

**Commentary: Lecture by Dr. Mordechai Kedar - The Middle East: Tribalism and Not Nationalism**

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Dr. Mordechai Kedar, an expert in the Arabic language and Islamic culture from Bar-Ilan University, opens for us a window so that we can understand how the tribes in the Middle East were created and how the tribal society constitutes the source of the wars in the Middle East.

According to Kedar, the factor that most characterizes the Middle East is the fact that it is a desert region without a large number of water sources. The sparse water resources (wells, rivers, puddles, etc.) cause people to fiercely defend the water resources they have.

These people, understanding that they do not have the option of defending the water resources alone, consider it necessary to recruit others who will help them defend more effectively these resources that others seek to take from them. However, the following question therefore arises. Who are the people a person in the Middle East most relies upon to stand at his side? The answer is – his brothers. After a number of generations, the brothers become cousins of the first and second degree, and thus, in essence, the tribe is created.

Hence, Dr. Kedar concludes that the true division in the Middle East is according to the borders of the tribe and the ethnic group and not according to the borders of the state.

Following the historical wars of tribes against one another over the water resources, Kedar maintains that violence is considered the first solution for all the problems in the Middle East. A known sentence in Arabic says that a person in the Middle East sleeps at night with one hand on his sword (today this is his AK-47 rifle).

However, it is known to all that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the First World War, the colonial powers ruled in the Middle East, having divided the borders of the Middle East according to their interests. In this division, they made one critical mistake: they did not delineate the borders of the Middle East according to its tribes but rather they created states and people from nothing, when they had no historical past, and expected that all the tribes would unite under the national citizenship that the Europeans had manufactured.

Therefore, in the Middle East countries were fashioned which were in essence combinations of completely different tribes. Despite the colonialist hopes, the tribal identity has remained until today the strong identity in the Middle East. The reason is that the environment of the tribe is closer to the life of the person in the Middle East than is the country, and therefore the person's entire life is conducted in his tribal environment and not by the executive authority.

According to Dr. Kedar, this is the source of the violence in the Middle East today. The conflicts between tribes, ethnic groups, and different religious sects that live under one country constitute a direct outcome of the desire of the Western powers to force Western ideas on another culture.

Thus, for example, Iraq received democracy from the United States at the cost of four thousand dead Americans and trillions of dollars. However, shortly afterwards it dissolved following religious and ethnic conflicts. In addition, after Kaddafi was toppled, Libya has not succeeded in stabilizing as a country because of the conflicts between the tribes.

Another example is Afghanistan. Afghanistan is divided into different ethnic groups, when not one group is called Afghan. Afghanistan is the name given to the place by the British and the Russians, who hoped that all the ethnic groups would unite under the Afghan nationality.

Yet despite everything, there is one group of countries in the Middle East that are stable, tranquil, and prosperous – the Gulf Emirates. These countries are different from the

other countries in the Middle East because their borders were delineated by the colonial powers at a later stage of their control of the region, after they had understood their error in drawing the borders of the rest of the countries in the region in the earlier stages of their rule, as noted previously.

To differentiate from the other countries in the Middle East, the Gulf Emirates are prosperous, tranquil, and stable. Some people say that the reason for their prosperity is oil; however, according to Dr. Kedar the oil is not a decisive parameter. Dubai, for instance, does not have oil at all, while other countries, such as Libya, Iraq, and Sudan, have considerable oil.

Dr. Kedar states that the reason for the stability and prosperity of the Gulf Emirates is the fact that each one of these countries is only one tribe!

These countries are also friendly with Israel, relative to the other Arab countries. Dr. Kedar explains that the moment there are no internal conflicts in a country then a common enemy to unite all the fighting sides is not necessary.

In conclusion, according to Dr. Mordechai Kedar of Bar-Ilan University, the Middle East is composed of a combative tribal society. Therefore, the only way to obtain peace in the Middle East is to create countries with single tribal hegemony and not to create countries that are combinations of tribes and different ethnic groups that will never agree to live with one another as one nationality.

Source:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z-XgJySNzVE>