Fractured and fractious

How imaginary lines continue to shape the fate of millions in the Arabian Peninsula

A CLOSER LOOK

TASNEEM TAYEB

THE last remaining major European colonial powers, Britain and France, were whiffing quite an opportunity at the dawn of World War I, as they found themselves on the right side of history. With the 400-year-old Ottoman empire flickering out, its massive hinterland in the Arabian Peninsula was ripe for the taking.

In 1915, Sir Mark Sykes, a British diplomat, was assigned the responsibility to work with his French counterpart François Georges-Picot, a colonial administrator, to decide the fate of the region. And decide they did, decisions which shaped the past, present and the foreseeable future of the Middle East.

Despite their knowledge of the complexities of the region, Sykes and Picot ripped apart the map with lines—straight, austere, imaginary—with nonchalant disregard for the sectarian, tribal and ethnic mosaic of the region: Britain had control of areas that today constitute Iraq, Jordan and Palestine, while France had control of what is now Syria and Lebanon. This is how the blueprint of a century of conflict and bloodshed was drawn.

Britain in particular was soon in a tight spot with the Zionists and Arabs in what is now Israel and Palestine. Britain was entrusted to support the recently founded Zionist movement that aimed to create "a national home for the Jewish people" in the land. But it was not an easy task. With Jews accounting for only 11 percent of the population in the area, and Arabs and Christians comprising the remaining 89 percent, it was difficult for Britain to support the formation of a separate nation for the Zionists. The difficulty of the mandate often resulted in Britain being at odds with both the Arabs and the Jews.

Although by the end of World War II the Jewish population had increased to 32 percent—almost one third of the total population—it still wasn't enough for them to secure half the land that they desired. Matters reached a boiling point when it became apparent towards the end of World War II that Britain would soon make their exit from the troubled region. Both communities started jockeying for power. Thus began a struggle which led to wars, which enabled the Jews to systematically flush out the Arabs from the region in order to make their claims over the land more legitimate.

During the first Nakba—translating literally to "catastrophe" in English—in 1947-48, between 700,000 and 800,000 Arabs fled their homeland or were expelled by well-equipped World War II veteran Israeli militia. And the ones who could flee were lucky because they could at least escape with their lives.

The result was another map drawn in imaginary lines—this time, inked in blood. The sudden disappearance of a people and their social, cultural, political values define the first Nakba—one moment they were there, another they were gone. The lands were swiftly taken away by Israel, property expropriated, villages bulldozed—the way today Myanmar is bulldozing the possessions of the displaced Rohingya—and most importantly identities were erased.

The last British troops in what had been the British Mandate of Palestine lower their flag in Haifa harbour in June 1948.

PHOTO: **AFP**

But the Arabs did not give up their claims to the land of their ancestors. The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) was found in 1964 during a summit in Egypt. Fatah was established in 1965 by Yasser Arafat. And the Arabs kept up their fight for an independent state.

Then the second Nakba happened, to further stretch the imaginary lines that formed Israel. And this was better planned and more systematic than the first one. This time Israel had certain strategic locations in mind and they soon captured and occupied Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt, West Bank including East Jerusalem from Jordan and Golan Heights from Syria. People living in these areas were trapped, further adding to the ethno-sectarian tensions of the Arabian Peninsula.

In 1988 Yasser Arafat proclaimed the establishment of the State of Palestine. Palestine claimed right over a territory over which it had no actual control—territories that had been occupied by Israel during the second Nakba—adding another layer to the imaginary lines that divide and dominate the lives of the millions caught in the middle of conflict.

And in the last few decades there had been the Intifada—the uprisings by the persecuted Palestinians; there had been killing of innocent Palestinians by Israel; there had been illegal Israeli settlements built on Palestinians lands; and there had been the continued struggle of the Palestinians for their rights.

But the suffering of the Palestinians continues; their self-determination remains as elusive as ever. And there are factions among the Palestinians—the most major is the rift between Fatah and Hamas, their two major political parties. Infighting between these factions only make their fight for justice more difficult.

After a jostling between Hamas and Fatah, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, and still retains it, despite the interlude from 2014 to 2016. Fatah heads the legitimate government of Palestine, but is mostly cornered in the West Bank. There is much more than just a big chunk of "Israeli" land dividing the Palestinians today—including ideology and beliefs.

Amidst all this fighting, within and without, perhaps what is now needed is unity among the Palestinians for their common cause of self-determination and realisation of their rights.

Earlier this month, Palestinians marked the 55th anniversary of the founding of Fatah. But the anniversary made headlines this year for another reason: to the surprise of everyone, this year Hamas, Fatah's bitter rival, allowed the Fatah supporters in Gaza to bring out rallies to celebrate the occasion.

While talking to AFP, a Hamas official said, "We consented to holding these festivities on Al-Wehda Street for Fatah to champion the unity of the Palestinian people."

Does this signify a shift in the political strategy of Hamas and Fatah in their struggle for self-determination; to right the wrong of the all layers of imaginary lines that have distorted the plurality of the region and destroyed the lives of millions? Can Palestinians finally unite in their fight for their land, rights and justice? One can only hope.

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Arguments for using AI to combat climate change

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ACCORDING to a report published by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), in 2018 the average global temperature was recorded to be the fourth highest on record. Based on five separately conserved data sets on global temperature, the WMO report shows that the global average temperature in the first 10 months of 2018 was nearly 1 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial baseline, i.e., 1850-1900. In this regard, WMO Secretary-General Petteri Taalas states that if global temperature continues to increase according to the current trend, by the end of the 21st century, planet earth may experience a 3-5 degree increase in global temperature.

Although the global community has become united under the umbrella of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), according to Taalas, to battle against the adversities of climate change the steps taken by the states are not adequate to meet "climate change targets and rein in temperature increases." Hence, he adds, "it is worth repeating once again that we are the first generation to fully understand climate change and the last generation to be able to do something about it."

Combating climate change includes strategies for adaptations (preparedness for adverse impacts of climate change) and mitigation (reducing emission of greenhouse gases in atmosphere). For both adaptation and mitigation, technology is an important tool. Mitigation of greenhouse gas requires advanced technologies or energy efficient technologies in transportation, buildings, electricity systems, land use, etc. Besides, prediction of greenhouse gas impacts of climate change is also important for mitigation. Adaptation to climate change requires advanced technologies like risk prediction, climate modelling, disaster management or resilience planning.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) that often includes machine learning and deep learning can play a mammoth role in battling climate change. A recent study conducted by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) shows that machine-learning can intervene at least in 13 essential sectors for battling climate change. These sectors include building better electricity systems, monitoring agricultural emissions and deforestation, creating new low-carbon materials, predicting extreme weather events, making transportation more efficient, reducing wasted energy from buildings, arranging geo-engineering for a more effective earth, and providing people with the tools to reduce their carbon footprint. Microsoft, which initiates "AI for Earth" programmes, and has committed USD 50 million over five years for research and development of new AI applications, has denoted AI as a "game changer".

Discourses of both ethics and public international law, either directly or indirectly, encourage the application of AI in combating climate change. Although the 2015 Paris Agreement does not directly refer to it, the preamble to the agreement recognises "the need for an effective and progressive response to the urgent threat of climate change on the basis of the best available scientific knowledge." AI obviously falls under the notion of "the best available scientific knowledge". Besides, Article 4(1) of the Agreement acknowledges the necessity of applying "the best available scientific knowledge" for climate change mitigation and Article 7(5) calls for the same for climate change adaptation.

In connection with climate change, one important ethical concern is that countries which were least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions in the past are likely to suffer the most serious impacts. This issue is also considered as "historical contribution" factor for the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC). Another important ethical concern is that the biggest victims of climate change are not in a position to blame or hold us to account. This is because they are either the poorer communities of the world, or unborn children of future generations or non-human creatures—*e.g. plants and animals.* This is also considered as a "respective capability" factor in the just mentioned principle of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). These ethical issues do not only fall under the discourse of ethics, but are also dealt under the concept of environmental justice as well as the equity and sustainable development principles of international law.

All these ultimately call for urgent innovation, development and deployment of AI in the battle against climate change, and at the same time, necessitates transferring the same to poor communities who do not have access to these technologies. In line with this, Article 10 of the Paris Agreement requires for technologies essential to battling climate change be transferred to the poor and developing countries. Article 11 of the Agreement also calls for financial cooperation that includes cooperation for innovation, development and transfer of the required technologies.

While both ethical and legal discourses on climate change require development and deployment of AI to battle climate change, the innovation, transfer and deployment of AI is also dependent on several other factors. These factors include creating enabling environment for innovating AI applications, creating suitable market for newly innovated AI technologies, and above all, willingness of capable countries and business entities to invest in innovation, development and transfer of those kind of AI technologies which are essential for battling climate change. No single country can do this on its own initiative. All countries need to work together and come to a consensus and find a method of cooperating with each other in innovating and implementing AI to combat climate change where necessary.

In addition to the regular discussion on innovation and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, the issue of cooperation in innovation and transfer of AI demands special attention from the Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the UNFCCC.

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ACROSS
1 Kitchen come-on
6 Eccentric fellows
11 Bowling spots
12 Asian capital
13 Bearings
14 Peace goddess
15 Unmatched
16 Mess up
18 Tyler of "The Lord of the Rings"
19 Poseidon's place
20 Workout unit
21 Seine season
22 Secret meetings
24 Historic times
25 Freud's home
27 Deck worker
29 Seuss title character
32 Thurman of
33 Capp and Capone
34 Feel poorly
35 Turn bad
36 Dachshund doc
37 – Aviv
38 Get up
40 Stage comment
42 Debussy work
43 Circus worker
44 Cold weather
45 Abrasive powder

"Kill Bill"

DOWN
1 Nearly
2 Corporate shark
3 How to take things, perhaps
4 Chess pieces
5 States
6 Nest sound
7 Lifeboat need
8 How to put on pants, perhaps
9 This evening, in ads
10 Colanders' kin
17 Give a new look to
23 Take to court
24 Vacuum lack
26 Put in other words
27 Big pictures
28 Unconcerned with ethics
30 German songs
31 Queen of mysteries
33 Turn away
39 Spot
41 Frodo's friend

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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