Russia Back to the Middle East

Professor Sattar Kassem

Lately, the Russian president said that the fall of the Soviet Union was a geo-strategic catastrophe. He meant that that US has been able to advance in its influence and domination geographically to the extent that put the whole world into strategic imbalance. This is true for Russia that has been pushed back to what could be an imposed confinement. It has been strangled and constantly humiliated by American advances in almost all world regions.

It is clear that the Russian President is dissatisfied with the absence of Russian influential roles in international issues, and working toward restoring Soviet thrust. The Middle East is a one important region that provides a suitable atmosphere for superpower competition and self-imposition. The Region is still unstable and a final peaceful settlement with Israel is still remote. The US has been monopolizing the political scene and giving Russia just a ceremonial role. This is true, for instance, for the Road Map which is supposed to be a political initiative coined by the US, UN, Russia and the European Union. The Russian role in implementing the initiative is restricted only to the rituals of formal political four-partite meetings.

Most probably that is why president Boten decided to sell Syria anti-aircraft missiles. Syria has been begging the Russians for these missiles for so many years due to the present open Arab skies before the Israeli war planes, and Russia had been adamantly refusing. In the last Syrian President visit to Russia few months ago, Russia decided to drop 70% of Syrian debts that amount to 11 billion $US, and to provide Syria with air defenses. The Israelis and the Americans have been outraged, but Russia ascertained that the deal will be fulfilled.

This new Russian approach has been reiterated by the President, and currently practical steps have been marched. The Russian president decided to make a trip to the Middle East and visit three key parties: Egypt, the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Although this looks to be an even handed trip, the Israelis and the American must be unhappy because of fears that American monopoly of political activities will be broken. Israel and American express their appreciation of international sharing in the efforts towards peace in ME, but they confine this participation in minor and marginal roles.

To the contrary of the Israelis, the Palestinians are happy to see the Russians back to the region because they badly need a neutralizer. They tried over the years to convince the Russians to play a major role in the peace efforts, but the Russians remained reluctant. That is why the Palestinians felt dismayed and sacrificed to the Americans and the Israelis. In Palestine, it has always been explained that the absence of rival or competing international powers has weakened the Arabs and the Palestinians in particular, a thing that has made a fair and just peaceful settlement in the region impossible. The Palestinians have been telling that the Americans are driving them toward surrender not toward peace. With the new development, they might have a chance to breathe.

The Russian president has promised to get Russia back to constructive political roles in the region and to work hard toward the realization of a final settlement. That is why, Boten has called upon the different parties involved in the peace talks to hold a summit in Moscow. The Americans immediately rejected the idea as fruitless and un-timely.

The Russian President promised to provide aid to the Palestinian Authority, and presented a couple of helicopters to the Palestinian president to replace the two that were ruined by the Israelis early in the Intefada.

Apparently the Russian President has a feeling of relaxation now due to the political and economic stability that Russia has achieved, and, thus, has a wider margin to maneuver in international politics. If this is the conclusion that he has reached, then it is expected that Russia will re-establish the un-buried Arab-Soviet ties. The Arabs and the Russians have mutual interests and both of them have a lot to gain.