

strengthening or weakening of Islamic groups within various states.

Bryans: Why is the disposition of the Palestinian question so determinant on how the religious question will work itself out?

Korany: Because for many Moslems the question is still between Jews and Moslems.

Heller: It is not a religious prism when they talk about Jews and Moslems. It is the same kind of identity delimiter that we were talking about before, a communitarian boundary, if you will. It has nothing to do with the religious content of the state, or of state legislation, or legitimacy of boundaries. Jews is another way that people in the Middle East refer to Israelis. I have the same difficulties Michael does in understanding the reasoning behind the statement that the disposition of the Palestinian issue will determine the relative success or failure of Islamic movements in the Arab world.

Korany: The importance of the Palestinian issue is that it brings within its confines many things at the same time. Certainly for some Islamic militants it is a religious issue, Jews and Moslems. But the Palestinian issue is considered, also, as a remnant of the colonial issue: Israel as part of the West and, in fact, almost a plot of the West – here, again, the conspiracy theory. But an issue which will come up again and again, and which could endanger many of governments in the Gulf, is that of double standards. Once you have been so strict in applying international law and UN resolutions, you can't be selective.

Stein: The Palestinian issue is salient because it involves the intersection of so many of the themes that we have already talked about. There is the religious dimension of it. The second is the association of the colonial past. That is the historic way that issue was interpreted in the Arab Middle East. The Iraqi/Kuwaiti conflict is interesting in that respect, because what was affirmed here were colonially drawn borders, and that is when the we/they distinction broke down. It was the explicit acknowledgement in the Arab Middle East that colonial borders are legitimate. The process of drawing them was not legitimate, but their existence is now legitimate. They are not open for change, irrespective of how they were drawn. So in a curious way the colonial association might recede in the next decade.

The third way that this is an important issue and has to play into Arab politics is in the state breaking/nation building perspective. To the extent that we are talking about broader processes in the Arab world which are going

to legitimate nationhood, even if they are not co-determinous with state boundaries, the Palestinian issue and the relationship between Israeli nationalism and Palestinian nationalism flows very much into that debate.

The double standard issue I would turn on its head. It is a double-edged sword, a problem for the whole Arab Middle East, and it is a litmus test. What are the standards for dealing with national minorities across state boundaries in the Middle East generally? That issue has never been on the agenda in the post-war period, other than in the Palestinian case. It will now be on the agenda.

WHAT WAS UNIQUE ABOUT THIS WAR WAS THAT THE WORLD'S LEADING MILITARY POWER WAS NOT ABLE TO FUND THE WAR...

Korany: Can the Helsinki model [Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, CSCE] be applied to the Middle East? Can we go beyond the state and try to organize democratic transformation and human rights and all of that?

Stein: Helsinki did not talk directly at all about changes in the forms of government. It raised the question on a wholly different issue – the level of human rights, dissent against established governments, and the extent that you extend these to cultural rights and to the tolerance of minorities. In retrospect, I suspect that Helsinki had enormous impact on what we are currently seeing in Eastern Europe and Soviet Union, because it was approached that way. The logical conclusion down the historical road was fundamental political change. To put the form of government at the top of the agenda, is to put the cart before the horse. The issue is, in fact, individual rights against the state, and cultural rights for minority groups.

Heller: It would be naive to insist on institutional forms of the liberal democratic state. The problem, as I said, was that since the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the idea of the sovereignty of the individual and the autonomy of the part from the whole has not had legitimacy in much of Middle Eastern political thought. No one would ever accuse the Ottoman empire of having been a liberal democratic state. But it did create much more manoeuvre room for individuals and for autonomous cultural or

communitarian groups than have ever existed in post-colonial states in the Middle East.

Bryans: One observation that one can make about how the process has unfolded in the last eight months is that the system and the various parts of it, whether it is the coalition or the UN, seemed to be pretty good at protecting nation states from each other and protecting state sovereignty. But as we've seen from particularly egregious examples of the past – whether it is the Holocaust or the Cambodians against the Khmer Rouge, and we now see it with the Kurds, and then there are some examples that are not quite so sharp, such as the Palestinians and the

Israelis – the system is very bad at protecting people from their governments.

The UN club has always said state sovereignty is supreme and everything else is sacrificed to that. So the Kurds have no voice. Is there something positive that can come out from all of this that can begin to help people that don't have a seat in this club of nation states?

Heller: It is not just starting now. It is not by accident that Bahgat pointed to Helsinki as some kind of seminal breakthrough, because there was a process there of enshrining the legitimacy of discussions about human rights within somebody else's state, as a beginning of the kind of delegitimization of this notion that state sovereignty is the ultimate value of the system. The same thing happened, incidentally, with respect to South Africa. If we had been playing by the rules, which say that you don't interfere in somebody else's internal affairs, there could never have been any kind of international action against South Africa, but there was. The problem is that there are more discouraging precedents about failure to do anything in the most atrocious cases.

Hunter: I had my UN years, and sat in on innumerable sessions of human rights commissions and the sub-committee on the protection of minorities, and what have you. I saw the cynicism of the great powers. There are some rules and regulations in regard to gross and systematic violations of human rights. After Halabja [the Kurdish town subject to gas attack by the government of Iraq in 1988], there was a motion in the human rights commission to do something against Iraq, and I have to say, shamefacedly, that the US government prevented that. Over the years, human rights have been basically used as a political propaganda tool. I saw this during the Carter administration when I was at the UN. It was done by putting pressure on the Soviets. Every time you are against some country you say they are abusing human rights. We don't need to change the Charter, we have to put our money where our mouth is. Apply these existing principles and strengthen the UN system. ▽