadir and Idris Mansor</i>	785
<i>Takyif Fiqhī</i> and its Application to Modern Contracts: A Case Study of the Central Provident Fund Nomination in Singapore <i>Mohamed El Tahir El Mesawi and Mohammad Rizhan bin Leman</i>	807
Revisiting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Vs. English Lingua Franca (ELF): The Case for Pronunciation <i>Wafa Zoghbor</i>	829
“How did we Choose?” Understanding the Northern Female Voting Behaviour in Malaysia in the 14th General Election <i>Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan, Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, Norehan Abdullah, and Zaireeni Azmi</i>	859

- Unintended Consequences? The Commodification of Ideas  
in Tertiary Education and their Effects on Muslim Students  
*Anke Iman Bouzenita, and Bronwyn Wood* 883
- Ultra Petita and the Threat to Constitutional Justice:  
The Indonesian Experience  
*Muhammad Siddiq Armia* 903
- Methods of Qur'ānic Memorisation (Ḥifẓ):  
Implications for Learning Performance  
*Mariam Adawiah Dzulkifli, and Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu* 931
- Book Reviews**
- Saudi Arabia in Transition: Insights on Social, Political,  
Economic and Religious Change by Bernard Haykel, Thomas  
Hegghammer and Stephane Lacroix (Eds.). New York, USA:  
Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 351,  
ISBN: 978-0-521-18509-7  
*Syaza Farhana Shukri* 949
- 'Arab Spring': Faktor dan Impak ('Arab Spring': Factors  
and Impact). Edited by Wan Kamal Mujani & Siti Nurulizah  
Musa. Bangi: Penerbit Fakulti Pengajian Islam,  
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. 2015, pp. 164.  
ISBN 978-967-5478-91-8.  
*Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin* 952
- Faith in an Age of Terror. Edited by Quek Tze Ming and  
Philip E. Satterthwaite. Singapore: Genesis Books,  
Singapore, 2018, pp.150.  
ISBN: 978-981-48-0707-4  
*Rabi'ah Aminudin* 956
- Karl Marx: Greatness and Illusion. By Gareth Stedman Jones.  
London: Penguin Books, 2017, pp. 768. Paper Back.  
ISBN 978-0-141-02480-6  
*Zahid Zamri* 959

***Research Note***

“O People of the Book”: An Exegetical Analysis  
of the Ahl al-Kitāb in Qur’ānic Discourse

*Jonathan Alexander Hoffman*

965

***Conference Report***

International Conference on Religion, Culture and Governance in the  
Contemporary World (ICRCG2018) 3-4 October 2018  
(Wednesday-Thursday) 23-24 Muharram 1440.

*Atiqur Rahman Mujahid*

979

## **Politics of Forced Migration and Refugees: Dynamics of International Conspiracy?**

**M. Moniruzzaman<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract:** Human mass migration from place to place is well recorded in history. The ancient patterns of mass migrations could have their origins in natural forces (Homo-erectus from Africa to Europe) or divine order (Israelites from the Pharaonic Egypt or early Muslims from Makkah). Simultaneously, modern recorded history suggests that human mass migrations were triggered by local and regional politics too such as political oppression (Nazi holocaust, Israeli occupation) or imperial invasion. However, a new pattern of mass migration emerged in the 20<sup>th</sup> century triggered by a complete new force-strategic redrawing of certain regional maps. This strategic redrawing of maps is not locally inspired but imposed from abroad as part of competitive economic and military strategies of a global scale. This article intends to analyse the mass migrations triggered by Iraq-Syria civil wars in the framework of international strategic global competition. The article argues that these mass migrations are artificially caused by the economic and military strategies of international hegemonic powers. Strategic national interest abroad is the underlying objective at the cost of the sufferings of the millions.

**Keywords:** Forced-migration, Iraq-Syria conflict, International hegemon, strategic interest.

**Abstrak:** Perpindahan besar-besaran dari satu tempat ke tempat yang lain telah direkodkan dalam sejarah. Corak perpindahan besar-besaran zaman dahulu adalah berasal daripada daya semula jadi (Homo-erectus dari Afrika ke Eropah) atau perintah tuhan (Orang Israel dari Mesir Purba atau Orang Islam dari Mekah). Pada masa yang sama, rekod sejarah moden mencadangkan bahawa perpindahan besar-besaran juga dicituskan oleh keadaan politik

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tempatan dan serantau seperti penindasan politik (holocaust nazi, penempatan Orang Israel) atau pencerobohan empayar. Namun begitu, corak baru dalam perpindahan besar-besaran yang muncul di abad ke-20 adalah dicetuskan oleh dorongan pemetaan strategik semula untuk beberapa peta wilayah. Pemetaan semula ini tidak diinspirasi secara tempatan tetapi di dibawa dari luar sebagai sebahagian daripada ekonomi berdaya saing dan strategi ketenteraan di skala dunia. Artikel ini akan menganalisis perpindahan besar-besaran yang dicetuskan oleh perang saudara Iraq-Syria dalam rangka kerja persaingan global strategik antarabangsa. Artikel ini membahaskan tentang perpindahan besar-besaran adalah disebabkan oleh strategi ketenteraan dan ekonomi sebagai kuasa hegemonik. Strategi kepentingan nasional di luar negara adalah dasar kepada kos dalam jutaan penderitaan.

**Kata kunci:** Perpindahan paksa, Konflik Iraq-Siria, Hegemoni antarabangsa, Kepentingan strategik.

## Introduction

The current overwhelming issue in the contemporary world is the influx of refugees. According to UNHCR records, as of June 2018, 68.5 million people have been forcibly displaced worldwide, of which 40 million are Internally Displaced Persons, 25.4 million are refugees in other countries, and 3.1 million are asylum seekers. On a daily basis, 44,400 people are forcibly displaced due to local conflicts and political persecution. Out of the 68.5 million people worldwide, about 57 percent come from only three countries; Syria (6.3 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), and South Sudan (2.4 million); about 85 per cent of refugees are in poor and developing countries, and there are only five countries hosting the highest number of refugees. These countries are Turkey (3.5 million), Pakistan and Uganda (1.4 million each), followed by Lebanon and Iran with 1 million each (UNHCR, 2018).

Instances of human mass-migrations triggered by natural or human factors can be traced all the way back to the ancient days of Mankind. Therefore, the mass migration of humans from one place to another is not a new phenomenon. However, the phenomenon of mass-migration and influx of refugees in the contemporary world are more complex, sustained and politicized. The past two hundred years has recorded a number of mega refugee influxes that have made the refugee issue a particular international problem so much so that public and private international bodies and agencies are created to address and handle the



issue. International refugee regimes are created and national governments through being signatories to those regimes become committed to address the refugee issue systematically and institutionally.

However, despite the fact that more systematic and institutional approaches have been developed to address the refugee issue, the causes and factors that create refugees continue to persist with greater and more sophisticated capabilities. In addition, the number of refugees keep surging geometrically, and certain refugee problems apparently take a perpetual normality that their solutions seem uncertain (Peter, 2015). These modern faces of the refugee issue give rise to a legitimate question- why has the refugee issue been intensified with greater volume, complexity, frequency and endurance in the contemporary world? This article argues that modern refugee problems are artificially created by deliberate intentions of the big and influential powers in order to secure and advance national strategic interests which keep the issue perpetually unresolved. This article takes a special look into the Iraqi, Palestinian and Syrian refugee issues as case studies.

### **Migration and refugee defined**

Migration, in general, is considered a natural occurrence - that people would voluntarily move from one place to another for special purposes or convenience. In the ancient world, where there were borderless boundaries, people had the opportunity of free movement with little to no restrictions. Movements of individuals or small groups in such natural ways did not make them migrants or refugees (Ness & Peter, 2014).

In this work, migrants and refugees are defined as specific categories of people displaced by certain endogenous or exogenous forces from their claimed natural and original homeland. This means that the displacement in question is not voluntarily, instead carried out by force; therefore, it is considered either permanent or temporary forced migration. Such forced migration in the contemporary world can happen internally within national boundaries, or across borders. Various push factors such as political persecution and violence (asylum seekers in a foreign land, and internally displaced persons within the national border), development projects such as dams, airports, and highways, environmental change (desertification, deforestation, land degradation, water pollution or inundation), natural disasters (floods, volcanoes,

landslides, earthquakes), man-made disasters (industrial accidents, radioactivity), and finally, people-trafficking and smuggling (prostitution and sex-slavery) can lead to both forced internal and cross-border migration. All these factors force people to migrate temporarily or on a permanent basis; however, they are not necessarily called refugees (Elena et. al., 2016).

Pull factors, which involve better and more promising economic and life-style chances, are examples of factors that induces internal or cross-border migration. Skilled and unskilled labour migration falls into this category; they are not termed as refugees as well.

Therefore, forced migration and refugees in this article refer to a special category of people for whom special refugee regimes are created and applied. For convenience, the article adopts the definition as outlined in the 1951 refugee convention. According to the 1951 *United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, a refugee is a person residing outside his or her country of nationality “owing to wellfounded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (UNHCR, 1951). The Convention has given some legal rights and entitlements to such group of people.

This definition clearly reflects the presence of push factors which force people to migrate; hence refugees are forced-migrants. However, this definition is particular to the Push Factors specific to the endogenous environment. How about a situation in which exogenous factors create an endogenous pushing environment for forced migration? This is an aspect that is absent from the existing international refugee regimes. This article argues that the contemporary phenomenon of forced migration and refugees, as a result of endogenous and exogenous factors, are a political category of people created by the dynamics of international political conspiracy. The extent of complexity in the refugee issue is, therefore, deeper and enduring.

## **Forced Migration in History**

There have been numerous instances of politically motivated forced migration in human history. In the past, small or large scale migration caused by political factors have been integral to any political community. In addition, domination, exclusion and expulsion have been at the centre of power-politics in both small and large communities. Crude power-politics is, therefore, exemplified by instances of forced migration. A number of selective examples can be brought in here.

### *Political threat*

One of the most ancient instances of politically motivated forced migration is the Biblical account of the Exodus of the People of Israel from the land and kingdom of Pharaoh in modern day Egypt. According to the Biblical and historical claims, as many as 600,000 people of Israeli descent, and followers of Moses, were forced to flee the land (Hoffmeier, 1999). These people were considered non-native to the land, and a threat to the political establishment. Various types of oppression and persecution were inflicted on this minority community who were considered an enemy to the political authority. The Pharaoh of the time, therefore, decided to ethnically cleanse the community, forcing them to leave the land, and thus, making them a large refugee community in a foreign land. From a religious point of view, this exodus had a divine dimension as well; Moses was commanded, and guided, by his God during the course of the Exodus. Even though the divine dimension is clear, the immediate causes and factors that triggered the Exodus are temporal- the policies of the Pharaoh. The refugees were later rehabilitated by God through divine command in a different land.

A similar example of forced migration of a large community on the basis of political threat can be found in the early years of Islamic history in Makkah (Mecca), located in modern day Saudi Arabia. The nascent Muslim community, under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad, during the second decade of the seventh century CE was increasingly felt to be a political threat to the political authority in Makkah. Consequently, a few dozen early Muslims were forced to take refuge in a neighbouring East African Christian kingdom, modern day Ethiopia, in the face of severe torture and persecution. Years later, a larger number of people of the new religious community were socially and economically excommunicated by forcing them to take shelter in a cave for years; this is equivalent to a

form of, what is now called, Internally Displaced Persons. A few years later, the entire community of Muslims was forced to leave the city and became a refugee community in another city hundreds of miles away (Hodgson, 1977). This action was a divine sanction endorsed much later, but the initial triggering factors for the forced migration were local political threats.

### *Religious discrimination*

European medieval history is full of instances of forced migration, especially of the Jewish community. One such case in point is the forced migration of Jewish people from medieval Christian Spain due to differing religious beliefs and as a minority community. In Spain alone, during 1248 and 1492, the Jewish community encountered waves of expulsion and forced migration due to being a hated community. The Christian reconquest of Spain during 1248 and 1492 subjected the Jewish community to mass conversion, expulsion and forced migration. Historical accounts claim that, in the year 1391 alone, about 100,000 Spanish Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity (known as the Great Conversion), another 100,000 were killed, and yet another 100,000 were forced to become refugees in the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, the Jewish people living in the German lands, France, and Italy were pushed towards Eastern Europe by a series of expulsions during 1300 and 1500 CE (Beinart & Jeffrey, 2005).

The Jewish expulsion from Spain coincided in time and volume with the Muslim expulsion from the land following the Christian re-conquest. However, the Muslim expulsion continued over the subsequent 200 years in various phases. Following the dethronement of Muslims from political power in Spain, the Christian rulers and their church authorities forced the Muslim population to convert to Christianity (Lea & Henry, 1983). Most Muslims during the last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup>, and first two decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, chose to abide by the religious Fatwa issued by a North African religious scholar, Ahmad ibn Abi Jum'ah in 1504, to outwardly convert to Christianity or deemphasise Islamic rituals in public life. This was a less stringent fatwa than a fatwa issued in 1492 by Ahmad al-Wansharis, the contemporary North African scholar and leading authority on Spanish Muslims, to leave Spain completely (Dadson, 2018). The next generation of those Muslims who were superficially converted to Christianity, or secretly practicing Islam, were known as Moriscos or Moorish or crypto-Islamic people.

However, a hundred years later, the Moriscos were considered political threats and were expelled forcibly. Between 1609 and 1614, King Phillip III of Spain enacted a number of decrees that led to the expulsion of an estimated 275,000 to 300,000 crypto-Muslims. According to a study in 2007, 60% of the 500,000 Moriscos population were expelled (Dadson, 2011).

### *Land and nationhood*

Forced migration of people in large numbers is also exemplified by the ideology of modern nationalism which emphasises cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic homogeneity, and territorial claim. The 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed probably the most frequent and largest number of forced migrated people in human history. A few examples of forced migration for the sake of nationhood and land include the creation of the modern Turkish states, the Jewish state of Israel, and the creation of India and Pakistan in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The official creation of these states involved official and unofficial expulsion and displacement of a large numbers of people.

The so-called Greek-Turkish population exchange took place in May 1923 following the plan by the League of Nations. This involved about 1.3 million Anatolian Greek Christians moving to Greece while 354,000 Greek Muslims crossed to Turkey in an attempt to make their nation more homogenous (İğsız, 2018).

A classic example of political forced migration on the basis of ethnic purification and pure nationalism is Nazi Germany's so-called holocaust policy of its Jewish people. The policy was to eliminate the entire Jewish population; as a result, during Hitler's regime, large waves of voluntary and involuntary migration of the Jewish people out of Germany. It is estimated that more than 340,000 Jews were forced to migrate from Germany and Austria during 1933 and the 1945 Nazi era in Germany (Levinson, 2018).

Another classic example of political forced migration for the sake of land and nationhood is the forced migration of Palestinian Arabs by the Israeli's. Following the May 1948 Israeli declaration of independence, the inhabitants resisted and a war broke out. The Israeli army sacked up to 600 Palestinian villages and their urban areas, expelling more than 700,000 Palestinian Muslims to neighbouring countries such as Jordan.

Moreover, about 250,000 to 300,000 Palestinian's were expelled before independence was declared (Tessler, 2009). These massive expulsions through various means such as Israeli military advances, massacres, psychological intimidation, destruction of villages and direct Israeli government orders to evacuate lands, are considered to be ethnic cleansing so as to establish a pure Jewish state, which became official in 1948. Following the expulsions, the first Israeli government passed a series of laws that aimed to prevent refugees from returning to their homes or claiming their property. Both land and nationhood are primary elements behind these massive expulsions. The Israeli policy and practice of land grabbing through official eviction orders are still practiced. The expelled population have been living as refugees for the past three quarters of a century (Blecher, 2018).

A third example of forced migration for land and nationhood occurred a year earlier in 1947 through the creation of India and Pakistan following the British decision to leave the colony after 190 years of occupation. The two countries were created based on the principle of Two-Nations Theory along a religious divide where the Hindu majority areas would form a Hindu India, and the Muslim majority areas would form a Muslim Pakistan. The minority population on either side's territories were to move to their majority sides. This required a huge population movement by gentle agreements for the sake of nationhood and land. The forced population exchange involved more than 5 million Hindus and Sikhs moving to present day India from present day Pakistan. In reciprocation, the same number of Muslims from present day India had to move towards the other direction. And in-between more than a million people were killed either locally or on their way to their new destination (Zamindar, 2010).

Land and nationhood politics led to forced migration of people in Europe as well. Possibly the largest population transfer in history was the expulsion of over 12 million Germans after the Second World War from neighbouring countries. And as recent as 1999, the Kosovo war saw the deportation of 800,000 ethnic Albanians (Harbinson et.al., 2000).

A series of political forced migrations on the basis of nationalism are exemplified by the Myanmar government's policy of expelling the Rohingya ethnic minority Muslim population from its Rakhain state since

the late 1970s. The state policy of national homogeneity in citizenship identity has deliberately excluded the Rohingyas and denied their right to stay in the land. To clear the Rohingya people out of the land, the Myanmar authority adopted direct and indirect means of oppression that compelled the people to leave. At least three waves of Rohingya expulsions in 1978, 1990-91, and 2017 have resulted in creating over a million refugees in the neighbouring country of Bangladesh (Farzana, 2017).

### **Strategic Forced Migration**

Politically driven forced migration for the sake of political security, land, and the purification of national identity has been the most common pattern in human history until very recently when its dimension took on a different course. Onwards from the 1980s, strategically forced migration became the most sustained pattern in deliberately creating large numbers of refugees. Strategic forced migration can be defined as the forcible migration of people from a particular land and territory as a consequence of deliberate war or political instability created by outside powers for the interest of geo-strategic control over strategic resources and space. Political and geo-strategic ambitions of Israel and USA for land and petroleum resources have caused artificial political forced migrations in Iraq and Syria. To understand the matter, we need to analyze the grand strategic objective of the USA and Israel in the region.

#### *Strategic Forced Migration: Israeli Plan of a new middle east*

Israeli land, political and security expansion has been an integral and continuous policy agenda since its creation. Over the past seventy years since 1948, Israel has been aggressive, consistent and continuous in enlarging its boundaries, tightening its security and deepening its influence in regional politics. The sustained Israeli policy has been to widen the hinterlands to keep immediate military threats far away from the Israeli heartland. This is a strategic obsession reflected in a 1982 policy paper authored by Oded Yinon, a military strategist, entitled “A Strategy for Israel in the Nineteen Eighties” published in a Hebrew journal, *KIVUNIM*. Though it is not a government whitepaper, the Israeli military and security policies pursued since the 1980s do not characteristically differ from the policy suggestions put forwards by the paper. The paper theorized, in the context of a nuclear existential

threat to humanity and political survival of the state of Israel in a world of real-politik, that there be military and strategic military options towards the hinterland Arab countries; Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and the entire Arabian Peninsula. To understand the categorical suggestions made within the paper, some selected quotes are warranted on key Arab countries.

As mentioned earlier, Egypt is considered to be as one of the main hinterland countries. Even though Egypt signed a peace treaty with Israel years before the paper was published, it nevertheless considered Egypt as an important candidate to be dealt with for long term strategic security on Israel's western frontier. It suggested "Israel will act directly or indirectly in order to regain control over Sinai as a strategic, economic and energy reserve for the long run." And eventually "[B]reaking Egypt down territorially into distinct geographical regions is the political aim of Israel..." Likewise Israel's long-term strategic security concern was its immediate north-eastern neighbor- Syria. Defusing the Syrian threat was considered to be a perpetual strategic aim of Israel. The paper advised "[T]he dissolution of Syria and Iraq later on into ethnically or religiously unique areas ... is Israel's primary target on the Eastern front in the long run, while the dissolution of the military power of those states serves as the primary short term target. Syria ... into several states ... Shi'ite Alawi state along its coast, a Sunni state in the Aleppo area, another Sunni state in Damascus ..., and the Druzes ... in our Golan, ... Hauran ... Jordan." The third most natural candidate state for Israel to be dealt with permanently was Iraq, in the distant hinterland area. The Oded paper regarded "Iraq, rich in oil on the one hand and internally torn on the other, is guaranteed as a candidate for Israel's targets." Therefore, "[E]very kind of inter-Arab confrontation will assist us in the short run and will shorten the way to the more important aim of breaking up Iraq into denominations as in Syria and in Lebanon... So, three (or more) states will exist around the three major cities: Basra, Baghdad and Mosul, and Shi'ite areas in the south will separate from the Sunni and Kurdish north." The paper quoted a military expert, Ze'ev Schiff, the military correspondent of Ha'aretz (Ha'aretz 6/2/1982) to substantiate his observation: "the "best" that can happen for Israeli interests in Iraq: "The dissolution of Iraq into a Shi'ite state, a Sunni state and the separation of the Kurdish part".



After making strategic and military policy suggestions on the three key Arab states, the Oded paper argued that, “[T]he entire Arabian peninsula is a natural candidate for dissolution due to internal and external pressures, and the matter is inevitable especially in Saudi Arabia.” An end product of such successful policy implementation is the division of the whole Middle East (ME) area into small states, and the dissolution of all the existing Arab states which Oded regarded as fragile as “House of Cards” or “House of Sands.”

As evident from the quotations, the 1982 Oded paper suggested policy options for Israel’s future and perpetual strategic security through rearranging the political structure, and resetting the boundaries, of the Arab hinterland states. An implementation of these policy advices would entail a number of obvious inevitabilities. Firstly, to deliberately interfere with the local politics of these countries to create political instability, sectarian tension and impose structural changes. Secondly, the Arab countries are regarded as free lands which can be twisted, tossed and played with at the whims of Israel, disregarding any international law with respect to territorial sovereignty and non-interference. Thirdly, the Arab states are regarded as objects that lack any substantive permanent national jurisdiction and are subjects to be molded according to the wishes of powerful outsiders. Finally, these Arab states are not empty deserts; they have huge populations in each state, with complex intersecting ethnic and religious mixture. Breaking down these states into pieces would inevitably require forcible population movement and transfer within, and across, boundaries which might create civil wars and huge artificial refugee communities. The dimensions of an enormous human disaster is considered irrelevant and immaterial in the Israeli plan. In other words, beneath the entire strategic security of the state of Israel lies the deliberate politics of forced migration and refugees. A clear reflection of these policy proposals can be found twenty years later in an expert report on Israeli policy called, “A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm” (Shapiro et.al., 2005).

*Strategic forced migration: the American strategic interest and policy in the Middle East*

Ever since the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, in which American Middle Eastern and diplomatic policy experienced a shocking debacle, a new Middle East policy with greater vision and enduring dominance was

in the making due to various reasons (Bacevich, 2016; Pollack, 2008). First, to recover America's lost image as a great power. Following the humiliating defeat in the Vietnam War, the United States had a second blow to its image thanks to the Iranian revolution and the accompanying hostage crisis. Bent on recovering its tattered image as the world's superpower, this attempt was characterized by the rise of the neo-conservative political trend, aggressive Star Wars military initiatives, and the imminent decline and fall of the Soviet Union. America progressively carved out a new Middle East policy in the background of these new realities in order to achieve three grand objectives in the region: to check and counter the rise of an Islamic Iran, safeguard the steady flow of petroleum from the region, and protect the state of Israel (Mearsheimer & Stephen, 2008). All these objectives are to be achieved through a grand strategy of long-term strategic and military presence in the region. The grand plan started to materialize from the beginning of 1990 through the Gulf war following the Iraq invasion of Kuwait.

Whether the invasion was clandestinely orchestrated by the USA to set the stage for its designed military presence in order to achieve the three grand objectives may be debated under the rubric of conspiracy theories, the fact of America's military presence in the region under whatever pretense is obvious. What prompted the military buildup in the Gulf in 1991; forcing Saddam Hussein to leave Kuwait and in turn liberating that nation, ended up with regime change in Iraq a decade later under a different justification- Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). This led to the removal of the dictator, and bringing freedom to Iraq.

However, what became progressively obvious immediately after the American invasion of Iraq was that the claim of WMD was a calculated deception to justify the invasion, and that it was actually oil which was the most important American interest in the region. Among numerous studies that concluded similar results, the opinion of the topmost economic and monetary policymaker of the USA at the time- Alan Greenspan, Chairman of the Federal Reserve, is sufficient to substantiate the claim. In his book *The Age of Turbulence: Adventures in a New World* (2008) Greenspan commented "I am saddened that it is politically inconvenient to acknowledge what everyone knows: the Iraq war is largely about oil." So, one of the three objectives had been apparently achieved, but its future security needed to be guaranteed.

How could the ‘oil’ objective be secured for the future? The answer to this question lies in three related and complimentary factors and objectives- more sustained and long-term military buildup, protecting the state of Israel, and weakening the Arab countries by dismantling the current borders and redrawing the regional maps; thus cutting the population into segments.

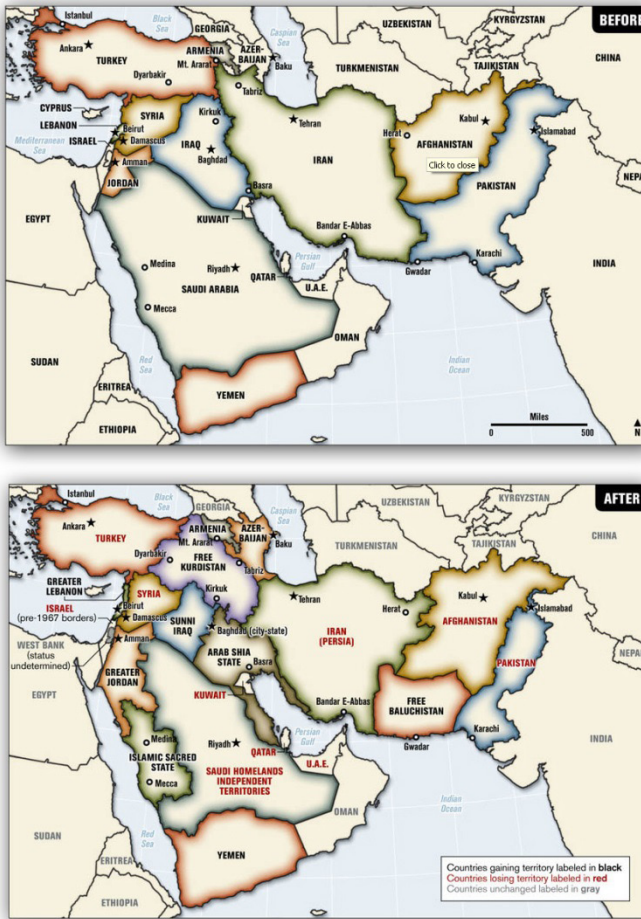
One unofficial military strategy policy suggestion to that effect was made by a retired Lieutenant-Colonel named Ralph Peters in his article “Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look”, which appeared in *Armed Forces Journal* on June 1, 2006, and subsequently in his book *Never Quit the Fight* published in 2008. Even though the policy suggestions were shrugged off by the American government as private and unofficial, they appeared in official media of the American armed forces and NATO, which carried weight and credibility. Indeed, subsequent political developments in the region would test the credibility of the plan put forward by Ralph Peters.

To understand the extent and volume of forced migration and refugees the plan can potentially entail, we need to look at the major features of the plan. Peters had three basic assumptions laid out; firstly, the Middle East is ethnically and religiously divided; secondly, the borders are artificial; and thirdly, the states are fragile and political instability is never-ending. These assumptions provided Peters with the liberty and legitimacy to twist, play and rearrange the borders of the Arab states. The stated objective is, however, peace in the region.

To achieve the objectives, Peters made two basic proposals. Firstly, a reimagining of Middle Eastern and Asian borders along ethnic, sectarian and tribal lines might ease regional tensions; and secondly, redrawing the borders of the Middle Eastern countries from Israel to Pakistan.

What would follow if this or a similar plan is put in effect? The extent of land and population exchange that Peters himself anticipated is worth considering here.

## Map: The Middle East map before and after proposed redrawing



Source: Ralph Peters, "Blood Borders: How a better Middle East would look" *Armed Forces Journal*, June 1, 2006

According to Ralph Peters's own calculation of land and population swap, the result of the redrawn map would present the following map of the Middle East. Israel returns to its pre-1967 borders; Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq lose territory to create a Free Kurdistan; Free Kurdistan- a new state created for the Kurds; a greater Lebanon- a reborn Phoenicia that also gains territory at the expense of Syria; a greater Jordan through gaining territory from Saudi Arabia; a Sunni Iraqi state- one of three

successor states to Iraq; an Arab Shia state- another successor state to Iraq, would house Iraq's current Shia population along with gaining territory from Iran; an Islamic Sacred State- a new state created that would act as an Islamic Vatican carved from Saudi Arabia; a new Saudi Arabia through losing territory to Jordan, Arab Shia State, Yemen and the Islamic Sacred State; a greater Yemen through gaining land from Saudi Arabia; a UAE through losing territory to Arab Shia State: Kuwait and Oman maintaining the status quo; a new Azerbaijan through gaining territory from Iran; a new Iran through losing land to Kurdistan, an Arab Shia State, Azerbaijan and Free Baluchistan but gaining territory from Afghanistan. A Free Baluchistan- a new state for the Baluch people to be carved out from Pakistan and Iran; an Afghanistan through losing land to Iran in the west but gaining from Pakistan in the east; and finally, a trimmed Pakistan through losing territory to both Free Baluchistan and Afghanistan.

According to the plan, a total of twenty states would appear in the new map in the place of the existing fifteen. Apparently, a redrawing of the Middle East map along ethnic and sectarian lines offers an attractive solution to regional intra and inter-state tensions. It may also bring centuries' old questions of Kurdish and Shia-Sunni rivalry to an end. However, what skip from the public debate or the grand narrative of the proponents of such plans are some legitimate legal and consequential concerns. Firstly, the plan is a manifest denial of international law with regard to nonintervention, respect of territorial integrity and national sovereignty. Secondly, it assumes that the region is open and subject to foreign imposition of political and military settlements; it is a laboratory to test any political and military designs of external powers; and the external powers have the legitimate right to twist and turn and play with tangible and intangible aspects of political affairs of people in the region. Thirdly, an imposition of such a radical solution requires violent intervention from outside as none of the states in question would agree to lose land and, possible natural resources underneath. Finally, the social and ethnic fabrics are considered very straight and clear cut that straight boundary lines along ethnic or sectarian lines are the easy way out. It totally disregards the potential human cost involved due to resistance, confrontation, possible civil war, and sectarian or ethnic violence. All these inevitably entails forced migration of a huge number of people and a creation of region-wide refugee communities.

### **Strategic Forced Migration in the ME: the happenings on the ground**

The Middle East has been a region where wild international strategic fantasy and the crude reality of political realism have largely coincided over the past about two hundred years. What is known as the Middle East today was the landmass of the Ottoman Empire until a century ago. The intrusion of foreign powers, intervention into the borders and shaping and reshaping of the region is not new; rather these started from the latter days of the Ottoman Empire. Probably the first official channel that allowed European powers of the time to make inroads into the region was the Empire taking loans from France in the middle of the Crimean War (1853-1856), thus giving France leverage to influence the region's politics. The war, a European powers' move to punish Russia using the Ottoman Empire, caused an exodus of 200,000 Crimean Tartar refugees in the Empire. A second exodus of the Bulgarian Muslims took place during the 1877-1878 Russo-Turkish War in which the European powers had a major stake. During the 1912-1913 Balkan War, some 400,000 Muslims were forced to migrate to mainland Turkey. The so-called Armenian Genocide of 1915 was also caused by an imposed war of Russia on Turkey in which an estimated 1.5 million Armenians were forced to migrate to Syria and Iraq (then known as Mesopotamia). It was European concerns of strategic gains in the region that caused the forced migration (Rogan, 2016).

The rivalries between these great powers during the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed the European powers to make known their strategic presence in the region. For instance, in exchange for British support of Turkey against Russia during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-1878, Britain officially entered militarily to the region. Britain took control of Cyprus's administration in 1878, and France occupied Tunisia in 1881. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1914, Britain took complete control of Cyprus and Egypt.

By the turn of the new century, the Turkish Empire turned into an aging 'Sick Man of Europe', which in turn became an object in the British, French, and Russian political and military surgical operation theatre. The First World War turned the tables around; the old European enemies- Britain, France and Russia, were allied against the Empire, which allied with Germany. Through a series of treaties, the Empire was

stripped off its political and military power, and its territories were put into a newly carved out map that was both directly, and indirectly, under the control of the European powers. Thus, the direct strategic presence of the foreign powers was made official. It was the Arab revolts that hastened the process. By the beginning of 1919, Britain took control of the Arabian Peninsula, Syria and Iraq. On its Northern front, the Ottoman Empire had to give away Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to Russia. In the end, the Treaty of Sevres officially partitioned the Empire into 39 territories which were divided among the European powers (Rogan, 2016).

What these historical trends suggest is that playing with the politics and map of the region is not new, not internal, and subject to foreign intervention. So when Oded Yinon, Ralph Peters and the Clean Break proposed redrawing boundaries and reorganising the region's geographic setting, it did not sound unusual. So even though Oded Yinon's 1982 plan, and Ralph Peters' 2006 plan may not be official, the actual happenings on the ground before 1982 and after 2006 did not differ from what they proposed.

Firstly, Israeli land, military and security expansion has been consistent over the past four decades, result in its grand strategic objectives appearing to be a replica of the 1982 strategic thinking of Oded Yinon. Internally, Israel has expanded progressively by encroaching on Palestinians' land to the point where their living spaces have been reduced to scattered dots on the Israeli landscape. But it is not the internal expansion that matters for Israel's greater strategic objectives; it is its hinterlands.

One of the two most important candidates for both Oded and Peters' restructuring of borders is Iraq. Both of them suggested creating a number of states out of the existing territory- a Sunni state, a Shia state, and a Kurdish state. The American military policy towards Iraq since 1990 have met a number of American and Israeli objectives simultaneously (Cooley, 2005). Firstly, there was the Oded proposal of weakening Iraq by eliminating its military capability through the American destruction of Iraq's air defense installations, limiting its air space by imposing No Fly Zones and UN-supervised destruction of its chemical industries in the 1990s. Even that did not fulfill the objective; Iraq's regime had to be changed, and its military totally dismantled.

In 2003, an invasion, defying global opposition, was carried out under the pretext of the existence of WMD's. In the end, Iraq descended into perpetual chaos, remaining weak for unknown future.

Secondly, the Oded strategy of dividing Iraq into a few smaller states by taking advantage of its sectarian divide was clearly reflected in post-invasion development in Iraq. The Kurdish region had been granted autonomy with its large control over oil resources; and its independence just fell short of a unsuccessful referendum which only one state, Israel, supported and recognized. The remaining regions remained loosely federated with the capital, but as a whole the state has been marred with sustained violence, and instability caused by sectarian chaos. Its very survival has been at stake, let alone being a threat to any neighboring country. So Oded and Peters plans are partially applied, but the Israeli objectives have been fully achieved.

Thirdly, the Iraq invasion helped achieve America's grand objective of securing control over oil resources in the region. Taking control of Iraqi oil began in the 1990s when Iraqi oil proceeds were given in the hands of an UN appointed body. This was to be formalized by transferring the control to largely American companies, which was effectively done immediately after the invasion in 2003. This became clear long before Alan Greenspan claimed that the Iraq invasion was largely for oil. Large and small American oil companies, some of which had business connections with American political elites who orchestrated the invasion, were awarded business contracts. The invaders were free to share oil resources as war booty.

The Iraq fiasco was nothing but a deliberate military adventure to initiate America's grand objectives in the region- strategic military presence, and control of Iraq's oil resources. Whether intended or not, the adventure helped achieve Israeli objectives in Iraq. According to a 2017 update by the UNHCR, the invasion forced three million people to be internally displaced and produced more than 4 million Iraqi refugees both at home and abroad. The sheer number of human casualties was simply disregarded by America's official attitude of "we aren't there for body count."

The second most ideal candidate state for both USA and Israel in the region to be terminally dealt with was Syria. Syria has been the most active frontline and hinterland state that posed an immediate military



threat to Israel since its creation. Syria and Israel's past wars, the Israeli control of Syria's Golan Heights, Syria's proxy-war with Israel in Lebanon in the 1980s, and Syria being a close ally of Iran and the Lebanese Hezbollah- are part of an existential threat to Israel. Therefore, the weakening of Syria or dismantling of its geographical, military and power structure is a foregone conclusion in achieving Israel's greater strategic objective (Phillips, 2016).

America's interest to see Syria weakened politically and militarily became more apparent and clearer since Bashar al-Assad came to power. Syria's forced roll-back policy from regional political and military engagement indicated the first signs of its decline as a major power in the region. The final blow came following the so-called Arab Spring which plunged Syria into an intricate civil war since March 2011. Numerous factions such as the Free Syrian Army, Syrian Democratic Forces, al-Nusra Front, and Daesh or Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) later Islamic State (IS), have been fighting against each other aided by foreign powers. The confusion and chaos is apparently deliberately sustained by the roles the foreign powers have been playing in this regard. The direct involvement of the two super powers- USA and Russia, has dragged the war for almost eight years. The objective of the USA and its allies has been to change the Syrian regime while Russia and its allies aim to maintain it. The entire country, save Damascus, has been subject to destruction, displacement of people and death. Active support by the USA and Israel triggered the civil war which was later sustained by complex alliances. The human cost has been monumental. According to the last estimate, out of 22 million, about 14 million Syrians live on humanitarian assistance, more than 6 million are internally displaced, and about 5 million became refugees abroad. According to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an estimated 522,000 Syrian civilians have been killed until 12 September 2018 (SOHR, 2018).

The Syrian civil war is more of an imposed war than one that is homegrown, arguably as part of Israel-America's grand strategic and military objective to weaken and dismantle Syria. The Arab Spring was an opportunity to do away with the Syrian threat to Israel, just as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was an opportunity to deal with the Iraqi threat. In both cases, a number of points are clear.

Firstly, the American and Israeli grand strategic and military objectives in the region are complimentary and identical. They work for

each other's interest. Secondly, they may deliberately cause a situation to occur through playful diplomacy, or conveniently and efficiently take advantage of a situation to interfere politically and militarily in order to achieve their grand objectives. Thirdly, they fundamentally disregard the national boundaries of the Arab states with the belief that they have legitimate rights to impose changes. And finally, they disregard the human consequence of their deliberate interventions as a mere byproduct, and make the neighbouring countries bear the burden.

### **Conclusion**

According to the UNHCR, there are 68.5 million people forcibly displaced worldwide, out of which 25.4 million are refugees. The instances of forced displacement and migration of people are not rare in human history; however, the frequency, intensity and volume of forced migration have increased rapidly over the past 200 years. Why is it so?

This article argued that in the past, forced migration and refugees resulted from natural forces such as disaster and climatic changes, political threats, divine order, religious persecution or nationalistic ideology and nation-state formula. However, in the contemporary world, forced migration and refugees are deliberately created as part of the dynamics of international conspiracies to achieve grand military and strategic objectives by dominant powers. An analysis of the cases of Iraq and Syria over the past thirty years reveal that local political turmoil, resulting in producing voluminous numbers of forcibly migrated and refugee population, is orchestrated by an international political conspiracy. Both Iraq and Syria have produced the biggest number of forced migrated and refugee population in the past thirty years. In these two cases, Israel and the United States had complimentary and identical grand objectives in the region. For Israel, these objectives were weakening and dismantling the Arab hinterland states for the greater security of the state of Israel. Both Iraq and Syria were ideal candidates for that. For the United States, the objectives were to make its long-term official military presence in the region, to safeguard its control over the region's oil wealth, and to counter any threat to the state of Israel. Again, both Iraq and Syria stood as the ideal candidates through which America achieved its objectives. America and Israel's Middle East politics dominated Iraq and Syria for the past forty years, and the consequences the two Arab countries experienced came arguably

from nothing but deliberate conspiracy politics played by the two allied powers.

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# In This Issue

## *Editorial*

### *Special Articles*

**Md. Moniruzzaman**

Politics of Forced Migration and Refugees: Dynamics of International Conspiracy?

**AKM Ahsan Ullah and Diotima Chatteraj**

Roots of Discrimination Against Rohingya Minorities: Society, Ethnicity and International Relations

**Kamal J. I. Badrasawi, Iman Osman Ahmed and Iyad M. Eid**

Exploring Ways to Provide Education in Conflict Zones: Implementation and Challenges

**Ibrahim O. Salawu and Aluko Opeyemi Idowu**

Political Settlement Analysis of the Blight of Internally Displaced Persons in the Muslim World: Lessons from Nigeria

### *Research Articles*

**Rohaiza Rokis**

Women's Work Empowerment through "Re-upcycle" Initiatives for Women-at-home

**Shafizan Mohamed and Tengku Siti Aisha Tengku Mohd Azzman**

The Islamization of the Malaysian Media: A Complex Interaction of Religion, Class and Commercialization

**Suleyman Temiz**

Rise of Central Conservatism in Political Leadership: Erbakan's National Outlook Movement and the 1997 Military Coup in Turkey

**Maskanah Mohammad Lotfie and Hartono**

Language Policy and Practices in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions

**Rahmah Bt Ahmad H. Osman and Naseeb Ahmed Siddiqui**

A Novel Critique on 'The Scientific Miracle of Qur'an Philosophy': An Inter-Civilization Debate

**Muhammad Nabil Fikri Bin Mhd Zain and Muhammad Amanullah**

Duties and Decision-Making Guidelines for Shari'ah Committee: An Overview of AAOIFI

**Nor Razinah Binti Mohd. Zain, Rusni Hassan and Nazifah Mustaffha**

Waqf Institutions in Malaysia: Appreciation of Wasafiyah Approach in Internal Control as a Part of Good Governance

**Ali Ahmed Zahir**

Muslim Jurists' Debate on Non-Muslim Religious Festivals and Its Effect on Muslims in the United States

**Azman Ariffin, Kasyfullah Abd Kadir and Idris Mansor**

Archaeological Analysis of Arabic-Malay Translation Works of Abdullah Basmeih

**Mohamed El Tahir El Mesawi and Mohammad Rizhan bin Leman**

*Takyif Fiqhī* and its Application to Modern Contracts: A Case Study of the Central Provident Fund Nomination in Singapore

**Wafa Zoghbor**

Revisiting English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Vs. English Lingua Franca (ELF): The Case for Pronunciation

**Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan, Mohd Azizuddin Mohd Sani, Norehan Abdullah, and Zaireeni Azmi**

"How did we Choose?" Understanding the Northern Female Voting Behaviour in Malaysia in the 14th General Election

**Anke Iman Bouzenita, and Bronwyn Wood**

Unintended Consequences? The Commodification of Ideas in Tertiary Education and their Effects on Muslim Students

**Muhammad Siddiq Armia**

Ultra Petita and the Threat to Constitutional Justice: The Indonesian Experience

**Mariam Adawiah Dzulkifli, and Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu**

Methods of Qur'anic Memorisation (Ḥifẓ): Implications for Learning Performance

### *Book Reviews*

### *Research Note*

### *Conference Report*

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