Erdogan & Turkey Are the Least Qualified to Espouse the Cause of Sunni Muslims

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The Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his senior officials are pulling a new trick in their never ending destructive game in the Middle East. This time around they are out to arouse division and strife among misguided Sunni Muslims followers and followers of the Shiite sect. A Cheap desperate call by an Erdogan never tired of continuously changing skin as a manipulating politician that for someone who immensely contributed to the raging internecine wars in the Arab world, Erdogan and his coterie are never shy of trying new tricks to rally the world of Sunni Muslims to stand behind him in his mostly Turkish nationalist drive to revive the Ottoman Empire. Erdogan and his Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, accused and warned Iran of spreading Shiite theology trying to convert Muslims of the Sunni Sect into Shiism, all contrived to serve a new Turkish agenda for territorial acquisition in Syria and in answering the new Trump Administration to collaborate with Washington in rekindling the Syrian war and causing the division of Syria into cantons under the rubric of so-called “Safety Zones,” a new innovation by US Secretary of Defense James Mattis.

Interestingly, when the comparison is drawn between Iran (Persia) and Turkey in judging the cultural and historical contributions to Arab/Islamic Civilization all through history, the Ottoman’s contributions and modern Turkey’s contributions to the enriching and security of the Arab world starkly pale in comparison. As a matter of fact, and as clearly attested to by historic evidence, the Ottoman Turks, mostly oppressive military warriors prone to military conquests and control, who ruled for Four Long Centuries over the Arabs contributed hugely to the deterioration and to the stagnation of the cultural, literary and scientific life in the Arab world along contributing to the political and administrative decadence of the Arabs and the Arab world. Rather on the contrary, a stifling Ottoman Turkish extended rule over the Arab lands brought the Arab language to near extinction had it not been to the Arab domains breaking free of the Ottomans upon the fall of the Ottoman Empire during the First World War.
Not a single Arab scientist, thinker or a scholar of renowned international recognition or to that matter even narrow regional renown came to existence during four long centuries of Ottoman Rule. Same can be said of the dearth or near total absence of renowned Turks in general who excelled in any scientific or literary and cultural fields other than the military field during the long Ottoman rule. Four long centuries of Ottoman Rule left the Arab world and the Arab people terribly backward at a time when Europe was experiencing profound and far reaching transformation and revival in religious reform; cultural development; advancements in political governance and more representative political systems; scientific and industrial renaissance; intellectual enlightenment and all sorts of progress touching on each and every aspect of European life.

Therefore, and upon the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Empire’s Arab constituency found themselves very backward and lacking in indigenous national strengths and capabilities rendering them an easy prey to Western colonialist predators’ hegemony, exploitations and to the tragic Zionists’ schemes of the colonization of Palestine and the mass eviction of the indigenous Palestinian people on the force of the creation of a Jewish Homeland in their place.

Turkey, ever since the break-up of the Turkish Ottoman Empire, took an anti-Arab stand siding mostly with the hegemonic imperialist powers; becoming a full-fledged member of the Western military alliances running opposite to the Middle Eastern people’s aspirations and to check the Middle Eastern people’s progress towards liberation and the legitimate unity of the Arab world. Turkey was among the first to recognize the Zionists’ usurpation of Palestine and in the forging of close political, diplomatic, economic and even military relations and cooperation with the new Zionist entity.

However, and by a stark contrast, the Iranians renowned all through history as Persians, inheritors of a rich Persian heritage and Persian civilization were instrumental in the founding of the renaissance of the Islamic Civilization nearly all through the 9th, the 10th and the 11th Centuries trailing as far down until the 12th and 13th centuries.

Great Persian scholars of the examples of Al-Farabi (Died 950 A.D.), Ibn Sina (Avicenne - died 1037 A.D.), al-Bīrūnī (died 1048 A.D.), al-Razi (864-930 A.D.), Omar Khayyam, Rūmī (1273 A.D.), to name a few, were luminous whose names remain intertwined with Islamic Civilization as remain widely referenced to this day in the general scientific, philosophical and literature records of Western
heritage (see my attached article, “Persian Contributions to the Islamic Civilization,” January 13, 2008).

Arab and Persian cultures became closely intertwined during the centuries of the Islamic Renaissance of the Golden Age of the First Abbasid Empire as Persian functionaries, in the example of Persian Al-Bamareka clan, organized the system of governance, Civil Service, administration and bureaucracy for the orderly management and control of a sprawling Abbasid empire under the rules of Harun El-Rasheed and his sons Al-Ameen, Al-Mamoun (born to a Persian mother) and Al-Mutassem.

**In short, the Arab-Persian interactive relations touched on every aspect of Arab-Persian lives for a few centuries marked by revival and a renaissance in every aspect of Arab and to some extend Persian lives.**

However, come the 16th Century of the Common Era, the Turkic expanding power and thrust of continuous military conquests West and East gave rise to a new Persian Empire that was given birth in 1501 under the rule of what’s then became known as the Safavid dynasty. The Arabs stopped figuring out during the ensuing centuries and the rivalry, especially in the following centuries of the dominance of the Ottomans and the Iranian Safavid Empire.

The Safavid dynasty, named after Ismail Savavid of Turkicized origin, was one of the most significant ruling dynasties of Iran, often considered the beginning of modern Iranian history. The Safavid shahs ruled over one of the greatest Iranian empires after the 7th-century Muslim conquest of Iran, and established the Twelver school of Shia Islam as the official religion of the empire, marking one of the most important turning points in Muslim history.

The Safavid dynasty had its origin in the Safaviyya Sufi order, which was established in the Azerbaijan region. It was of mixed ancestry (Kurdish and Azerbaijani, which included intermarriages with Georgian, Circassian, and Pontic Greek dignitaries). From their base in Ardabil, Azerbaijan, the Safavids established control over parts of Greater Iran and reasserted the Iranian identity of the region, thus becoming the first native dynasty since the Sasanian Empire to establish a unified Iranian state.

The Safavids ruled from 1501 to 1722 (experiencing a brief restoration from 1729 to 1736) and, at their height, they controlled all of modern Iran, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Armenia, most of Georgia, the North Caucasus, Iraq, Kuwait, and
Afghanistan, as well as parts of Turkey, Syria, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Despite their demise in 1736, the legacy that they left behind was the revival of Persia as an economic stronghold between East and West, the establishment of an efficient state and bureaucracy based upon "checks and balances", their architectural innovations and their patronage for fine arts. The Safavids have also left their mark down to the present era by spreading Shi'a Islam in Iran, as well as major parts of the Caucasus, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia.

The Safavid conversion of Iran from Sunnism to Shiism took place roughly over the 16th through 18th centuries and made Iran the spiritual bastion of Shia Islam. Judging in retrospect, one could never remove the political motivation spurred by all ambitious rulers’ intent on asserting and establishing their continuing distinct Dynastic Rule as the main reason for the Safavids’ shift to Shiism. With Sunni Islam being the mainstream religion of the controlling political powers of the region, the Safavid Kings aimed at divorcing with controlling regional powers in fulfillment of the carrying out of their ambitious plans to creating a distinct, powerful and expanding empire. This is true following the Arab adage, rather the motto, “People follow the Religion of their Rulers,” “الناس على دين ملوكهم.”

This is true of many situations in history of ambitious rulers wanting to establish their distinct continuing reign and solidify the authority and control of their ruling dynasties over varied and sprawling constituencies. Emperor Constantine the Great declared Christianity the official religion of the state by convening the First Council of Nicea in Nicea (nowadays Iznik, Bursa province of Turkey), in AD 325. The First Council of Nicaea, first ecumenical council, was a council of Christian bishops convened in the first effort to attain consensus in the Church to establish the Canonic Bibles. The First Council of Nicaea’s main accomplishments were settlement of the Christological issue of the nature of the Son of God and his relationship to God the Father, the construction of the first part of the Nicene Creed, establishing uniform observance of the date of Easter, and promulgation of early canon law.

Similar example exists of the conversion of the Kazar Turks under the initiative of the King of the Kazar Empire in Eastern Russia, Crimea and the Ukraine to Judaism in the 8th Century A.D. in what later became the European Ashkenazi Jews. The King of the Kazar Empire’s motivation not too divorced of that of the Roman Emperor Constantine I aiming at adopting a religion distinct and different
from those of neighboring Christian Byzantium and Muslim Caucasus, a new adopted theology that would assert the Kazars’ independence and unique power.

Ismail Safavid’s adoption of Shiism is not all that divorced of the historic examples of other ambitious Empire Building rulers preceding him in the examples of the Constantine I and the Kazar ruler. Adopting Shiism, a perfect Islamic sect, seemed to have served Ismail’s objective of rendering Iran the repository of Persian cultural traditions and self-awareness of Iranianhood, acting as a bridge to modern Iran. It also ensured the dominance of the Twelver sect (Twelve Imams originating at Caliph Ali and ending in the enfant Imam twelve’s descendant of Ali’s lineage who mysteriously disappeared in 870 A.D. at the age of 5 as considered the Mahdi, the Messiah who would reappear to lead the world into a just life).

Shiism has always ruled and dominated under the Zaydiyyah and Ismaili sects including the long extended rule of the Ismaili Fatimid who ruled for nearly two centuries beginning the 10th century AD until the end of the 12th century over the entire Maghrebien Region, Egypt (As the builders of Cairo and the Azhar Learning Institution) and the Levant. The extended Ismaili Fatimid rule over extended geography at the heart of the Arab world never infringed on the core beliefs or the religious life of Muslims under their rule during their two long centuries’ rule.

Through their actions, the Safavids reunified Iran as an independent state in 1501 and established Twelver Shiism as the official religion of their empire, marking one of the most important turning points in the history of Islam. Besides, the Safavid Kings themselves claimed to be Seyyeds, family descendants of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, although many scholars have cast doubt on this claim.

After the conquest, Ismail El-Safadi began transforming the religious landscape of Iran by imposing Twelver Shiism on the populace. Ismail imported for that purpose a new Shia Ulema corps from traditional Shiite centers of the Arabic speaking lands, largely from Jabal Amil (of Southern Lebanon), Mount Lebanon, and Syria, while to a much lesser extent from Bahrain and Southern Iraq in order to create a state clergy. These scholars taught the doctrine of Twelver Shiism and made it accessible to the population and energetically encouraged conversion to Shiism. To emphasize how scarce Twelver Shiism was then to be found in Iran, a chronicler tells us that only one Shia text could be found in Ismail’s capital Tabriz. Thus it is questionable whether Ismail and his followers could have succeeded in forcing a whole people to adopt a new faith without the support of the Arab Shiite
scholars. The rulers of Safavid Persia also invited these foreign Shiite religious scholars to their court in order to provide legitimacy for their own rule over Persia.

Shiism is more prone to the allegoric exegesis of the Quran and observance of higher spiritual metaphysics stemming from great Sufi influences; this, as Shiites closely observe and fully adhere to the requisite 5 tenets of Islam rendering them indisputably full-fledged observing Muslims.

The Shiites high reverence of the descendants of Prophet Muhammed, El Seyyeds, stems from exaltation of El Seyyeds’ inherent wisdom, near full infallibility and great ability to interpret the esoteric meanings and not readily obvious purpose and the essence of the Divine message entrusted to Prophet Muhammad and his selective descendants. The Shiites’ tendencies to generally adopt the allegoric interpretation of the Quran place them in a stark contrast with the Sunni Salafis’ adoption of the literal and strict interpretations that tend not to evolve, keep pace, adapt to changing times and the changing realities of life.

Carried to excesses, Shiite rituals commemorating Ashora, the 10th of the Lunar Hijra Month of Muharram, the date of remembrance of the Assassination of the Prophet’s grandson Imam Al-Hussein, tend to alienate the Shiites from the Sunnis as such a ritual is rightly perceived as a pagan ritual not condoned in the Islamic teachings. This in no way, abhorrent and uncivilized expression of mourning of long bygone era as is could ever cut into the Shiites’ well entrenched core Islamic beliefs widely shared by the rest of the Sunni Muslims.

In conclusion, increasingly megalomaniac and unpredictable Chameleon Erdogan anew shifting political coloring is inviting Sunni-Shiite Sectarian strife playing on Sunni-Shiite Sectarian sensitivities with his most recent outcries to only add to his most dismal and sinister acts of the ongoing most destructive internecine strife plaguing the entire Arab region.

Erdogan and Turkey do not qualify, judging by the record, to speak and espouse the Cause of Sunni Muslims as his sectarian fraught divisional call only invites further disservice, wars and destruction of lives, to Arabs and Sunni Muslims.