The Middle East in the 20th Century

Course Guidebook

Eamonn Gearon
Arabist and Author

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Eamonn's other Great Courses include *Turning Points in Middle Eastern History* and *The History and Achievements of the Islamic Golden Age*. ∎

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

Guides

Supplementary Material

THE
MIDDLE EAST
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

The contemporary Middle East and North Africa—otherwise known as the Arab Middle East—is one of the world's most important geopolitical regions. By studying the history of the region in the 20th century, you can develop a better understanding of the main political, social, and religious trends that have shaped events in individual countries and the region as a whole. In this way, you will also get insights into those issues that are of vital importance in the modern world, including intra- and international conflicts, the emergence of democracy in the region, the economics of oil and gas, the modern emergence of terrorism in the greater Middle East, and the power and roles of Islam, whether religious, cultural, political, or some combination of all three.

As well as introducing many of the historical threads that originate in the region during the 20th century, this course examines the century of emerging trends while at the same time combining these macro developments with particular events. Examples of this include the emergence of Jewish nationalism, or Zionism, and the birth of the State of Israel in 1948; the rise of Arab nationalism and the 1956 Suez Crisis; the growth of militarism in the region and the attendant rise of coup d'états both successful and failed; and the important, ongoing role played by some militaries in national politics.

Another major political force, Islamism, is also tracked across the breadth of the 20th century and beyond, from the birth of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928, to the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and on to the events of the 2011 Arab Spring.

This course also considers the growing importance of oil and gas in the years following the Second World War and the continuing role of petroleum economics. It discusses the century of progress that has taken place in everything from advances in health care and education to the steps taken toward women's rights in the Middle East and the journey that still lies ahead in this area of universal concern and importance.

Taken together, these stories from the history of the Middle East and North Africa in the 20th century provide a clear, detailed, and comprehensible picture of this most complex and fascinating region. These insights will allow you to make your own informed judgments about the contemporary Middle East and to more fully appreciate the historical and political importance it continues to have today.

Lecture 1

A **MIDDLE EAST** CROSSROADS IN THE YEAR 1900

The Middle East in 1900 was a dynamic region undergoing massive internal and external transformation—much of it similar to the social dynamics in the West at the same time. As the decades wore on, the region would see far-reaching and accelerating changes in social, political, and economic life. And yet today, many people might continue to view the Middle East and North Africa as a distant, unchanging, monolithic bloc that is so foreign as to defy our ability to comprehend and penetrate its veil. This course aims to change that perception.

Territorial Boundaries

You might think that the term *Middle East* refers to a single, universally accepted geographical distinction, perhaps of ancient pedigree. It doesn't.

The term *Middle East* was coined at the start of the 20th century. At that time, the term *Near East*—referring to Ottoman Anatolia and the Levant—was also in widespread use, referencing territory that encompasses modern-day Turkey, Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. The term *Far East*, by contrast, referred predominantly to China, Japan, and Southeast Asia, including the territory encompassed by imperial French Indochina.

In September 1902, US admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan—an expert in naval war strategy—published an article called "The Persian Gulf and International Relations." Here is where the term *Middle East* might have appeared in print for the first time. Mahan was referring to seaborne approaches to India from the west, through the Persian Gulf.

Persian Gulf is itself a somewhat loaded term. The Arab states of the Arabian Peninsula refer to these waters as the Arabian Gulf. *North Africa* is a more intuitive geographic label, referring to Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and sometimes Sudan.

Today, scholars and diplomats frequently refer to the broader geopolitical area as the Middle East and North Africa. This refers to the predominance of the Arabic language and/or majority-Muslim affiliation of most of the region's peoples. It also includes the non-Arabic-majority State of Israel but only sometimes extends to Iran, where Farsi—not Arabic—is spoken. And it typically does not include Turkey, which, though a Muslim-majority nation, also has its own language.

Notwithstanding this careful distinction, this course will periodically use the term *Middle East* when referring to the broader area of the Middle East and North Africa.

Nationalism

At the turn of the 19th century, many Middle Easterners were drawn to the dynamism of modernization that the West seemed to represent. This included industrialization, nationalism, and such classic Enlightenment ideals as individual liberty and the separation of church and state. But the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa also maintained a desire to hold on to their local traditions.

One of the most influential Muslim reformers of the period was the scholar Muhammad Abduh. Abduh was a founding figure of a school of Muslim thought called Islamic Modernism, which sought to respond to—and reconcile—Western cultural norms with the traditional practice of Islam.

Nationalism was one of the most important and most obvious political trends in the Middle East and North Africa in the 20th century, just as it had been earlier in France, Germany, and Latin America—and as it would be later in colonial Asia and Africa.

The Ottoman sultan in Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul) still controlled significant territory at the turn of the 20th century, despite having lost influence for decades—even centuries—in the farther corners of his empire. But nationalist voices were murmuring in the empire's heartland (modern Turkey) and among ethnic and religious groups such as Arabs, Armenians, and Jews.

In a couple of decades, nationalism would break the sultan's hegemony, dissolve the empire, and see the eventual emergence of a dozen states, beginning with Turkey in 1923 and including Cyprus, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and parts of Saudi Arabia and Greece, as well as Israel and the Palestinian territories.

On the other hand, Turkish and Qajar Persian authorities opposed ethnic nationalism and attempted to persuade their subjects to adopt or accept a united identity based on the territorial shape of the empire itself. In 1902, 47 political reformers convened behind closed doors at the First Congress of Ottoman Opposition. The delegates, who were known as the Young Turks, wanted to replace the Ottoman monarchy with a constitutional government.

Jewish nationalism was also on the rise in Europe. Austro-Hungarian Jewish intellectual and author Theodor Herzl felt some urgency to create a Zionist movement after pogroms, or anti-Jewish persecution, appeared across Europe. Believing that anti-Semitism would not go away, Herzl pushed for the creation of a safe national home for the Jews—a dream that would eventually come to pass with the 1948 creation of the State of Israel.

In April 1908, an army unit under Young Turk leadership marched on Constantinople. The sultan failed to put down the rebellion due to its popularity among the troops. So, in July 1908, the sultan capitulated to the Young Turks' demands, restoring parliamentary rule and the constitution of 1878.

The revolution ushered in multiparty democracy for the first time in Ottoman history, though the sultan remained nominally in power until 1922. In 1913, the first Arab Congress was convened in Paris to discuss greater autonomy for Arabs living in the ethnic Turkic-controlled Ottoman Empire. So began the dawn of yet another nationalist movement in the region.

European Imperial Powers

By 1900, European imperial powers—notably Britain and France—were already keenly involved in the region. Western imperialism had gotten underway with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt and Syria in 1798. It extended further with the construction and opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, underwritten by a joint-stock company based in Paris. France initially held a majority 52% of the shares of the Suez Canal Company, with Egypt owning 44%. But within a few years, Britain had acquired Egypt's shares.

Britain's first possession in the region came in 1839 with the seizure of the Red Sea port of Aden, in the south of Yemen. Britain invaded Egypt in 1882 and overturned a populist, military-led uprising. Then, in September 1898, the Irish-born British army officer and colonial administrator Lord Herbert Kitchener ventured into North Africa to defeat the army of the Muslim religious and military leader Muhammad Ahmad (known to his followers as the Mahdi), who had fought and briefly won independence for the Ottoman territorial possession of what is today Sudan.

In January 1900, the first passenger train ran from Cairo to Khartoum, capital of Sudan, and marked British rule along the Nile until the withdrawal of the last British troops in 1956. In 1899, the Kuwaiti emir Mubarak Al Sabah went so far as to sign a pact making his Middle Eastern territory a British protectorate, securing British sea routes to India.

This is another reason why the Middle East held such particular importance for the European powers. At the same time, the relative impotence of regional leaders and populations in the face of European encroachment into their economies, political life, and cultural norms was a source of anger and embarrassment.

In 1900, the discovery of oil in the region was imminent. The first concession to search for black gold was issued in 1901, when the shah of Persia (in contemporary Iran) granted British millionaire William Knox D'Arcy a license to explore for oil for a period of 60 years.

The first strike in Persia came in May 1908, leading to the formation of the London-based Anglo-Persian Oil Company, which the British government would soon take control of. It was an early predecessor of the global energy giant BP, formerly called British Petroleum, and it became an important source of British energy supplies and an eventual catalyst for Persian nationalism. Oil was discovered in the Arab world in 1927 near Kirkuk, in the British mandate of Iraq.

Conclusion

A crossroads of three continents—Europe, Asia, and Africa—the Middle East and North Africa in 1900 was one of the most multicultural, multiethnic, multilinguistic, and multireligious places on earth. There was a clear majority Muslim-Arab population. But there were also significant numbers of non-Arab indigenous populations.

Regional capitals such as Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem were cosmopolitan centers with publishing houses, newspapers, and theaters. In contrast, the Arabian Peninsula remained remote, little-touched, and largely unknown.

A Western traveler in the Middle East and North Africa at the turn of the 19th century would more than likely take their geographical bearings from the Christian Bible. But far from fixed in time, the Middle East and North Africa at the dawn of the 20th century had already begun a process of revolutionary social, political, and economic change that would accelerate through the next 100 years.

Reading

Abduh, *The Theology of Unity.*

Barr, *The Unchanging East.*

Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East.*

Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation.*

Egger, *A History of the Muslim World since 1260.*

Gearon, *The Sahara.*

Herzl, *The Jewish State.*

Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples.*

Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East.*

Questions

1 In 1900, the Ottoman Empire had been referred to as "the sick man" of Europe for some 50 years. By the dawn of the 20th century, was the empire doomed to collapse? Why or why not?

2 To what extent were nationalisms that took root in the Middle East—including Arab, Armenian, and Jewish nationalisms—authentically indigenous, or homegrown, versus political philosophy imported from Europe and the wider West?

CONSTITUTIONAL
REVOLTS IN
PERSIA AND **TURKEY**

I t's not easy to predict what will start a revolution. History is filled with examples of people enduring years of terrible social conditions and economic hardship—or living through decades of oppression—before rising up to overthrow a hated regime. What tips people over the edge often comes from unexpected quarters. In 1905, it was the price of sugar in Persia. This lecture discusses two constitutional revolutions in the Middle East in the years leading up to the First World War and their enduring influence today.

Constitutionalism in the Middle East and North Africa

For a constitution to be valid, a set of rules must be agreed on by the majority of society. The application of these democratically established rules allows for the ordering and regulation of a nation according to the terms of that constitution.

It's unlikely that you'd describe the political makeup of the contemporary Middle East as bursting with democratic countries. Instead, you might mention autocracy, corrupt monarchs, military dictators, and secret police. But while these terms might fit the current political reality, it doesn't mean the desire for democracy isn't as strong there as anywhere else in the world.

Demands for constitutional governments in the Middle East and North Africa started even as the same desires were being pursued across Europe. The movement began in the late 18th century in Western Europe and then spread to North America.

The first reforms in the Ottoman Empire were issued in 1839 in the imperial capital of Constantinople. Called the Tanzimat reforms, these were baby steps toward something resembling a democratic government. They included provisions aimed at the liberty of all individuals, equality under the law for Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, and a single system of universal education. Meanwhile, in another corner of the Ottoman Empire, Tunisia adopted a full-blown constitution as early as 1861.

Two factors were especially important in the spread of these demands for constitutional government. One was the general population's increased access to education. Broader sections of society were able to read, write, and discuss ideas about democracy. A second factor was industrialization and the development of modern military technologies.

The dynastic king in Persia, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah, and the sultan in Constantinople, Abdul Hamid II, initially welcomed the promise of wealth that foreign trade represented. But it soon became obvious that the Middle Eastern rulers weren't a match for these Western interlopers. What had started as the pursuit of trade became something far more insidious: dominating Western influence in the Middle East and Asia more broadly. Educated local elites were among the first to organize and try to do something to halt it.

Persia's Constitutional Revolution

In December 1905, the governor of Tehran accused two sugar merchants of price gouging and told them to reduce their prices. The merchants argued that a price reduction was impossible because unlike foreign merchants, who paid a 5% tariff on imported sugar, Persian merchants were required to pay a 20% tariff on the very same product.

The governor was unimpressed and ordered the two sugar vendors to be bastinadoed—caned—in public. But fellow merchants and the public revolted. Across Tehran, shop owners refused to open their doors. By shutting down the bazaar, they brought the city to a standstill. Others joined the strike, including religious scholars and students. They barricaded themselves inside mosques, government offices, and other sites across the city.

The protesters drew up a series of demands that were submitted to the country's prime minister. They demanded the establishment of a House of Justice, which was to be a place where representatives of the people would gather to debate and raise grievances regarding the running of their country. So, by the summer of 1906, the protestors in Tehran were calling for some form of parliament.

In 1905, Japanese land forces—supported by a powerful modern navy—crushed the forces of imperial Russia. This outcome shocked all European colonial powers. It was the first time in the modern era that an Asian nation had beaten a European one. And for those in the Middle East who were demanding greater say in how their countries were run, Japan's victory was enormously inspirational.

Mozaffar ad-Din Shah agreed to this demand. Persia's first elections were held in the autumn of 1906, and the National Consultative Assembly sat for the first time that October. Without wasting time, the assembly passed a number of modernizing reforms, including the introduction of a free press.

On December 30, 1906, the shah signed a piece of legislation known as the Fundamental Law, which was Iran's first constitution. It made his power contingent on the will or consent of the people. Having accepted this revolutionary shift toward a more democratic system, Mozaffar ad-Din Shah died of a heart attack three days later.

Mohammad Ali Shah

Mozaffar ad-Din's death is far from the end of the story. He was succeeded by his 34-year-old son, Mohammad Ali Shah, a bitter opponent of the new constitution. Mohammad Ali was determined to throw out the constitution and halt Persia's shift toward democracy.

Ali began his reign by pretending to support the National Consultative Assembly and the constitution. But against a backdrop of rising prices for food and other basics, he succeeded in manipulating the poorest in society, getting them to agitate for the restoration of royal authority and against the constitutionalists.

In August 1907, Britain and Russia signed an agreement to divide Persia into two spheres of influence, with Russia getting the north and Britain the southeast. A neutral zone between them was also designated. This marked an entente for Britain and Russia in what was known as the Great Game—a period of rivalry, competition, and mutual distrust that revolved around Russian imperial ambitions in Asia and Britain's jealous guarding of India, with Afghanistan as a buffer between them.

When the Anglo-Russian agreement became public knowledge, the new king argued that the constitutionalists had failed to protect the country's sovereignty. Sensing he had sufficient popular support, the shah moved against the assembly in June 1908. The constitution was abolished, and leading members of the constitutional movement were arrested and executed.

The shah was back in power. But his ascent was brief and came at the expense of a civil war that ended in the summer of 1909. Reconstituted constitutionalist forces then marched on Tehran, forcing the shah to abdicate, and the victors replaced him with his 11-year-old son. After Persia's second national elections, they also reestablished the constitution.

After four years of revolution and counterrevolution, the National Consultative Assembly was back in power. And the constitutional revolution had come to an end, at least for the time being.

> The arrival of wealthy and powerful European trading companies often caused great disruption to local trade networks, overturning existing channels of patronage and access to capital and power. Domestic revolutionary moments can be seen in part as reactions to modernization and other newly emerging movements from the West. Modernity and traditionalism were locked in an epic struggle, with both views having their proponents.

The Ottoman Empire's Constitutional Revolution

The Ottoman Empire faced its own constitutional revolution in 1908. It was a rerun of an earlier period of constitutional government from 1876 to 1878. Now, Ottoman army officers in Macedonia and other Balkan territories mutinied. Their main demand was to reestablish an earlier constitution that had been abandoned in 1878 by Abdul Hamid II, who, decades later, was still the sultan.

One difference between the situation in the Ottoman Empire and that in Persia was that events in the Ottoman Empire were driven largely by secret societies. The most important secret society to emerge was the Committee of Union and Progress, or CUP, which went on to play a central role in Turkish politics until the end of the First World War. Within the Ottoman Empire, they were known as Unionists. Elsewhere, they're better known as the Young Turks.

For decades, the weakening Ottoman Empire had been losing territory in Europe and elsewhere. The Young Turks were determined to halt, if not reverse, this trend. The concept of the Ottoman Empire's greatness was immensely important to the Young Turks, who saw ethnic Turks as the dominant group.

The mutiny that Ottoman officers had started in Macedonia spread through the Balkans to the Ottoman capital of Constantinople. This protest swelled with wide popular support. The movement's leaders demanded the restoration of the former constitution and reestablishment of the lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, in the country's proto-parliament.

Sultan Abdul Hamid II had no choice but to restore the old constitution and the Chamber of Deputies. And an amendment to the constitution gave the chamber more genuine political power than it previously had. Nevertheless, from the time of the constitution's restoration to the outbreak of the First World War, the empire's political environment remained tumultuous, spiked by further uprisings and coups as competing groups struggled to consolidate power.

Conclusion

The constitutional revolutions in Persia and the Ottoman Empire ultimately fell short of the hopes of reform-minded groups and individuals. They failed to more conclusively limit the power of imperial rulers or establish effective democratic assemblies. In addition, the Young Turks' ethnic focus rankled many non-Turks and spawned competing nationalist movements of Arab and others.

Still, the constitutional movements were a powerful inspiration for future generations. This period of Middle Eastern history is marked by the emergence of democratic institutions and such concepts as political representation, national citizenship, and the separation of powers among the ruled and the ruler. It's fully in line with liberal and republican trends in Western politics.

Consequently, it's entirely appropriate to think of these constitutional revolutions as a genuinely democratic experiment in governance. The movements might have failed, and arguably they may remain unfulfilled today, but they created a political legacy that resonated throughout the rest of the 20th century and that one day would inspire the protestors who took to the streets during the Arab uprisings in the early 21st century.

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———, *Modern Iran since 1797*.

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Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

Egger, *A History of the Muslim World since 1260*.

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.

Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*.

Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*.

Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

Khalidi, Anderson, Muslih, and Simon, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*.

Kipling, *Kim*.

Questions

1 What drove the constitutional revolutions in Persia and the Ottoman Empire? Do you think the causes were driven more by foreign or domestic concerns?

2 What do you think caused the failure of the constitutional revolutions?

3 How different might the history of the 20th century in the Middle East and North Africa have looked had these revolutions been successful?

WORLD WAR I AND THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE'S FALL

Nationalism was one of the most important trends in the history of the Middle East and North Africa during the 20th century. Different types of nationalism emerged across the region, including Arab, Jewish, and Turkish forms. Each was forged in the crucible of the First World War, and all played significant roles in national and regional politics for the rest of the century. This lecture considers the stories of Mustafa Kemal (later known as Atatürk), the founding father and first president of the Republic of Turkey; Chaim Weizmann, eminent chemist, Zionist, and first president of Israel; and Faisal bin Hussein, battlefield leader of the Arab Revolt and king of Syria and later Iraq.

Mustafa Kemal

The start of the First World War is marked down as July 28, 1914, precisely a month after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Among other things, the war led to the collapse and dissolution of the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, tsarist Russia, and the Ottoman Empire. Inevitably, the breakdown of ruling structures created power vacuums into which new political ideologies would grow.

The Ottoman Empire's predominantly agricultural populations were ill-prepared for modern, industrialized warfare, and they were desperate to not be drawn into the conflict. But Ottoman armies had for years been reliant on German military trainers, so they were forced into siding with Germany and its allies against Britain and France—two countries that would soon have their eyes on a postwar rearrangement of the region.

The Ottomans entered the war on October 29, 1914. In spite of British and French predictions that they'd be knocked out of the conflict in a matter of months, they stayed the course for the next four years until signing a truce on October 30, 1918, two weeks before the comprehensive armistice of November 11.

One reason for the Ottomans' relative success during the war was the leadership and military acumen of officers such as Mustafa Kemal. Kemal was in charge of Ottoman forces on the Gallipoli Peninsula, in modern-day Turkey. He correctly guessed where enemy forces might attempt a landing and had his men dug in and waiting when the British and their allies arrived in February 1915.

British and Allied forces failed to break through Turkish lines for the next 11 months and eventually withdrew during the dead of night in January 1916. This great success propelled Mustafa Kemal into the Turkish national consciousness and proved inspirational in persuading his exhausted compatriots to fight a four-year war of independence against Greece, France, Britain, Armenia, and others from 1919 to 1923.

It was this Turkish War of Independence that led to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey, with Kemal—or Atatürk—as its founding father and first president, a position he held until his death in 1938.

THE BASES OF CIVILIZA
TION IN THE NEAR EAST ARM
ENIAN CRANES × OURFA×
1914 — 1919

The Ottoman Empire, by some estimates, lost a staggering 25% of its population between 1914 and 1918. This figure includes the estimated 1.5 million Ottoman Armenians who died as a result of state-sponsored genocide. Such losses inevitably led to ruptures in the economic, political, and societal realities of the region.

Chaim Weizmann

Like other types of nationalism, Zionism takes different forms. But the common denominator is the claim to Eretz Israel—or the "Land of Israel"—as the focus of Jewish self-determination. Jews had no state of their own for almost 2,000 years, so they were forced to live as diaspora communities in Europe and elsewhere around the world.

Chaim Weizmann, the Zionist statesman who would serve as modern Israel's first president, was born in Russia in 1874. He earned a PhD in Organic Chemistry from the University of Fribourg and then became a senior lecturer at the University of Manchester. His research into the natural fermentation processes of microorganisms made him known as the father of industrial fermentation.

By 1915, Weizmann's bacterial-fermentation technique was able to produce large quantities of acetone, a colorless and volatile flammable liquid used as a propellant in explosives. The implication is obvious. Overnight, Weizmann's discovery became integral to the Allied war effort. He became director of the British Admiralty laboratories and was quietly lauded as a British hero.

With important connections at the top of the British government, Weizmann wasted no time in sharing his ideas with people in power. The foreign secretary Arthur Balfour—a member of Parliament for Manchester—had known Weizmann before the war and was sympathetic to the establishment of a Jewish homeland.

On November 2, 1917, Balfour proposed establishing a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. But while the British government was endorsing the Zionist cause, it failed to share this fact with its Arab allies.

> Zionism was a minority position among Jews, both religious and secular, even as recently as the start of the First World War. A clear majority of European Jews advocated for assimilation within whichever country they were living. The Zionist counterargument was that the centuries-long persistence of anti-Semitism in Europe had doomed the policy of assimilation to failure.

Britain was happy to declare its support for Arab independence—at least for the duration of the war—while also backing the Zionist cause, despite the obvious competition that would result from any overlap between the proposed territories of the two possible states.

Starting in July 1915, Sharif Hussein of Mecca and Sir Henry McMahon, Britain's high commissioner to the Sultanate of Egypt—a British protectorate—exchanged a series of letters in which Hussein was promised an independent Arab kingdom once the war was over. Satisfied that an agreement had been reached, Hussein and his sons launched the Arab Revolt against Ottoman forces in June 1916.

Shortly thereafter, Sharif Hussein declared himself king of the Arabs, a self-promotion that would ultimately come to nothing. What territories the Arabs and the British believed were included or excluded from the agreement for a postwar Arab kingdom became the subject of fierce debate, and the proposed independent Arab kingdom did not come to pass.

Faisal bin Hussein

Although King Hussein was the titular head of the Arab Revolt, he did not lead the action. This was the responsibility of his third son, Faisal bin Hussein. But the cause of Arab nationalism—and the dream of an Arab independent state—did not spring from Faisal's imagination at the start of the war.

Long exposed to European merchants, missionaries, and ideas about political representation, 19th-century Arab intellectuals were alarmed by a contrary form of nationalism known as Ottomanism, which was a last throw of the dice by the Ottoman rulers to save their fracturing empire by imposing a single Ottoman identity on all peoples within their borders. Ottoman Turks' claims of their own natural superiority did not sit easily with the empire's Arabs, Armenians, and other minorities, and they developed their own forms of nationalism and demands for autonomy or independence.

It's then that Hussein, who had no obvious prewar track record of support for Arab nationalism, emerged with support from Britain as a standard-bearer of Arab nationalism. The war in the Middle East was going badly for Britain and France at the time, and they were happy to make any number of contradictory or otherwise incompatible promises to help them win the war, including the Balfour Declaration and promises to the Arabs.

Faisal's army of the Arab Revolt took Damascus in October 1918 and declared it a kingdom in March 1920. Just four months later, the British stood by as French troops forced the Arabs out of the city. A degree of guilt in Prime Minister David Lloyd George's government led Britain to make Faisal the first king of Iraq, a title he held from 1921 until his death from a heart attack in 1933.

The British also installed Faisal's older brother, Abdullah, as king of Transjordan, later renamed Jordan. The creation of these two Arab kingdoms can be seen as consolation prizes for two of Sharif Hussein's sons. But these Arab states were intended to be loyal and obedient to British interests in the region and not standard-bearers of Arab nationalism.

Conclusion

The end of the war in Europe came on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, when an armistice came into effect along the Western Front. The Ottomans and Allies suffered a combined 1.4 million military casualties, including dead and wounded.

It's hard to imagine the British government making the Balfour Declaration, which supported the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people, had it not been for the war. The same is true of British promises to the Arabs. In peacetime, there would have been no reason for the British to have any interest in supporting an independent Arab state.

It was impossible for Britain to live up to all of its wartime promises. That said, in an ad hoc settlement that blended British strategic interests in the Middle East with a smidgeon of guilt at betraying its wartime Arab allies, it facilitated the creation of the kingdoms of Transjordan and Iraq. And although it was decades before it came to fruition—and again resulted from self-interest over rectitude—Britain eventually sponsored an independent Jewish state in the British mandate for Palestine.

Reading

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Barr, *A Line in the Sand*.
Coates Ulrichsen, *The First World War in the Middle East*.
Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.
Fawaz, *A Land of Aching Hearts*.
Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*.
Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*.
Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*.
Howell, *Queen of the Desert*.
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Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of War*.
Morris, *Farewell the Trumpets*.
Rogan, *The Fall of the Ottomans*.

Questions

1 Bearing in mind the First World War backdrop, can the British authorities be excused for making various contradictory and incompatible promises to different interest groups, including the Arabs, the French, and the Zionists?

2 Might it have been possible for Arab and Jewish nationalists to have come to a more acceptable postwar accommodation had Britain and France not been so heavily invested in their own interests in the region?

Lecture 4

EGYPTIAN
REVOLUTION AND
TURKISH INDEPENDENCE

The First World War presaged the final destruction of the Ottoman Empire. In the years after the war, local populations fought for independence, battled to stave off foreign control, and loudly proclaimed disappointment with the peace agreements forced on them. Inevitably, these treaties were designed to benefit European powers and their local proxies. This lecture considers the Turkish War of Independence, beginning in May 1919; anti-British uprisings from Egypt to Iraq; and what the map of the new Middle East and North Africa looked like after the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

The Turkish War of Independence

The Treaty of Versailles was signed by the Allied powers and Germany on June 28, 1919, five years to the day after the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke Franz Ferdinand had set Europe on the road to war. The treaty required Germany to disarm, give up certain territories, accept responsibility for the war, and pay reparations.

The Allies then turned their attention to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and who would lay claim to which former Ottoman territories. Hostilities in the empire had ceased in October 1918 with the signing of the Armistice of Mudros, but the Allies' plan for sharing Ottoman lands was not made public until the subsequent Treaty of Sèvres was signed in August 1920.

Because so many Allies demanded a portion of Ottoman territory, the terms laid out in the treaty were harsher than Germany itself was forced to accept. Turkish nationalists based in the central Anatolian city of Ankara, now the capital of Turkey, formed a breakaway government led by the senior general and war hero Mustafa Kemal, better known today as Atatürk. The nationalists declared their intention to fight Allied forces to overturn the treaty, and they began by stripping the treaty's Ottoman signatories of their citizenship.

> The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916—by which Britain and France, with the consent of Russia and Italy, secretly agreed to divvy up the Arab lands of the Ottoman Empire—is often cited as one reason why there's so much instability in the modern Middle East.

Atatürk organized small militia units that soon found themselves confronting troops from Britain, Greece, and other European nations, including French imperial forces from North and West Africa. Yet Atatürk's men were also confronted by fellow Turks who didn't share the nationalists' vision. Lacking any domestic armaments production, Atatürk's forces relied on materiel support from Bolshevik Russia.

At the same time, Britain and its allies were exhausted and virtually insolvent after four years of fighting Germany. Atatürk's forces ultimately prevailed and negotiated a settlement that overturned the Treaty of Sèvres and preserved Anatolian territorial integrity. This new agreement, the Treaty of Lausanne, was signed on July 24, 1923, and the Republic of Turkey was declared on October 29.

Egypt's Nationalist Movement

Elsewhere in Britain's Middle Eastern empire, Egypt had been effectively ruled since 1882, when British forces put down a nationalist revolt. Since then, Egypt had been considered an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire, but it was wholly controlled and run by British authorities. Britain kept the local khedive, or sultan, on his throne while maintaining the flimsy façade of not being in charge.

Then, at the start of the First World War, Britain removed the khedive, who was an Egyptian nationalist, and replaced him with his pro-British uncle. Britain also formalized the newly declared Sultanate of Egypt as a British protectorate and declared martial law across the country. It attempted to quell local anger with the promise that Egyptians would not be conscripted, but this was a promise that Britain was soon unable to keep.

Egypt was at the very center of anti-Ottoman war efforts by the British during World War I, and it was transformed into a garrison of British and Allied forces. Demand for essential materials, from cotton to food, shot up overnight. The British forcibly requisitioned these at below-market values, angering the locals. And worse was to come.

An estimated half-million Egyptians were recruited to serve the campaign against the Ottomans and the broader war effort. Tens of thousands of Egyptians would die. And when the war came to an end, they were left with runaway inflation and rocketing unemployment.

Against this backdrop, Egyptian nationalists sent a delegation called Wafd to the British high commissioner to request permission to join the Paris peace talks when they began in January 1919. The head of the Wafd movement, Saad Zaghlul, and his fellow Wafdists pressed for Egypt's independence. Instead of allowing the Wafd leadership to travel to London and Paris, however, the British instead had them arrested and exiled on the island of Malta.

Outraged by such flagrant disregard, anti-British demonstrations spread. So began Egypt's liberal nationalist revolution. By the end of 1919, about 30 British soldiers had lost their lives amid the nationalist unrest in Egypt, as had a similar number of European civilians. Meanwhile, some 800 Egyptian fatalities and more than 1,600 wounded had been recorded.

The Uprising in Iraq

Had this been Britain's only postwar headache, the empire might have weathered the storm. But another uprising in Mesopotamia—modern-day Iraq— caught Britain off guard. Mesopotamia hadn't been under British control before the First World War, but the League of Nations made it a British mandate until such time as it was ready for independence. When this would be was a decision left entirely to the mandatory power. The League of Nations also made Palestine and Transjordan (later Jordan) British mandates, while France played that role in Lebanon and Syria.

> One novel feature of Egypt's revolution was the active role played by virtually all segments of society. The sight of hundreds of women marching for independence was nothing short of revolutionary, marking the start of a more public role for women as political activists across the Middle East.

This very much looked like European imperialism. In response, some Iraqi clerics issued fatwas, or religious opinions, that it was unlawful to work for the British. Largely peaceful demonstrations started in Baghdad in May 1920, uniting some traditionally distinct sections of Iraqi society, such as Shia and Sunni Muslims. Violence erupted in June after another fatwa announced that it was the duty of the people to peacefully demand their rights and that the oppressed were permitted to use defensive force if the British prevented the people from obtaining these rights.

Lacking enough soldiers on the ground, Britain deployed the Royal Air Force to bomb unruly tribes. By November 1920, roughly 10,000 Iraqis had been killed, along with some 1,000 British and Indian soldiers. The cost to the British treasury was roughly £40 million—more than had been spent on the entire British-backed Arab Revolt against the Ottomans during the war.
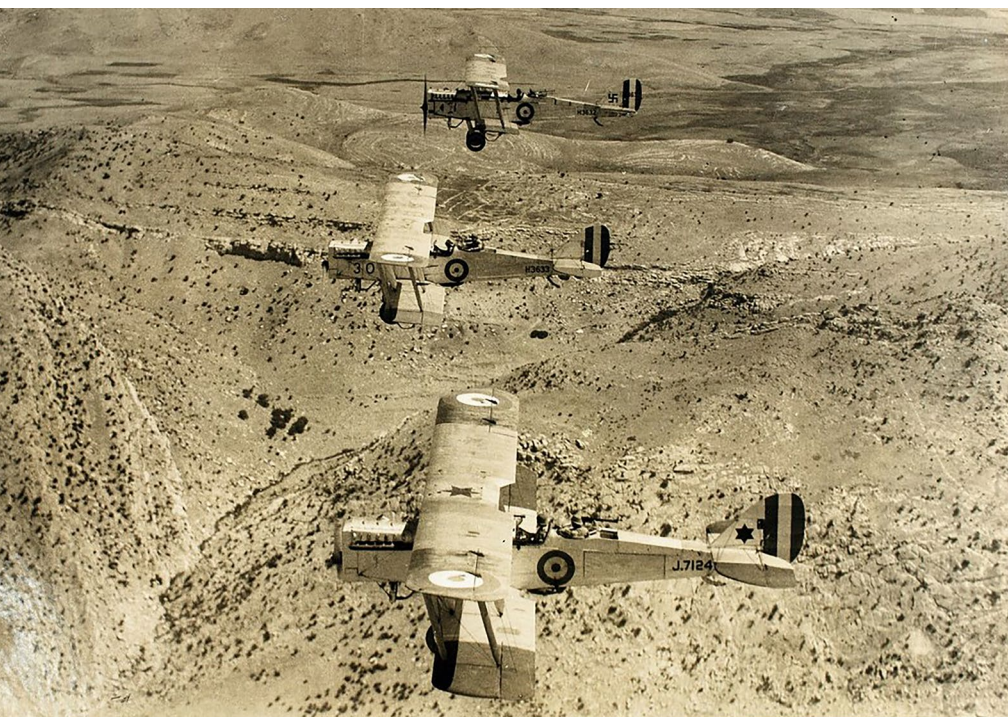
In the short term, Britain could claim victory in both Egypt and Iraq, restoring order in both places. But suppressing the revolts had proved prohibitively expensive, and an alternative approach was needed, as future uprisings remained likely. Coupled with these realizations was the fact that Britain still had to settle matters with France, which was both its greatest ally during the war and its biggest peacetime rival in the Middle East.

Britain's Arab allies had occupied Damascus in October 1918. Sharif Hussein of Mecca's third son, Faisal, saw Damascus as a natural capital for an independent Syrian Arab kingdom. But France believed that Syria belonged to it, so British forces withdrew, leaving Faisal's poorly equipped army in place. Faisal declared himself king in March 1920, though his kingdom was to last a mere four months before his Arab troops surrendered to the French.

Some British officials might have felt a degree of shame for deserting their Arab allies, but a clear majority saw that Britain's relationship with France was more important. Winston Churchill was appointed Britain's colonial secretary, and one of his first jobs was to build a team of advisors to help him work out a British plan for the Middle East.

In April 1921, Sharif Hussein's second son, Abdullah, was installed as the king of the newly created Transjordan emirate, with only the British crown above him. Four months later, his younger brother, Faisal, was crowned king of Iraq—a Sunni ruling over a Shia majority. The Shia majority wouldn't have its collective voice heard in Iraq for another 80 years. More important to the British, however, was that the French were more or less happy with how things stood.

Conclusion

Coming almost five years after the end of the First World War, the Treaty of Lausanne finalized the conditions of the League of Nations' mandates in the Middle East, and it marked the official end of the state of war between the former Ottoman Empire and Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and Romania.

The Treaty of Lausanne settled international borders out of former Ottoman lands, including the boundaries of Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. It ceded to Greece all but two of the islands, islets, and other territories in the Aegean Sea that lay more than three miles off Turkey's shores.

As such, the Treaty of Lausanne finally closed the door on the Ottoman Empire and ushered in the birth of the Republic of Turkey. It marked a central moment in the creation of the modern Middle East and a new starting point across the region for the rest of the 20th century.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation*.

Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*.

Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace*.

Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*.

Herzl, *The Jewish State*.

Howell, *Queen of the Desert*.

Ingrams, *Palestine Papers*.

Khalidi, Anderson, Muslih, and Simon, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*.

McMeekin, *The Ottoman Endgame*.

Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*.

Questions

1 What might have happened to Anatolia, the Turkish heartland of the Ottoman Empire, had it not been for the inspirational leadership of Mustafa Kemal, or Atatürk?

2 Why did Britain and France consistently misunderstand and underestimate the strength of nationalist feeling in regions of the Middle East and North Africa where they had mandatory control?

MONARCHIES OF THE 20TH-CENTURY MIDDLE EAST

The 20th century saw the creation of more democracies than any other century in history. Yet today, more than a third of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa remain monarchies. This lecture surveys the monarchies in this region from the end of the First World War in 1918 to the start of the Second World War in 1939. It also considers how the discovery of oil transformed some of the region's otherwise-impoverished principalities into some of the wealthiest regimes on earth.

A History of Middle Eastern Monarchies

Many people assume that Middle Eastern monarchies are fantastically ancient powers of an almost Biblical vintage. But the oldest unbroken dynasty is that of Morocco's Alaouite family, which has been in power there since 1631. Elsewhere, Oman's Al Said ruling family rose to power in 1792, and Bahrain's Al Khalifa line did so four years later, in 1796. Egypt's ruling family came to power in 1805, when its dynastic founder, Muhammad—or Mehmet—Ali, broke from his Ottoman masters and helped himself to the throne.

In Qatar, the Al Thani family took over in 1878, and Kuwait's Al Sabah family came to power in 1896. Britain created two Arab monarchies in 1921: the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, which today is called Jordan, and the Kingdom of Iraq, which came to a bloody end in 1958. Finally, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded in 1932.

Morocco, located on the extreme western edge of North Africa—roughly 2,000 miles from Constantinople—was simply too far away to have ever been conquered by the Ottomans. The other royal states that remained independent of the Ottomans—Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Bahrain—were also of roughly equal distance from the imperial capital, on the southern and western shores of the Persian Gulf.

For the places that had been part of the Ottoman Empire—including Kuwait and the Hejaz, or western Arabia—the empire's dissolution was a golden opportunity for rulers across the Middle East and North Africa to come out from the shadow of the sultan in Constantinople. Freed from having to swear loyalty and pay tribute to an overlord, local rulers were keen to more fully assert their personal authority.

Now, instead of delivering the communal Friday prayers in the name of the Ottoman ruler, emirs and tribal leaders had a space in which they could boost their individual legitimacy and increase their authority. Among the more obvious means of demonstrating personal power was securing one's territories and external borders. In some cases, this was done by mutual agreement, such as entering into a treaty with neighboring tribes. Or a peace was forced on them—say, at the point of gunboats of Britain's Royal Navy.

As far back as the 1820s, Britain established treaties with numerous emirates, or principalities, up and down the Persian Gulf. British merchants were tired of seeing their ships attacked in these waters, and traders and the government in London wanted a guaranteed safe passage to India. So, they offered financial incentives and struck deals with local powers in the Middle East to gain security and favor.

Ibn Saud and Saudi Arabia

Yet another way of securing power was by conquest, as was the case with Saudi Arabia. Ibn Saud shaped the creation of Saudi Arabia in a series of campaigns across 30 years. In 1902, he and his Wahhabi fighters secured their first major victory in recapturing Riyadh—today Saudi Arabia's capital—from their regional rivals, the Al Rashids, who had taken it from the Sauds in 1890.

The Sauds, after conquering one oasis town after another, signed an agreement with the British in December 1915, called the Treaty of Darin. The British recognized the newly emerging Saudi state, while in return Ibn Saud recognized British protectorates in eastern Arabia. There was no mention in this agreement of the Hejaz—the lands held by Sharif Hussein of Mecca, who was about to fight on Britain's side in World War I.

> The vast bulk of central Arabia—the Saud family's ancestral homeland—had remained beyond the control of the Ottomans for most of their imperial history. Nobody really wanted to conquer this remote and harsh place, which was seen by many as being completely worthless—that is, until the discovery of oil.

While Ibn Saud seems to have been focused on smaller skirmishes with the British to gain local influence, his chief domestic rival, Sharif Hussein, had set his objective as ridding the peninsula of Ottoman influence—not least because doing so would protect him from the Ottoman authorities, who were at that very moment planning to remove him as the emir of Mecca.

At the start of Sharif Hussein's revolt against the Ottomans, in June 1916, Hussein unilaterally declared himself king of the Hejaz. This would never have been permitted if the Ottomans were still in charge there. For the remainder of the First World War, Hussein and his sons enjoyed British and French support, but the Britain-Hussein alliance was self-limiting and weak. Britain was unwilling to do anything that would jeopardize its alliance with France.

Eventually, these parallel Arabian Peninsula conflicts collided, bringing Ibn Saud and Hussein into direct confrontation. In 1924, Britain lost patience with Hussein, eventually withdrawing its financial and political support for him and the Hejaz. Ibn Saud's Wahhabi forces proceeded to invade and conquer this transitory state along the western edge of the Arabian Peninsula.

Meanwhile, in 1927, Britain and Ibn Saud signed the Treaty of Jeddah, recognizing Ibn Saud's sovereignty over both his Najd homeland in the center of the peninsula and Sharif Hussein's former territories in western Arabia. For his part, Ibn Saud agreed to stop attacking neighboring British protectorates in eastern Arabia, such as Kuwait, Qatar, and the Trucial States.

In 1932, Ibn Saud announced the establishment of a new monarchy, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, which his heirs continue to rule to this day. Indeed, Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world whose ruling family's name is in its official title.
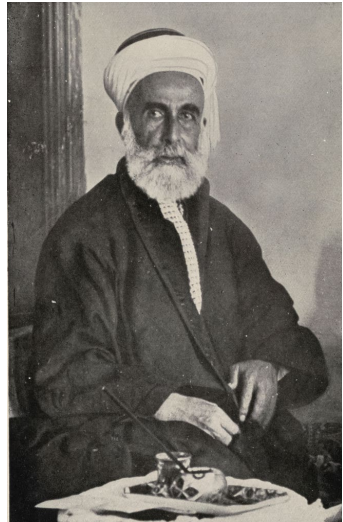
The Discovery of Oil

Most Middle Eastern monarchies in the years before the Second World War—especially those on the Arabian Peninsula—were not super rich by any standards. Hajj pilgrims making their way to Mecca provided a useful boost to the state coffers, and seaborne trade sustained emirates around the peninsula. But none of this was comparable to the riches the exploitation of oil would bring.

Seven years after the shah of Persia granted William Knox D'Arcy a concession to search for oil, British geologist George Bernard Reynolds struck black gold in modern Iran in 1908. It was found in Bahrain in 1931 by Frank Holmes, a British–New Zealander mining engineer, with production starting the following year. That was followed by oil strikes in Kuwait in 1937, in Saudi Arabia in 1938, in Qatar in 1940, and in the United Arab Emirates in the 1950s.

In the wider region, major oil and gas reserves were discovered in Algeria in 1956, six years before the country gained independence, and in the United Kingdom of Libya in 1959.

The fantastic wealth associated with the Arabian Peninsula today didn't enrichen its monarchies overnight. The main reason for the delay was because the first concessions for exploration and drilling were awarded in favor of international, Western oil corporations. In the short term, the Middle Eastern monarchies were happy to have any oil money flowing in. It might not have been much, but it was enough to keep them afloat and spread a little prosperity among their subjects.

Conclusion

In 2020, there were 195 sovereign states in the world, give or take. Of those 195, 44 have a monarch as the head of state. But Britain's Queen Elizabeth II is the head of state for 16 of those 44, meaning that there are actually just 29 individual monarchs as head of state. That's 14% of the world's total number of states. Some are absolute monarchs, others mere figureheads, and some have powers that are limited by law.

Of the approximately 20 states of the Middle East and North Africa, however, eight of them are monarchies—40% versus the global figure of 14%. Two are considered constitutional monarchies, and two are absolute monarchies. In reality, the other four lean more in favor of the king than any representative body.

It's hard to say if the monarchies of the Middle East have a future. Many people today see monarchies as anachronistic. Wealthy monarchs can certainly use patronage to remain in power, but the survival of this ancient tradition in modern times will require a hefty degree of flexibility and adaptability if these monarchies have any chance of staying put.

Reading

Bidwell, *Dictionary of Modern Arab History.*

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth.*

Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East.*

Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East.*

Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies.*

Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East.*

Owen, *Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life.*

Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb.*

Questions

1 Would there have been as many Middle East monarchies as there were at the start of the 21st century if there were no significant oil and gas deposits in the region?

2 Do Middle Eastern monarchies have a future if global economies continue to move toward clean, renewable sources of energy? What reforms might they introduce to secure their survival?

THE **MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD** AND **ITS FOUNDER**

At the start of the 20th century, the Muslim Middle East was dominated by foreign powers. Into this maelstrom stepped a succession of Muslim reformers who argued that the Arab world had lost its independence and sense of identity amid the foreign domination. The reformers claimed that the best way to push back was through a return to the model of Islamic society exemplified by Muhammad and the earliest days of Islam. Hassan al-Banna was one of a number of Islamic reformers to emerge during the early 20th century. His Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen, or Muslim Brotherhood, was established as an Islamic reformist movement, and it grew rapidly during its first decade of existence.

Hassan al-Banna's Early Life

Hassan al-Banna was born in 1906 in the Egyptian town of el-Mahmoudia, where a canal connects to the Nile River. As an important transport hub, the town was garrisoned by British forces during World War I. There were periods of tension and even occasional outbursts of violence between locals and the foreign soldiers during and after the war. The British occupation struck the young al-Banna as unjust.

Hassan's father was an imam, or prayer leader, and a teacher in a local school. Because his father had a small library of Islamic texts at home, al-Banna was exposed to Qur'anic exegeses and religious arguments from a young age. That said, he would never become a formal religious scholar in the same vein as Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida. Instead, al-Banna's strength, and no doubt popularity, had more to do with how easily he connected with regular Egyptians.

Two important Islamic reformers of the period preceded Hassan al-Banna: Muhammad Abduh, who is considered the founder of Islamic modernism, and Rashid Rida, Abduh's sometime disciple. One aspect of Islamic modernism that both Abduh and Rida espoused was the view that Muslims shouldn't blindly accept the interpretations of religious texts as handed down by medieval clerics. They argued that the realities of contemporary life should be considered when interpreting and applying the historical scholarship.

Beyond his family, one of al-Banna's earliest influences was an Egyptian army colonel, Ahmed Urabi, who in 1882 led a nationalist uprising against the influence of Britain and France in his country and in opposition to Egypt's royal family, which he saw as submissive to the foreign powers. In the next major public uprising—the Egyptian revolution of 1919—al-Banna marched against the British occupation. He was 13 years old.
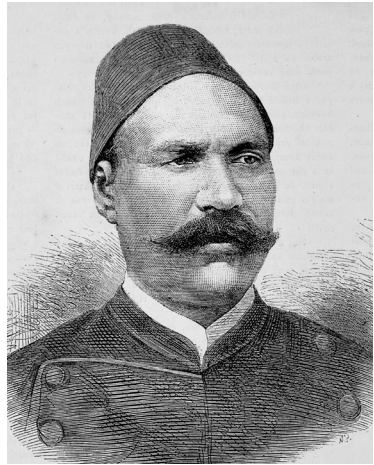
In 1924, Atatürk—president of the newly created Republic of Turkey—abolished the caliphate in Constantinople, ending 1,400 years of nominally religious governance in the Muslim Middle East and replacing it with a secular, republican system of governance in Turkey. For al-Banna and many millions of other Muslims, the disappearance of the caliphate represented the end of an era that had begun with Muhammad's death in 632. Al-Banna opposed the tendency to secularization in the region. He also rejected the Western influences he saw driving this change.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Determined to fundamentally change society, al-Banna was 23 when he founded the Muslim Brotherhood. Its initial goal was to promote spiritual and moral improvements in the community. To make the organization more appealing to Arab youth, it was deliberately created on what Hassan saw as an Islamic footing, promoting what he called an authentically local, non-European face.

Al-Banna's vision was to employ religion to further pan-Islamic political ends. He and his followers interpreted dogma to bolster original and distinctly modern political views—positions opposed by the established political order. Having concluded that the established order failed the population, one of the brotherhood's most-quoted slogans is "Islam is the answer."

Al-Banna used existing networks in a bottom-up social movement to weave his designs into a much older social fabric. Most obviously, he took advantage of the ties that existed around mosques and Islamic welfare associations. Everything al-Banna and the brotherhood advocated positioned Islam at its center, be it opposition to colonial rule, social inequality, the need for public health and education for the masses, or the growing conflict in Palestine between Jews and Arabs. By speaking out on so many pressing social and political concerns, al-Banna appealed to numerous groups simultaneously, achieving mass appeal among the rural poor and dispossessed as well as urban-dwelling civil servants and workers.

Membership in the Muslim Brotherhood grew rapidly. Within about 10 years, it stood at an estimated half million in Egypt, when the country as a whole had a population of around 17 million. Swelling subscriptions also gave the brotherhood funds to help people buy medicine or to educate the poor—the sort of things that many believed the state ought to provide.

In 1939, al-Banna wrote an open letter to Egypt's teenaged king, Farouk. Believing that the West was gripped by capitalist greed and empty materialism, he wanted the king to expel the British and guide Egypt forward on an Islamic path. King Farouk came to see the conservative Muslim Brotherhood as a useful counterweight to Egyptian communists and to the country's most important political party at that time, the secular nationalist Wafd party.

Despite the monarch's support, a 1941 British intelligence report identified the Muslim Brotherhood as a "serious danger to public security." Egyptian officials bowed to British pressure and briefly imprisoned al-Banna. But the British also offered to provide the Muslim Brotherhood with financial support if it would put a halt to its anti-British activities. To date, there's no documentary evidence of a response to this offer by al-Banna, but the brotherhood's anti-British activities did quiet down for the rest of the war.

Arab-Israeli War

By the end of World War II, whatever uneasy truce the brotherhood might have negotiated with the British came to an end. Demands for the expulsion of the British and the establishment of an Islamic state grew louder, and a wave of violence spread across the country. Egypt's prime minister and other officials were murdered by Muslim Brotherhood activists, and attacks against British military targets in the Suez Canal area became commonplace. Meanwhile, relations between the brotherhood and the king also soured, with Farouk unwilling or unable to tell the British to leave.

In May 1948, Britain announced that it was ending its supervisory administrative role in Palestine. Ever since shortly after the end of World War I, Britain had overseen Palestine while, in theory, preparing it for independence. The League of Nations' mandate handed Britain the legal duty to act as a caretaker government but not as a colonial power. In turn, the League of Nations' recently created successor—the United Nations—established Arab and Jewish zones in Palestine, with Jerusalem administered by the UN. This sparked a civil war.

On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, the executive head of the World Zionist Organization, declared the creation of the State of Israel. As a result, Egypt immediately went to war against the newly declared state as part of an Arab coalition, alongside troops from Transjordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen.

> The war saw about 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fleeing or being expelled from their homes in the area that became Israel, while the three years following the war saw a roughly similar number of Jews emigrating to Israel.

This first Arab-Israeli war proved disastrous for the Arab armies. After nearly 10 months of fighting, Israel emerged victorious. It gained control not only of the area proposed by the UN's partition plan of 1947 for a Jewish state but also close to 60% of the area allocated to the Arab's state, including Jaffa, Lod, Galilee, west Jerusalem, and some territories in the West Bank. Transjordan took control of the remainder of the former British mandate, and the Egyptian military took control of the Gaza Strip.

Al-Banna, having pushed hard for the disastrous war to take place, and having sent hundreds of Muslim Brotherhood members to fight, now blamed the king and the government for Egypt's humiliating defeat. Cairo's chief of police and the governor of Cairo province were assassinated. Then, in December 1948, Prime Minister Nokrashi Pasha was murdered by a Muslim Brotherhood member. It's not clear if al-Banna personally sanctioned the killing, but the Egyptian government responded by ordering the dissolution of the society. At the same time, it arrested dozens of the brotherhood's leaders and other members.

In January 1949, Egypt signed an armistice with Israel to which al-Banna responded by calling for Farouk's overthrow. A month later, in February 1949, the 42-year-old al-Banna was himself assassinated by government agents in Cairo. But this was far from the end of his legacy. The Muslim Brotherhood was intertwined with the deep-rooted Islamic revivalist movement that would continue to grow in the coming years and decades.

Conclusion

Two other Islamic modernists, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida, were steeped in centuries of Islamic scholarship. Hassan al-Banna's stance on many issues was more populist and more aggressive, and he was willing to ignore scholarship in the promotion of violence when it suited his aims.

So, was Hassan al-Banna the architect of Muslim extremism in the second half of the 20th century? Islam talks about two forms of struggle: a so-called greater jihad and a lesser jihad. Greater jihad is the personal struggle to be a better person, while the lesser jihad is armed conflict, or warfare. Al-Banna deliberately set aside centuries of scholarship on the subject to reverse this. He told his followers that they should regard the fight against colonial occupation, rather than the struggle to be a better person, as the greater jihad.

Today, it's hard to overstate the importance of Islamism in the political life of the Middle East and North Africa. Almost three-quarters of a century since al-Banna's death, Islamism is one of the most widespread and most divisive political trends in the region. It can also be argued that Hassan al-Banna did more than any other individual in making this come about.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East.*

Esposito, *Islam and Politics.*

Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East.*

Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation.*

Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age.*

Kepel, *Jihad.*

Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies.*

Qutb, *A Child from the Village.*

———, *Milestones.*

Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood.*

Questions

1 Would the Muslim Brotherhood have been more or less successful had Hassan al-Banna decided to root the movement more firmly in traditional Islamic scholarship rather than the garb of contemporary populism? How does this affect the movement's success at its foundation in 1928 versus its success in the present day?

2 Hassan al-Banna was not the only modern nationalist from the Middle East or North Africa to reject a secular nationalist ideology in favor of Islamist politics. Can Islamism as a political movement be said to have failed—a charge al-Banna and others once laid against secularist politics?

WORLD WAR II
FAULT LINES IN
THE MIDDLE EAST

For much of the Second World War, opinions in the Middle East and North Africa were not seen as all that important by the warring Axis and Allied forces—unless, that is, the locals were being asked to put on a uniform and fight for them. Instead of focusing on individual battles or campaigns, this lecture broadly examines how World War II affected the Middle East as a whole, including local populations and their political objectives.

Foreign Powers in the Middle East

After the First World War and the Treaty of Sèvres, signed between the Allied powers and the Ottoman Empire in 1920, the League of Nations granted Britain and France various mandates in the region. France got Syria and Lebanon, while Britain was handed Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. In theory, the mandate system was meant to prepare these states for independence, but Britain and France administered them like colonies. With the mandates, the British Empire reached its greatest territorial extent and became the world's largest-ever empire, covering a quarter of the globe.

While true that France and Britain were the most powerful foreign occupiers in the region at the outset of World War II, their standing wasn't as lofty or secure as it had been 20 years earlier. A series of nativist uprisings, revolts, and full-blown revolutions against the imperial powers had shown them to be vulnerable and maybe even prone to being toppled.

Beginning the first year after the end of the World War I, the British had been compelled to put down a nationalist revolution in Egypt. Afterward, fearful of further popular unrest, Britain made a unilateral concession and declared Egyptian independence in 1922.

The British confronted another outbreak of popular unrest the very next year in Mesopotamia, or modern-day Iraq. The 1920 Iraqi Revolt started in Baghdad with a series of mass demonstrations following the mandate grant, and another conflict broke out in the north as Iraqi Kurds also demanded their independence. Both uprisings were largely crushed by October 1920—at a cost of up to 10,000 Iraqi dead—but rumbles of discontent continued until 1922.

Meanwhile, inter-Jewish rivalries erupted in Palestine in 1921 and spread to Arab areas. Another wave of deadly violence erupted in Jerusalem in 1929, and in 1936, an Arab revolt against British administration in Palestine—combined with continuing mass immigration of Jews—provoked a civil war between Arabs, Jews, and the British. The fighting lasted for three years before the British brought an end to it.

The French also faced challenges during the interwar years. Between 1920 and 1927, the Amazigh population of the Rif Mountains in north Morocco fought French and Spanish forces for autonomy. The French also kept busy with the Great Syrian Revolt from 1925 to 1927, in which Syrians sought to overthrow French rule. As these examples make plain, the luster had worn off British and French power in the region after World War I and the peak of imperial power.

The North African Campaign

Combat in the Middle East and North Africa during World War II spanned a period of about 36 months, starting with Italy's invasion of British-occupied Egypt in June 1940 and concluding with the surrender of 250,000 German and Italian troops in Tunisia in May 1943.

On the European continent, the Second World War had been triggered by Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, followed by Britain and France's declaration of war two days later in support of their Polish ally. Subsequently, Germany invaded France in May 1940, emboldening Italy, which declared war against the Allies on June 10, 1940.

When France fell in late June, Britain lost its largest European ally and now confronted a new enemy: Vichy France, including its territorial outposts in the Middle East and North Africa. Vichy France was essentially pro-Nazi, so Britain could no longer count on its former allies in Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia. Furthermore, it now confronted hostile forces on its territorial borders in Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq.

Four days after Italy declared war against the Allies, British forces crossed from Egypt into Libya, and the North African campaign had begun. For the Allies, this was a hugely worrying development, not least because Italian forces in the region outnumbered British troops by a ratio of more than six-to-one.

The fighting in the Sahara and along the Mediterranean coastal plains was the most important front where Allied and Axis forces would clash until Operation Torch—the US-led invasion of Morocco and Algeria—two years later, in November 1942.

The North African campaign was notable for the seesaw nature of the fighting, with first one side making advances across Egypt and Libya before being forced to halt its forward motion, and then the inevitable push back by the other side. This continued for almost three years, until the Axis powers surrendered in 1943.

The Rashid Ali Coup

If British authorities hoped that Arab populations would remain pliant during the war, they were forced to think again as political turmoil broke out once more in Iraq.

In March 1940, the Arab nationalist Rashid Ali al-Gaylani became the Iraqi prime minister. Stringently anti-British, Rashid Ali sided with Germany and Italy during the war. But Allied victories in North Africa undermined support for Rashid Ali's government, and he was forced to resign in January 1941—but he wasn't gone for long.

Supported by German intelligence and military assistance from both Germany and Italy, four Iraqi generals launched a nationalist and pro-Nazi coup on April 1, 1941, and succeeded at overthrowing the pro-British regime. Rashid Ali was once again installed as prime minister, and the new government went on the offensive. They surrounded and laid siege to Britain's Royal Air Force base at Habbaniya and planned to use the surrounding war's mayhem to seize full independence for Iraq.

The coup's military leaders had reckoned that Britain was too weak and too occupied elsewhere to get in their way. But the coup made clear that British forces needed to quickly focus on the new crisis before oil supplies from Iraq were cut off or Germany gained the ability to confront British forces from Vichy-controlled Syria on Iraq's western border.

Another thing coup plotters failed to give full credit to was the strength and determination of Royal Air Force units based at Habbaniya. The units were able to launch almost continuous bombing raids against rebellion forces. Britain also sent reinforcements from India into southern Iraq and on horseback from Haifa—in what was then the British mandate for Palestine—into western Iraq.

As British forces now battled to the outskirts of Baghdad, Rashid Ali and a number of his senior allies fled east to Iran. The coup collapsed. An armistice brought the matter to a formal close on the last day of May 1941, followed by the installation of a new, pro-British government in Iraq.

Conclusion

US landings in Morocco and Algeria in November 1942 marked the beginning of the end of the war in the Middle East. Operation Torch would run for seven months, until May 1943, ending with the surrender of the remaining Italian and German forces in North Africa.

While Vichy France remained captive to its German occupier, its Middle Eastern possessions were about to move in a new direction. The head of the Free French government and forces, General Charles de Gaulle, appointed Georges Catroux as high commissioner to the Levant, with control over both Syria and Lebanon. While both states became autonomous, Lebanon became an independent democracy with elections in November 1943. And in February 1945—the last year of the broader war—Lebanon declared war on Axis Germany and Japan.

At the war's end, the French got cold feet about following through on its promise of granting Syria independence and responded forcefully in favor of a continued French occupation. British prime minister Churchill responded by ordering British troops and armored cars into Syria with orders to fire on French military forces. On reaching the Syrian capital, British troops escorted French forces back to their barracks. De Gaulle was prevailed upon to order a cease-fire and the withdrawal of the French forces from the country. Syria itself emerged as an independent country in 1946.

> The total number of colonial forces who served French and British interests during the war numbers in the millions. More than 300,000 North African soldiers fought on behalf of France. Britain itself relied on the service of Egyptians and other local forces in addition to the roughly 1 million non-Arab Muslims in the British Indian Army— 40% of its total. Well in excess of 1 million Jews also fought in the war as part of the armies of the Soviet Union, the United States, Poland, France, or Britain.

While most countries in the Middle East and North Africa were created after the First World War, it was only after the Second World War that most gained independence. Coupled with this major shift toward independence was a simultaneous realization that Britain and France were losing their power and influence. The inevitable outcome was their replacement in the postwar era with two competing forces: capitalism from the United States and communism from the Soviet Union.

Another important event toward the end of the war came in March 1945, when the Arab League was formed in Cairo. The original six members were Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia. The organization aimed to foster closer relations between the member states and to safeguard their independence and sovereignty. Although often riven with division, the Arab League still aspires to play a role in boosting the region's economy and settling disputes among its 22 member countries. Its formation was also a sign of the increased independence of the former colonial territories.

Reading

Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East*.

Gearon, *The Sahara*.

Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*.

Keay, *Sowing the Wind*.

Monroe, *Britain's Moment in the Middle East*.

Questions

1   Consider the role of troops from the Middle East and North Africa in securing victory in the Second World War for Britain, France, and the Allied nations. Were these soldiers unreasonable or unrealistic to expect independence for their nations after the war?

2   What might the Middle East and North Africa have looked like if Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy had won the Second World War?

EUROPEAN ANTI-SEMITISM AND ISRAEL'S BIRTH

European anti-Semitism in the 19th century was expressed through common bigotry and discrimination as well as violence. Out of such prejudice came the modern Zionist movement and Jewish determination to form an independent state. The birth of the State of Israel was one of the most significant events in the Middle East and North Africa during the 20th century. This lecture discusses the path leading to that momentous occasion of independence.

Zionism and the Jewish State

As long as there have been Jews in Europe—more than 2,000 years—there has also been anti-Semitism in Europe. This isn't to say that anti-Semitism was universally or consistently practiced. On the contrary, Jews often received protection of rulers who wanted to show they had the power to maintain law and order over their subjects, regardless of faith. Jewish subjects also had valuable skills that rulers wanted to safeguard, including finance, medicine, and craftwork.

At other times, a ruler might decide that anti-Jewish persecution was just the thing to assert their authority. In such instances, some of the most extreme forms of anti-Semitism would be state-sanctioned. Through the centuries, the persecution of Europe's Jews included forced conversion, confiscation of property, destruction of synagogues, judicial execution, extrajudicial massacres at the hands of mobs, and enslavement and expulsion.

In the late 19th-century Russian Empire, outbreaks of state-sanctioned violence against Jews became increasingly commonplace. One result of these pogroms was an exodus of Jews from the Russian Empire to other parts of the world, including Western Europe, Britain, and the United States, all of which offered—or seemed to offer—safe haven.

> In the year 70 CE, Roman forces destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple, the most important center of Jewish worship. It was a turning point in the doomed Jewish revolt against the Roman Empire. This was not the first mass expulsion of Jews from Israel, nor would it be the last. But the temple's destruction became a point of memory for Jews around the world.

Against this backdrop, it's apparent why many European Jews felt they were living in a shadow, constantly waiting for the next attack. Out of this came the birth of Zionism, which stated the aim of establishing a Jewish state in the land of Israel, the Jews' biblical homeland.

The dream of reestablishing a Jewish state was an old one. But in 1896, the Austro-Hungarian Jewish journalist, author, and political activist Theodor Herzl published a pamphlet titled *The Jewish State*. Herzl suggested that Jews should leave Europe for Palestine to establish a state of their own and avoid the anti-Semitism that had dogged them for centuries. He founded the Zionist Organization, today known as the World Zionist Organization, to help achieve this goal.

The Balfour Declaration

In the midst of the First World War, Britain was in dire need of help from any source. Herbert Samuel, the first Jew to serve as a member of the British cabinet, proposed that the government support Zionist ambitions. He argued that this would win worldwide Jewish support for Britain. The cabinet discussed the matter, canvasing Zionist and anti-Zionist Jews, though famously not asking Palestine Jews or Arabs. And it agreed to embrace Samuel's proposition.

On November 2, 1917, foreign secretary Arthur Balfour sent the 67-word Balfour Declaration to Baron Lionel Walter Rothschild, a prominent member of Britain's Jewish community, stating that "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people." And in 1920, the postwar League of Nations awarded Britain ruling authority in what was known formally as the Mandate for Palestine, effective as of September 1923.

As the Zionist plan for a national homeland gained momentum, Jewish migration began en masse into the mandate area. Aliyah—meaning "ascent," as in toward Jerusalem—became one of the most basic tenets of Zionism. Migration was not steady but rather occurred in waves, often in response to events elsewhere. The first aliyah began as far back as 1882, driven by the pogroms in Russia. The combined total of Jews migrating to the land of Israel over the course of the first four aliyahs, between 1882 and 1929, was 197,000.

But far more significant was the fifth aliyah, from 1929 to 1939. After Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933, virulently anti-Jewish policies lent urgency to the migratory tide. Some 250,000 Jews migrated to Palestine in the 1930s. By 1940, the Jewish population in the mandate was 450,000, or roughly 30% of the territory's total population.

Such an influx in a relatively short time was bound to have an impact. Palestinian Arabs responded with the Arab Revolt of 1936–1939, demanding Arab independence and the end of open-ended Jewish immigration. The British army and Palestine police force brutally put down the insurrection, though it took three years to do so.

The British government responded to the revolt with the release of a new policy for Palestine, known as the White Paper of 1939. The policy outlined strict limits on the number of Jews allowed to migrate into mandatory Palestine. Restrictions would also be imposed on future land purchases by Jewish migrants. At the same time, the White Paper declared Britain's intent to withdraw from Palestine and see the establishment of an independent Jewish homeland—with an Arab majority—within 10 years.

The Palestine Partition Plan

The last four years of the British mandate in Palestine—from February 1944 until May 1948—were marked by a well-organized Jewish insurgency in response to immigration restrictions. In August 1947, photos appeared in the media of two abducted British sergeants who had been murdered by Zionist terrorists and left hanging from two trees in an olive grove. Anti-Jewish rioting broke out across Britain, and British leaders expressed a desire to get out of Palestine as soon as possible.

The newly established United Nations called for a partition of Palestine and an end to the British mandate no later than August 1, 1948. Britain, in a hurry to leave, announced it would be gone by mid-May. The partition plan envisioned the creation of two separate states, one Arab and one Jewish, with special international status for Jerusalem.

The Jewish Agency for Palestine accepted the plan while noting certain problems in it. Arab leaders and governments rejected the plan in its entirety and added that they'd not accept any plan that included a territorial division. Nevertheless, the General Assembly approved the plan, called Resolution 181. It was adopted on November 29, 1947, and civil war broke out in Palestine the next day.

The most infamous event of the insurgency period was a bomb blast in July 1946 carried out by members of the Irgun. The blast destroyed a wing of the King David Hotel—the headquarters of British administrative and military authorities in Palestine—killing 91 people and injuring more than 40 others.

Seeing that the British mandate was to end soon, the Arab League had already started discussing possible responses, including military intervention. Between 250,000 and 300,000 Palestinian Arabs left Palestine—some willingly, and others not. On May 14, 1948, the flag of Israel was raised. When David Ben-Gurion, as head of the World Zionist Organization and soon to be his country's first prime minister, read aloud the Israeli Declaration of Independence, he did so beneath a portrait of Theodor Herzl, the intellectual founder of the Zionist movement.

Conclusion

The founding of the State of Israel was a remarkable triumph for Zionism. But the civil war in Palestine swiftly morphed into the first Arab-Israeli war, followed by decades of intermittent and unresolved conflict.

A week before the end of the mandate, the British Foreign Office had seen that an Arab military invasion was inevitable. It concluded that no Arab army—apart from Jordan's British-trained and British-led Arab Legion—would come out of the conflict well. Still, the Arab League announced it would act to guarantee the security and right to self-determination of the Arab-majority population in post-mandate Palestine. The result was a decisive Jewish victory.

Israelis call this conflict the War of Independence. Palestinian Arabs refer to it as *al-nakba*, Arabic for "the catastrophe." It resulted in the destruction of 400 or more Palestinian villages and more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fleeing or being forced from their homes. In all, close to 80% of the prewar Arab population left Palestine between 1947 and 1949. The precise number of refugees as well as the question of who counts as a refugee remain key issues to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict these many years later.

Reading

Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict.*

Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel.*

Dieckhoff, *The Invention of a Nation.*

Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East.*

Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict.*

Halpern and Reinharz, *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society.*

Herzl, *The Jewish State.*

Johnson, *A History of the Jews.*

Laqueur and Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader.*

Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine.*

———, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict.*

Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel.*

Shlaim, *The Iron Wall.*

———, *War and Peace in the Middle East.*

Thompson, *Legacy of Empire.*

Questions

1 With the birth of modern Jewish nationalism, Theodor Herzl and other Zionists argued that centuries of periodic anti-Semitism in Europe had proved Jews could never be entirely secure there. Was he right?

2 Would the State of Israel still have won its independence in 1948 had it not been for shame and outrage that emerged when the world became aware of the horrors of the Holocaust in Europe?

HOW **NASSER TRANSFORMED** EGYPT AND **THE WORLD**

Gamal Abdel Nasser was a towering figure in the Middle East and North Africa during the 20th century. He led the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and consolidated power to become prime minister in 1954 and president in 1956. This lecture examines domestic affairs and international relations under Nasser.

The Egyptian Revolution of 1952

Britain had been in control of Egypt since 1882, when its forces landed in the port city of Alexandria and put down a nationalist rebellion that had begun in the Egyptian army. In 1888, the signing of the Convention of Constantinople gave Britain the right to protect the Suez Canal area. Then, at the start of the First World War, Britain declared Egypt a protectorate, giving the British even tighter control.

In 1948, a coalition of Arab countries, including Egypt, suffered a humiliating defeat in a war with Israel. The Egyptian army's Free Officers Movement blamed King Farouk for this defeat, accusing him of being corrupt and excessively pro-British. Then, beginning in late 1951, nationalist Egyptian police officers began supporting domestic groups who were attacking British authorities. In one such attack, several British soldiers were killed. British forces launched an all-out assault, killing 50 Egyptian police officers and injuring 100 more.

When news of the police deaths in Egypt spread, the country exploded in riots. King Farouk's response was to dismiss the parliamentary government and declare martial law. That made matters worse, relying as it did on British enforcement. Between January and July 1952, Egypt experienced a succession of short-lived governments, none of which accomplished anything to meet protestors' demands for the British to leave the country and for an end to official corruption.

On July 23, 1952, Nasser and the Free Officers arrested key pro-royalist commanders around Cairo before returning to their barracks to take control of their soldiers. They then debated what to do with the king. Some wanted to him put on trial and execute him, while others spoke in support of abdication and exile. In the evening of July 26, Farouk sailed away on his yacht, bound for Italy. He died in Rome a little more than a decade later, at the age of 45.

Next, the plotters established a Revolutionary Command Council to consolidate their victory. In January 1953, this council banned all political parties in Egypt and declared a three-year transitional period during which it would rule. Six months later, the council abolished the monarchy, declared Egypt a republic, and named the 52-year-old general Naguib as Egypt's first president and prime minister.

Naguib's appointment gave the coup a popular public face. But it was never Nasser's intention to leave him in charge for long. Nasser started intriguing against Naguib, accusing him of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which the council banned in January 1954. In turn, Naguib was forced to resign the presidency in November 1954. Nasser, meanwhile, became head of the Revolutionary Command Council and subsequently Egypt's president.

Domestic Affairs

It was clear almost from the beginning that the Revolutionary Command Council had plans that went beyond getting rid of a disliked monarch. One of the most revolutionary changes the council implemented was land reform. Almost two-thirds of Egypt's land was owned by just 5% of the population in 1952. And a mere 0.5% of the population owned one-third of the country's agricultural land. On average, rents absorbed 75% of the value the land could produce.

On September 11, 1952, the Revolutionary Command Council imposed a radical new limit on how much land an individual could own. The limit was 200 feddans, or about 200 acres, a person. Any holdings above that were broken up and redistributed among peasant farmers. The new law also covered how much rent could be charged for the use of land, and it introduced a minimum wage for farmers. Egypt saw a remarkable 30% increase in cultivated land over the course of Nasser's 14-year presidency.

The Revolutionary Command Council also banned all existing political parties and numerous other organizations. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood had supported the overthrow of the king, Nasser now saw the grassroots organization as a possible opponent. The Muslim Brotherhood demanded four cabinet-level posts in return for its continuing support. Nasser rejected that, instead offering two junior ministerial posts, which made the group unhappy.

In October 1954, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood carried out an assassination attempt against Nasser while he was delivering a nationally broadcast radio speech to a rally in Alexandria. The unsuccessful plot gave Nasser an excuse to crack down on the Muslim Brotherhood and any other opponents. Thousands were imprisoned without trial, and at least six of the brotherhood's leadership were sentenced to death.

Nasser had the gift of being able to deliver rousing rhetoric that connected with the average person. He was also smart enough to realize that if he made himself a household name, he would be a stronger president. He embarked on a nationwide tour, delivering stirring speeches via radio. His long speeches extolled the virtues of Arab nationalism while attacking colonial oppression. This won him countless admirers and inspired many to follow in his footsteps.

Another key to Nasser's success was that his speeches often followed live radio concerts by the Arab world's most famous singer, Umm Kulthum. She threw her support behind the new Republic of Egypt in 1952.

The Suez Crisis

In October 1956, the Suez Crisis erupted between Britain, France, Israel, and Egypt. The importance of the Suez Canal to international shipping cannot be overstated, and there were many competing interests in and around Egypt at the time. For one thing, it was owned mainly by Britain and France and was under British—not Egyptian—control and protection.

On July 26, 1956, Nasser secretly ordered Egyptian forces to seize control of the canal. The Egyptians also closed the canal to Israel, in breach of international law. Britain, France, and Israel were furious. But they worried about what the United States' response might be to military action, which could drive Egypt closer to the communist Soviet Union. Britain established a secret pact with France and Israel under which the three countries would invade and retake the canal.

Israeli forces crossed into Egypt on October 29 and progressed swiftly across the Sinai Peninsula. The next morning, Britain and France issued joint cease-fire ultimatums to both Egypt and Israel. But this was a ploy that Israel ignored, giving Britain and France an excuse to land paratroopers to protect the canal.

The military objective was achieved, but political pressure from the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Nations forced the occupiers into a humiliating withdrawal. Most historians agree this was the moment when the idea of Great Britain as a major global power could no longer be sustained. Meanwhile, the retreat of British and French troops meant that Egypt could claim victory over two colonial powers in spite of its actual military defeat.

International Relations

Nasser made strides toward his pan-Arab dream with a union of Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic from 1958 to 1961. This was a politically united nation with Nasser as its president.

As soon as Nasser held the reins of power, he launched a draconian crackdown against Syrian communists. The power-sharing disparity became evident in the 600-seat National Assembly, in which Egyptians held 400 seats and Syrians held 200. Discontent grew among sidelined Syrian politicians and a diminished Syrian army. In September 1961, the United Arab Republic ended with a coup by a number of Syrian army officers, who declared their country's independence from the union. This was an embarrassing setback for Nasser.

Nasser also committed Egypt to a costly and ultimately unsuccessful five-year military intervention in North Yemen. But the next really serious blow to his standing was a disastrous defeat by Israel in the June 1967 Six-Day War. Israel had warned that closing the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping would constitute a cause for war. Then, Nasser announced that he would indeed close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli vessels after Israel responded to Arab threats to redirect water from the Jordan River.

On June 5, 1967, Israel—claiming the danger of an imminent attack—bombed 17 Egyptian airfields, wiping out most of Egypt's air force. Israeli ground forces invaded and occupied the Sinai Peninsula. Jordan and Syria also entered the war against Israel, having signed defense pacts with Egypt. Israeli forces swiftly captured the Jordan-controlled West Bank, the Egypt-controlled Gaza Strip, and Syria's Golan Heights.

On June 8, Egypt and Jordan accepted a UN Security Council cease-fire, and Syria agreed to the same the following day. Unwilling to leave Syria with a strategic advantage on the Golan Heights, however, Israel launched an attack against Syria. So, the cease-fire didn't take effect until June 10.

Conclusion

Nasser resigned as president, but popular demonstrations saw him swiftly reinstated, leaving high-ranking military officers to take the blame. Egypt's defeat should have been a fatal blow to Nasser's credibility as the Arab world's most popular and successful leader. But the hopes of the Arab world were pinned on Nasser. If he went down, the region would go down with him.

The long-term consequences were dramatic for civilians. Between 280,000 and 320,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from the West Bank, and more than 100,000 fled from the Golan Heights. Minority Jewish communities also fled across the Arab world. While Jordanians had sympathy for the

Palestinian refugees created by war, the arrival of hundreds of thousands of these people inevitably created tensions between the native inhabitants and new arrivals.

A diabetic and heavy smoker with a family history of heart disease, Nasser suffered a heart attack and died at age 52. He is remembered fondly by many in the Arab world for his anti-imperialist efforts as well as his efforts to improve the Egyptian economy and social justice through land reform and other measures. But his authoritarianism and abuses of human rights to maintain power ushered in a trend of dictatorial politics in Egypt and across the region that was increasingly at odds with international standards as the 20th century wore on.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.

Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East*.

Keay, *Sowing the Wind*.

Khalidi, Anderson, Muslih, and Simon, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*.

Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956*.

Naguib, *Egypt's Destiny*.

Wien, *Arab Nationalism*.

Questions

1   Egypt's 1952 Free Officers coup was revolutionary in that it overthrew King Farouk and replaced the monarchy with a republic. How successful were Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser in following this with positive societal and economic changes in Egypt?

2   To what extent was Nasser's political survival due to the genuine, widespread appeal of Arab nationalism? And to what extent was it due to a lack of any obvious or viable alternative leadership?

THE SUEZ CRISIS
AND COLD WAR
IN THE DESERT

The Cold War was an ideological, technological, economic, and military rivalry between the United States, the Soviet Union, and their respective allies. It would be wrong, however, to think of the half-century after World War II as entirely cold. On the contrary, the period catalogs a surfeit of coups, revolutions, uprisings, proxy wars, and other forms of military and political interference sponsored by one side or the other. This lecture examines the Cold War as it played out across the Middle East and North Africa.

The Eisenhower Doctrine

In the Middle East and North Africa region, the US-Soviet confrontation got going as a result of the Suez Crisis in 1956. Britain, France, and Israel invaded Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal after Egyptian president Nasser nationalized it. The military action was successful but a political disaster.

Anti-British and anti-French protests broke out across the region. Soviet premier Nikolai Bulganin threatened to send troops to Egypt in support of the Nasser regime, and he wrote to the British, French, and Israeli governments threatening rocket attacks against their capitals if they didn't withdraw.

US president Dwight D. Eisenhower was worried that Bulganin's threats could lead to World War III and the deaths of countless millions of people. So, he demanded that Britain, France, and Israel withdraw their invasion forces from Egypt without delay and pressured them to accept a United Nations cease-fire on November 6. Britain and France did as they were told, while Israel refused and remained in possession of the Sinai Peninsula until the following year.

On January 5, 1957, Eisenhower announced that any Middle Eastern country threatened by armed aggression could ask the United States for economic and military aid. Known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, this policy specifically singled out threats from the Soviet Union. Having angered and embarrassed long-time allies in Britain and France, Eisenhower was moving to fill the void left by the diminution of their power in the region. He was also offering an alternative to Nasser as a political power in the Arab world.

In 1947, US president Harry Truman laid out a foreign policy cornerstone that became known as the Truman Doctrine. This called for the containment of the Soviet Union wherever possible.

Operation Blue Bat

The first test of the Eisenhower Doctrine came the following year, in the summer of 1958. Camille Chamoun was in the sixth and final year of his term as Lebanon's president, and he was far from universally loved. He was pro-American and anticommunist. And he was the only Arab leader to have embraced the Eisenhower Doctrine after it was first announced.

Worried that upcoming elections in Lebanon would hand victory to pro-Nasserite (and anti-American) political parties, Chamoun announced he wanted to change the constitution so that he could stand for reelection. Many Lebanese saw Chamoun's plan as a breach of a power-sharing agreement known as the National Pact, which distributed power among the country's three main confessional groups: Sunni Muslims, Shia Muslims, and Maronite Christians.

The US government didn't support Chamoun's plan, but it didn't want to lose Lebanon as a useful ally in the region. In May 1958, Chamoun asked the United States to intervene militarily amid riots, arson attacks, and other acts of violence in his country. Eisenhower agreed, even though there was no obvious communist aggression.

On July 15, 1958, Operation Blue Bat was launched. US forces occupied and secured Beirut International Airport, Lebanon's principal port, and all approaches to the capital. Tactically, Operation Blue Bat was a complete success. It lasted just three months and provided political breathing space during a highly charged time.

Chamoun was allowed to stay in power until the end of his term that September, and a national reconciliation government was formed to end the crisis. US forces withdrew before the end of October. In Cold War terms, Operation Blue Bat handed the United States a useful diplomatic victory in the Middle East and put the Soviet Union on notice that the United States was prepared to intervene militarily in the region.

The North Yemen Civil War

The North Yemen Civil War was a devasting conflict that had all the main Cold War elements in play. It began when pro-republic, or anti-monarchical, army officers launched a coup against the ruling Mutawakkilite Kingdom in 1962.

The ousted royals withdrew to the region bordering Saudi Arabia, from where they rallied support and gained backing from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom, which employed mercenary forces. The United States did not get involved directly. Despite persistent rumors to the contrary, there's no evidence of covert activity by the CIA or any other US intelligence agency.

The coup leader, Abdullah al-Sallal, declared himself president of the newly named Yemen Arab Republic. He was backed by Egyptian military forces and supplied by the Soviet Union. But neither the royalists nor the republicans could land a knockout blow.

Egypt's military presence in the country grew from 5,000 troops in October 1962 to 15,000 in December and 36,000 a year later. Its presence peaked at about 70,000 troops in 1996, in what by now seemed to be an unwinnable war. Nasser began a rapid disengagement from North Yemen in 1967 to contend with the rising costs of the war and plummeting national pride.

Jordan and Britain also became tired of the war. In 1970, Saudi Arabia agreed to recognize Abdullah al-Sallal's victory, putting an end to royalist hopes in North Yemen. A new government was formed that included a number of North Yemeni royalists but no members of the royal family itself.

In broader Cold War terms, this war was not a primary concern for the United States or the Soviet Union, but it was watched keenly in Washington and Moscow. In this republican-versus-royalist clash on the fringes of the Cold War, and indeed the geographical fringes of the Middle East itself, the defeat of a traditionalist, pro-Western royal family was a victory for Soviet interests.

The 1973 Arab-Israeli War

The 1973 Arab-Israeli War, also known as the Yom Kippur War, was provoked by the Arab coalition partners Egypt and Syria when they crossed cease-fire lines agreed to after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. This conflict, like the others, held out the possibility of morphing into a larger confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union.

For one thing, the 1973 Arab-Israeli War was the largest naval confrontation between the navies of the US and the USSR of the entire Cold War. At the outbreak of that war, the Soviet Union had 52 ships in the Mediterranean and America had 48, including nuclear-armed submarines. As the war got underway, both superpowers moved quickly to reinforce these fleets and displayed increased hostility to each other.

Meanwhile, as Israel turned the tide of the war against its Arab opponents, the Soviet Union threatened military intervention if hostilities did not come to an end. The United States, worried about the possibility of such an escalation, moved swiftly to secure a cease-fire.

One important outcome of the events of 1973 was a Saudi Arabia–led oil embargo against America and certain Western allies in retaliation for their support of Israel in the war. This was the first time that the Middle Eastern oil producers had used oil as an economic weapon.

Globalists see events as being driven by the ambitions—or interference—of the superpowers. Regionalists and localists, by contrast, argue that local powers—far from being acted on—are often instrumental in driving the policies of the rival superpowers. The leadership of every country, and even subnational groups, have their own agendas. Consequently, states and substate actors did their best to play the USA and the USSR against each other.

By 1957, Egypt, Syria, and Algeria were more inclined to the Soviet orbit, while Morocco and most of the Gulf monarchies—along with Jordan and Iraq—were reliably pro-Western. But while tempting to think of the region as being divided between Soviet-leaning socialist republics and pro-Western monarchies, a simple answer cannot truly answer a complex question. And if scholars understand anything about the region, it's that change there is constant.

Conclusion

In November 1989, the news had just broken that East Berliners would be allowed to travel freely to West Germany for the first time since the Berlin Wall had gone up in 1961. A couple of weeks later, in December 1989, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and US president George H. W. Bush declared the Cold War over.

These astonishing events would soon connect the dots to the end of the Cold War in the Middle East as well. In August 1990, Iraqi president Saddam Hussein invaded and occupied neighboring Kuwait. Previously, such an event might have created the ideal circumstances for a Cold War rivalry and possibly a proxy war. Instead, the United States and the USSR both signed the UN Security Council Resolution 660, condemning Saddam Hussein's invasion.

After decades of a Cold War, the longtime enemies found themselves working together as partners in an international coalition against Iraqi aggression. It marked a massive shift in the global geopolitical situation and inevitably would influence intraregional relations as well. Looking at the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, it would be fair to say that the United States won the Cold War, including in the Middle East—but perhaps on points rather than through a knockout blow.

Reading

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Keay, *Sowing the Wind*.

Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*.

Khalidi, Anderson, Muslih, and Simon, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*.

Louis and Owen, *Suez 1956*.

Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*.

Sayigh and Shlaim, *The Cold War in the Middle East*.

Wien, *Arab Nationalism*.

Questions

1   Was the Cold War in the Middle East and North Africa driven more by the global competition between the United States and the USSR, by local political rivalries and competition, or by some combination of the two?

2   Was the Eisenhower Doctrine and subsequent increased involvement of the United States in the Middle East inevitable as a result of the Suez Crisis and the humiliating climbdown of Britain and France under pressure from the White House?

Lecture 11

THE ALGERIAN WAR
OF **INDEPENDENCE**

The Algerian War was both a war for independence and a civil war. It was a conflict that left no one untouched; French fought French, and Algerians fought Algerians. This lecture surveys the French colonial period in the Middle East and North Africa, noting the different paths to independence taken by five countries under French control: Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. It also discusses the Algerian War and its legacy.

French Colonial Interests

After the First World War, the League of Nations created the Mandate for Syria and Lebanon, with administrative control formally awarded to France in September 1923. By this time, France had many decades of trade, diplomatic ties, and cultural exchanges in the Middle East and North Africa.

In 1943, Lebanon established a parliament and domestic power-sharing agreement among its principal religious and ethnic factions called the National Pact. It was an unwritten agreement but formed the basis of the Lebanese Republic, in which certain posts are always held by a particular confessional group. The French mandate formally ended in 1945, marking complete independence for the Lebanese Republic.

French troops left Syria in April 1946, before formal independence was granted, under pressure from Britain and Syrian nationalists. Syria, too, emerged as a parliamentary republic, with a president and prime minister.

Still, France maintained control of three colonial territories in the region: Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. None would gain independence for at least another decade. In part, this reflected their closer geographical proximity and a tighter French grip in North Africa.

During the Second World War, France had relied on some 300,000 North African Arab and Amazigh soldiers to assist it. But afterward, Charles de Gaulle made clear that he had no intention of granting independence to these territories. This was a slap in the face to millions of French colonial subjects and strengthened support for nationalist causes throughout the French empire.

The First Indochina War—known in Vietnam as the Anti-French Resistance War—erupted in 1946. It ended with a humiliating defeat for the French and the division of Vietnam into north and south. Nevertheless, defeat in Vietnam made the French all the more determined to win the subsequent Algerian War, beginning in November 1954.

The National Liberation Front

In 1956, France granted independence to Algeria's neighbors, Morocco and Tunisia. Both were considered French protectorates. But the French hadn't been in either place nearly so long as they had been in Algeria. France had invaded Algeria in 1830 and formally incorporated the territory into the French metropole in 1848. Since then, French Algeria, as it was called, was administered exactly as if it were part of the mainland.

The leading nationalist movement in Algeria during the French colonial era was the Front de Libération Nationale, or National Liberation Front. It led the fight for independence during the war and remains the most important party in Algerian politics, having ruled the country without serious challenge since 1962.

Many Algerians fighting for independence after World War II had fought for the French during the war. This meant they were disciplined, battle-hardened, and well organized. French authorities initially underestimated the Algerian's strength of feeling and the danger the National Liberation Front posed to colonial rule.

> Initially, most Algerians were not in favor of independence but rather were somewhere along a spectrum of opinion. Some wanted greater access to economic and educational opportunities. Others demanded full equality with the European settlers, who by the start of the war made up more than 10% of Algeria's population.

In 1955, following a series of massacres by the Algerian resistance in major urban centers, the French response grew in violence. One turning point came in August, when National Liberation Front forces killed 123 French men, women, and children in what became known as the Philippeville massacre. Beforehand, the resistance had targeted only military and other government targets. Afterward, the net spread to include all European settlers and any Algerians who stood in their way.

French authorities claimed to kill 1,273 guerrillas in reprisal. The National Liberation Front put the figure closer to 12,000 dead. French settlers organized their own vigilante committees to exact revenge, meeting with virtually no protest from French Algerian security forces. Still, as time went by, a deepening sense of disillusionment about France's role and purpose in Algeria grew.

In September 1956, French soldiers were ordered to use whatever force they deemed necessary to regain full control of the colonial capital in the Battle of Algiers. Meanwhile, the French used napalm—a firebomb fuel-gel mixture—against liberation fighters in villages. Thousands of Algerians were summarily executed, and rape was used as a weapon.

Children were routinely tortured to make their parents talk. By 1957, the use of torture had become routine on both sides. But when this became public knowledge in France, it was met with widespread outrage. Many likened such tactics to the German Gestapo's treatment of French men and women little more than a decade earlier.

Charles de Gaulle

As the war entered its fourth year in 1958, there was no sign that either side was any closer to military victory. And then a political crisis struck France, leading to the collapse of the Fourth Republic, which had governed the country since the end of the Second World War. The wartime leader of the French Resistance, Charles de Gaulle, now resurfaced.

In May 1958, a group of Algerian-based French army officers staged a coup of the colonial government in Algiers. They demanded that de Gaulle be placed at the head of a government of national unity in Paris and that France's prime minister be removed. Meanwhile, dissident French paratroopers took control of the French island of Corsica. They planned to use it as a base from which to launch a coup d'état that would overthrow the seat of French power in Paris.

De Gaulle offered tacit support for the coup by saying that he'd lead the country if called on to do so. The French parliament bowed to the plotters' demands and voted de Gaulle into power as prime minister. The coup was called off, and the Fourth Republic came to an ignominious end. He was inaugurated as the president of the Fifth Republic in January 1959.

Many saw de Gaulle's return to power as a breakthrough that would allow France to remain in power in Algeria. Indeed, by mid-1959, the French army was as close to regaining control in Algeria as it ever would be. But the National Liberation Front had been successfully winning allies in the developing world and courting superpower support by playing the United States and Soviet Union against one another. At the same time, the United Nations had no appetite for imperialism at the end of the 1950s. This amounted to tacit support for Algerian independence.

De Gaulle soon realized that France's position in Algeria was untenable. In September 1959, he announced a stunning about-face, speaking for the first time about self-determination and majority rule in Algeria. The de Gaulle government declared a cease-fire in Algeria on March 19, 1962, and the long-running war ended in stalemate.

> Algerian independence proved inspirational to many anticolonial movements. Nelson Mandela, the anti-apartheid opposition leader from South Africa, traveled to Algeria in 1961 and was trained by the National Liberation Front. And in 1990, Algeria was the first country Mandela visited after being released from prison for his political activism.

Conclusion

Among an Algerian population of 11 million, the death toll was anywhere from the 350,000 estimated by France to the National Liberation Front's estimate of 1.5 million. Some 2 million Algerians fled or were resettled, including almost all of the 1 million French settlers. Among the French loyalists who remained, many faced bloody reprisals.

In April 1962, referendums were held in France and Algeria on whether to accept the negotiated accords—which had instituted a cease-fire, ended the war, and called for the formation of "an independent and sovereign state" in Algeria. In France, 91% of the electorate voted to support the agreement. In Algeria, 99% voted in favor. And on July 5, 1962—132 years to the day after the French first invaded—Algeria became independent.

Reading

Bidwell, *Dictionary of Modern Arab History.*

Evans, *Algeria.*

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth.*

Fieldhouse, *Western Imperialism in the Middle East.*

Horne, *A Savage War of Peace.*

McDougall, *A History of Algeria.*

Willis, *Politics and Power in the Maghreb.*

Questions

1 What reasons can you suggest for the reluctance of successive French governments to acknowledge the war for independence for what it was?

2 Suggest possible hurdles facing a newly independent state in establishing democratic norms and traditions if the armed forces that fought for and won national independence remain central to the political order.

Lecture 12

MIDDLE EASTERN
ARMIES AND
COUP D'ÉTATS

On June 30, 2012, Mohamed Morsi was sworn in as Egypt's first democratically elected head of state in the country's more than 5,000-year history. Only a year later, Morsi was overthrown by the Egyptian army and its leader, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who was elected president in May 2014. One reason Morsi's overthrow came as a surprise was the widespread view that coups simply didn't happen anymore. If anything, they were a legacy of the 20th century, now out of fashion. Still, the Middle East and North Africa provide us with numerous examples from the past century.

Defining *Coup*

Cambridge Dictionary defines *coup* as "a sudden illegal, often violent, taking of government power, especially by parts of the army." Between 1949 and 1970, no fewer than 20 successful coups took place across the Middle East and North Africa. Another eight or so unsuccessful attempts were made during the same period.

Many who defended the Egyptian army's overthrow of a democratically elected president said the army was responding to popular protests demanding Morsi's removal from office. By this definition, the overthrow of a government anytime it is demanded by a large group of protestors would be acceptable. But who decides if the crowds are big enough or if their demands are legitimate? Such a system would make a mockery of democratic transitions.

Another point to bear in mind is whether a coup is genuinely homegrown or driven by foreign powers with their own interests and agendas. The Cold War and US-Soviet superpower rivalry formed the backdrop to many of the events in the Middle East and North Africa during the 1950s and 1960s. The 1953 ouster of Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, is perhaps the most significant foreign-backed overthrow of a Middle Eastern ruler during this time. As later revealed, the plot was planned jointly by the CIA and Britain's MI6.

One reason that so many military coups happened in the Middle East and North Africa between 1949 and 1970 is that the Cold War helped to destabilize the region. But setting aside that global rivalry, 1949 might be thought of as a bumper year in Syria as the country witnessed three coup d'états. One thing we learn from history is that if a country experiences one successful coup, it's far more likely to see one or more additional coups in the future.

In something of a *Groundhog Day* experience, a coup means greater political instability, and that instability makes it harder to govern, which means less is achieved. The attendant rise in discontent because of this political paralysis is seized on by one of the competing factions in the military. Cue another coup.
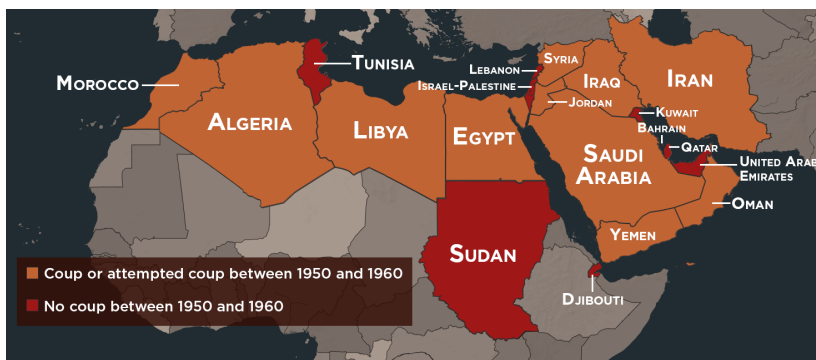
Coups and Colonialism

In 1970, 29-year-old Qaboos bin Said overthrew his father to become sultan of Oman. The economy of Oman had traditionally relied on the slave trade and arms dealing to support the national coffers and pay local tribes to gain their loyalty. When the British shut off both of these revenue streams, there was an attendant rise in local uprisings. The cash-strapped sultan became increasingly dependent on Britain's military support to quell revolts created by British policies.

> Syria experienced no fewer than nine successful coups—and at least one failed attempt—between 1949 and 1970. Things settled down in 1970, after Hafez al-Assad seized power in a coup. He ascended to the presidency in 1971 and held on to power until his death in 2000, when he was succeeded by his son, Bashar al-Assad.

Both Britain and the sultan had grown tired of this arrangement, as had the sultan's son, Qaboos bin Said, who was under house arrest on his father's instructions. Seeing an opportunity to install a potentially more reliable and pliant ruler, Britain contacted Qaboos via cassette tape recordings smuggled into his quarters. Informing him that they were going to depose his father, the British asked if he would like to be installed in his wake. And so it came to pass that Qaboos bin Said held the post of sultan of Oman for 50 years, remaining loyal to those who facilitated his ascension to the throne.

For a number of the region's countries, political instability was almost built into the fabric of the state due in part to the colonial experience, which often destroyed preexisting power structures and intercommunal relations. And stability wasn't always possible to rebuild after gaining independence. How a country gained independence was also important in determining who ruled the country.

In Algeria, an eight-year war to gain independence from France in 1962 meant that the Army of National Liberation and its political wing, the National Liberation Front, emerged as dual power brokers and the only ones capable of running the country afterward. Yet each showed a reluctance to allow a more equitable power-sharing scheme with the country's citizenship.

Coups against Monarchs

Monarchies in the Middle East and North Africa proved more resilient—or perhaps more coup-proof—than republics for a number of possible reasons. For one thing, there is a matter of loyalty to a family line that has an inherent appeal for many in societies where loyalty to family, tribes, and clans has been the tradition.

That said, it would be wide of the mark to suggest that monarchies have succeeded because they're monarchies and that republican regimes were toppled because they weren't. The closed nature of monarchical rule can also prove to be a source of discontent.

An example of an attempted coup against a monarch is the July 1969 effort by a group of Saudi Arabian air force officers against Saudi Arabia's king, Faisal. The plotters planned to bomb the Sauds' palace in Riyadh to kill the king and other senior royals who might succeed him. Then, they would announce the establishment of the Republic of the Arabian Peninsula. Faisal thwarted this attempt, possibly as a result of a tip-off from an American intelligence agency. Before the year was over, an estimated 2,000 people were arrested in connection with the attempted coup and an unknown number were executed.

Less than two months after the failed coup in Saudi Arabia, King Idris of Libya was toppled by Qaddafi. King Hussein of Jordan fought off coup attempts by the Palestine Liberation Organization. And Morocco's king, Hassan II, survived two coup attempts. So, monarchies clearly were not immune to the threat of military overthrow. They were just better at fending off such attempts.

Armed Forces in the Middle East

The data doesn't support the inference that the Middle East has suffered more coups than other places, nor does it appear that the region's governments were more vulnerable to military overthrow than elsewhere. To the contrary, coups during the 20th century were more numerous in at least two other geopolitical zones outside of the Middle East and North Africa—namely sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

Still, the armed forces have been among the region's most important institutions since independence. In addition to the occasions when a military has seized power, the military generally commanded high degrees of influence on government policy and in many cases continues to do so. Regional and global tensions combined with internal political disorder and the relative lack of deep-seated civilian rule caused militaries to remain central to the politics and life in general of many of the modern nation-states of the Middle East and North Africa.

In Algeria, for instance, the usual organs of civil society were either wholly absent after independence—due to the flight of European settlers who formerly held these posts and then fled the country—or severely underdeveloped due to the previous policy of favoring European settlers in senior positions. So, the military often filled the vacuum.

Over time, which is to say since independence, a military industrial complex has developed in a number of countries, including in Algeria, Egypt, and Syria, whereby the armed forces became deeply entrenched in and integral to the very heart of state economic interests. Indeed, one of the military's most important roles in these countries is to protect its own interests, including its economic influence.

Conclusion

So, have we seen an end to coups in North Africa and the Middle East? Probably not, as you saw in the case of the ouster of President Morsi in Egypt. But coups were less frequent in the early decades of the 21st century than they were during the 1950s and 1960s.

On the other hand, there are plenty of countries in today's Middle East and North Africa where the armed forces find themselves holding many of the cards of government and the economy. In these places, the military might find no further need for coups.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East.*

Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century.*

Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East.*

Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation.*

Gaub, *Guardians of the Arab State.*

Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East.*

Keay, *Sowing the Wind.*

Owen, *Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life.*

Questions

1 Should democratic nations, Western or otherwise, adhere to self-imposed restrictions on political engagement or business with undemocratic or repressive, military-controlled states in the Middle East or North Africa? (Feel free to think about this question in relation to any other geopolitical regions.)

2 What is the difference between a coup d'état and popular protests that lead to the overthrow of a regime that has gained the support of the country's armed forces?

Lecture 13

THE 1967
ARAB-ISRAELI WAR
AND ITS AFTERMATH

I n April 1967, an Israeli armored tractor was ploughing alongside the Syrian border in what had been a designated demilitarized zone for almost two decades. Seeing this as a provocation, Syrian forces fired on the Israeli tractor on Israeli land. Israeli forces responded by shelling the Syrians, and matters escalated. This lecture discusses the causes, results, and long-term consequences of the Six-Day War of June 1967 and, in October 1973, the subsequent Yom Kippur War.

Buildup to the War

In the years before the 1967 war, not a single Arab government in the Middle East and North Africa recognized the State of Israel, established shortly after the end of World War II. Roughly 700,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from the portion of land from which Israel was carved, and Arabs often argue that the mass influx of Jews to Israel is a form of imperialism, with Jewish settlers colonizing Arab lands.

This opinion was sufficiently ingrained by 1964 such that the Cairo-based League of Arab States—known simply as the Arab League—decided that the Palestinian people needed their own representative body. On June 2, 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO, was founded.

President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt, who was keen to be recognized as leader of the wider Arab world, said that "collective Arab military preparations … will constitute the ultimate practical means for the final liquidation of Israel." Guerrilla attacks against Israel followed, and Israel responded in kind.

Israeli forces were outnumbered by Arab armies two-to-one at the time. The Arabs also possessed three times the number of tanks that Israel had and numerical superiority in aircraft. In spite of this, senior Egyptian generals warned Nasser that Egypt wasn't yet ready to go to war against Israel. And they were right. The Israeli air force had conducted hundreds of reconnaissance flights over the years, accumulating unrivalled knowledge of Arab artillery defenses, information on the location and layout of their airfields, and even voice recognition of base commanders and other senior officials.

Remember that these events were taking place during the Cold War. Egypt and Syria received aircraft from the Soviet Union, while Israel's air force was largely supplied by France and its tanks by Britain. The United States had also started supplying Israel, Egypt, and Jordan with defensive weaponry. But it was worried that Israel's response might lead to Soviet involvement and an escalation in hostilities.

This would have been the moment for cooler thinking. Instead, Egypt's Nasser chose to take a most provocative step, effectively making war inevitable.

The Six-Day War

On May 16, 1967, Egyptian general Muhammad Fawzy ordered United Nations peacekeepers, who had maintained a presence in Egypt on the border with Israel since the Suez Crisis a decade earlier, to withdraw. Six days later, Egypt closed the narrow Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. This stopped the flow of oil to Israel from Iran and cut off Israel's supply route from Asia.

The closure paralleled an earlier decision by Egypt to shut the straits in 1956, precipitating an attack by Britain, France, and Israel on Egypt. Since then, Israel had warned that any subsequent closure of the straits would be considered an act of war.

General Moshe Dayan became Israel's new defense minister on June 1, 1967. Dayan was confident that the Arab armies were no match for Israeli forces, and he was unflinching in his opinion that Israel should strike first. On June 4 and 5, both the United States and the Soviet Union applied diplomatic pressure on Nasser to not start a war. But those efforts came to no avail as Israel launched a preemptive strike.

Israel organized Operation Focus to launch disabling strikes on Egypt's air defenses. And on the morning of June 5, 188 Israeli planes—94% of the national air force's operational aircraft—raided Egyptian airfields, followed by raids on airfields in Syria and Jordan over the next two days.

In just three hours, virtually all of Egypt's air force was destroyed. More than 450 Arab aircraft were disabled, most while still on the ground. And numerous airfields were put out of commission. Israel itself lost only some 19 planes.

Lacking any serious aerial protection or response, Nasser ordered his forces to retreat. As in 1956, Israeli forces swiftly filled the gap and occupied the Sinai Peninsula. On June 8, Egypt and Jordan agreed to a cease-fire. Syria followed suit a day later, although Israel was unwilling to leave Syria with an advantage in the Golan Heights and launched a swift attack, which meant that fighting didn't end until June 10.

Israel had taken the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria. These gains meant a six-fold increase in the territory Israel now controlled. The Six-Day War also resulted in the deaths of some 20,000 Arab soldiers compared to fewer than 800 Israeli fatalities.

After the 1967 War

Nasser resigned as Egypt's president only to resume his duties following popular protests. Jordan's King Hussein might have lost East Jerusalem and the West Bank, but he held onto his throne. Meanwhile, a new wave of anti-Semitism broke out in the Soviet Union and around the Arab world. Soviet hostility combined with the newfound appeal of Jewish nationalism led to almost 300,000 Soviet Jews being granted exit visas between 1970 and 1988. Some 165,000 settled in Israel, and 126,000 moved to the United States.

Across the Arab world, angry mobs attacked Jews from Morocco to Baghdad. Synagogues were burnt, and people were killed or detained. Chief rabbis in Cairo and Alexandria were arrested and held on trumped-up charges. Across the region, an estimated 7,000 Jews were expelled from countries that many had called home for centuries.

As for Arab populations, as many as 325,000 out of 1 million in the West Bank and Gaza were dislocated from territories now under Israeli control. Most settled in Jordan, creating a burden for the host government and providing a base from which the PLO could challenge Israel. Another 100,000 civilians fled or were displaced from the Golan Heights in Syria.

Egypt's humiliation at Suez in 1956 and a general unwillingness of Arab states to accept Israel's existence combined to make the 1967 war inevitable. But Israel's stunning victory and territorial gains would lead inevitably to another confrontation, wherein Arab nations would again fight to restore some of their pride.

In September 1967, the Arab League issued a statement recorded as the Khartoum Resolution. In principle, the Arab governments agreed to work for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from lands they had occupied since June 1967. The resolution underscores these principles: "no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it, and insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country."

For the next three years, from 1967 to 1970, Egypt pursued a war of attrition with Israel. This included exchanges of artillery fire, raids into the Sinai, and skirmishes to test each other's defenses and readiness. Israel remained in full control of the Sinai at the cost of 1,400 Israeli and 5,000 Egyptian lives.

The Yom Kippur War

The Yom Kippur War began in October 1973. In three weeks' time, it would result in the Israeli military succeeding against a coalition of Arab forces—but not before courting defeat in the early days of the clash. Victory in the previous Six-Day War had led to dangerous overconfidence, hubris, and even a sense of invincibility among Israel's armed forces.

Egyptian and Syrian forces now enjoyed the benefit of surprise in launching coordinated attacks on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in Judaism. Israeli intelligence anticipated the attack but found it difficult to convince the political and military leadership that Arab armies would dare to initiate action after the events of six years earlier.

US support in the form of Operation Nickel Grass—an airlift intended to replace all lost Israeli materiel, including tanks—was of critical importance to Israel's survival.

The 1973 conflict would prove to be the bloodiest and most destructive of all the Arab-Israeli wars. Egyptian soldiers swiftly crossed the Sinai Peninsula, and it was three days before Israeli troops rallied to halt further advances. A short stalemate followed, after which Israeli forces advanced against Egypt and Syria both, at one point getting within 20 miles of Damascus and shelling its outskirts.

A UN-brokered cease-fire brought hostilities to a close on October 25. At war's end, 2,800 Israelis had died, along with more than 18,000 Arabs, with a further 30,000 Arabs and Israeli injured. In Israel, the military's early setbacks were blamed on government complacency. And in April 1974, Prime Minister Golda Meir resigned, and her cabinet, in keeping with Israeli law, followed suit.

Perhaps the biggest result of the war was the opening of secret negotiations between Israel and Egypt on their relationship. Those talks eventually led to the US-sponsored Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, by which Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and Egypt recognized the State of Israel.

Conclusion

At today's distance, the utter humiliation Egypt, Syria, and Jordan suffered at Israel's hands in 1967 has led many to see the Six-Day War as marking the end of Arab unity as an ideal and Arab nationalism as a political goal. Any semblance of this unity disappeared after Egypt and Israel's 1979 peace agreement. Indeed, Egypt's decision to make peace with Israel generated an enormous amount of ill will between it and the other Arab states.

After 1973, the stateless Palestinians whose cause had united the Arab nations against Israel found themselves more or less abandoned by the Arab states. The new world order would be one of shifting Cold War alliances, the rise of oil as an economic engine and weapon, and the rise of non-state actors such as Muslim fundamentalist religious and terrorist groups.

At the same time, the first phase of the 1973 war had made it clear that Israel no longer could write off its Arab neighbors militarily and that perhaps it should try to work out a more sustainable relationship with them. This realization has yet to result in a new accommodation or mutual respect.

Reading

Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*.

Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel*.

Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*.

Laqueur and Rubin, *The Israel-Arab Reader*.

Milton-Edwards and Hincliffe, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945*.

Oren, *Six Days of War*.

Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine*.

Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*.

———, *War and Peace in the Middle East*.

Shlaim and Sayigh, *The Cold War and the Middle East*.

Questions

1 After 1948, what, if anything, should Arab leaders have done to persuade their people to accept the reality of and start working with the State of Israel in the almost 20 years that elapsed before the start of the 1967 war?

2 It has been said that before 1973 there were only Arab-Israeli wars and after 1973 the conflict was transformed into one between Israel and the Palestinian people. Is this a fair assessment of the situation, and if so, what caused Arab governments to have such a shift in attitude or approach?

Lecture 14

THE ARAB OIL
EMBARGO OF 1973

The right-turn-on-red traffic procedure was introduced as an energy-saving measure in different American states starting in 1973, when the Arab members of OPEC—the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries—imposed an oil embargo on the United States and a number of its allies. The price of gasoline quadrupled in less than a year. This lecture examines the importance of oil in the Middle East and North Africa as an instrument of politics in the region, the global economy, and geostrategic relations.

Oil as a Weapon

Oil was discovered in Iran in 1908 and in Saudi Arabia in 1938. By the end of the Second World War, a British government committee had concluded that the Middle East was the British Empire's most important oil supplier. By 1955, as exploration continued, the Middle East was estimated to hold 75% of global reserves.

In September 1973, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia met in secret and agreed that they would use oil as a weapon against the West if the West supported Israel in the looming Arab-Israeli war. In this way, the biggest regional oil-producing nations would exert influence over events by increasing prices, cutting production, or refusing to sell oil to certain countries.

The Yom Kippur War broke out on October 6 and lasted for 19 days. Halfway through it, the Arab members of OPEC took all three steps, specifically targeting countries that were backing Israel. The effects of the embargo were immediate and dramatic. Countries that were most reliant on foreign oil were hit hardest, including the United States.

By 1974, oil prices had quadrupled to nearly $12 per barrel, which in today's inflation-adjusted terms equates to a rise from roughly $14 to $65. The shift in the relationship between the industrialized nations of the West and the oil-exporting nations of the Middle East was nothing short of seismic. Before 1973, the industrial powers had dictated prices and terms of business, but now the producers gained considerable leverage.

Certain Middle Eastern producers had tried the idea of oil as a weapon twice before, but neither attempt was especially successful. Then, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OAPEC, was founded in January 1968, in the wake of the Arab-Israeli war in 1967. It was originally intended to prevent oil from being used as a weapon and to ensure that the production and sale of oil was kept out of politics.

Saudi Arabia consistently rejected calls by some of the region's more radical governments to use oil as a weapon, but things changed in 1973. While the Middle East's proven reserves had grown, so had demand for oil in the industrialized West. Saudi Arabia was now responsible for 21% of global exports. All of a sudden, Saudi Arabia—not Texas—was the world's swing producer. And the United States was economically vulnerable in a way it hadn't been previously.

By the summer of 1973, the United States was importing 6.2 million barrels a day, approximately double its oil imports of just three years earlier.

The oil embargo of 1973 ended in March 1974, less than two weeks after Israel withdrew the last of its troops from the western side of the Suez Canal. The embargo's effectiveness was limited in terms of forcing the United States to shift its policy away from Israel, but it made a huge impact in terms of how governments thought about the global economy, including energy efficiency, resource conservation, and alternative sources.

Oil Shocks after 1973

Oil was now understood as essential to keeping the global economy running, and the geopolitical importance of the Middle East and North Africa was like never before. For one thing, shipping lanes in the region passed through three major choke points. A maritime choke point is a body of water narrow enough that closing it poses significant risks to trade and the economy.

There are seven major choke points for seaborne crude oil transports around the world. Three are in the Middle East. Most oil is transported by sea, so the risk to these shipping lanes has been a constant concern since the Arab oil-producing nations first employed oil as a weapon in 1973.

The second oil shock was driven by the January 1979 revolution in Iran. Although global production of oil dropped by only about 4%, prices more than doubled in less than 12 months, swelling the treasuries of producing countries. Prices temporarily rose to about $127 a barrel in today's inflation-adjusted terms.

Oil shocks continued to batter the global economy. The Iran-Iraq War—based at least in part on political and territorial disputes in oil-producing border areas—led to large drops in oil production in both countries and initiated a global recession in the early 1980s.

The risk posed to shipping lanes was also brought into sharp relief during the Iran-Iraq War. Iraq's Saddam Hussein, having failed to launch successful ground attacks against Iran, ordered attacks against Iranian ships in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Although an estimated 550 civilian vessels from at least 34 nations were damaged within four years, this Tanker War didn't produce anything like the results the Iraqis hoped for.

Saddam Hussein was responsible for another oil-driven economic crisis in 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait. Iraq now controlled 20% of global oil reserves and made clear that it was prepared to use oil as a weapon. The threat Iraq also posed to neighboring Saudi Arabia and its oil fields was too great to ignore. But when a US-led military coalition launched a campaign to liberate Kuwait, Iraqi forces set fire to roughly 600 wells, burning about six million barrels a day.

A more recent event to impact oil prices was a series of antigovernment protests in North Africa and the Middle East popularly known as the Arab Spring, which began in Tunisia in December 2010. As protests multiplied, the price of oil soared. This reflected market fears of instability and worries about the global supply chain in the event that oil transports through the Suez Canal were closed.

Wealth in Oil-Producing Nations

Another central question surrounding oil is what it can mean to be an oil-rich or an oil-poor nation. Rulers of oil-rich states not only had a voice that could no longer be ignored in the realm of international affairs, but their immense wealth also made them more or less immune to critical voices within or beyond their borders.

Gulf monarchies now used their wealth to provide financial aid to less fortunate nations in the region and to persuade more revolutionary regimes to moderate. Yet the inefficiencies that mark highly centralized planning also weakened the states' economic and national security, as budgets were now tied more closely to booms and busts in oil prices.

Subsidies given when times were good were hard to reduce or remove, as attested by bread riots across the region during the 1970s. By the end of the 1970s, much of the region was failing economically, opening up a space for revolutionary groups. Some regimes responded with increased authoritarianism. And as they are still dependent on oil revenues, they have not become more democratic since then.

> The oil curse is a phenomenon whereby a state's economy fails to develop in a diverse and stable fashion as long as it's overly reliant on a single source of rent— in this case, the extraction of oil.

OIL PRICES
2003–2008
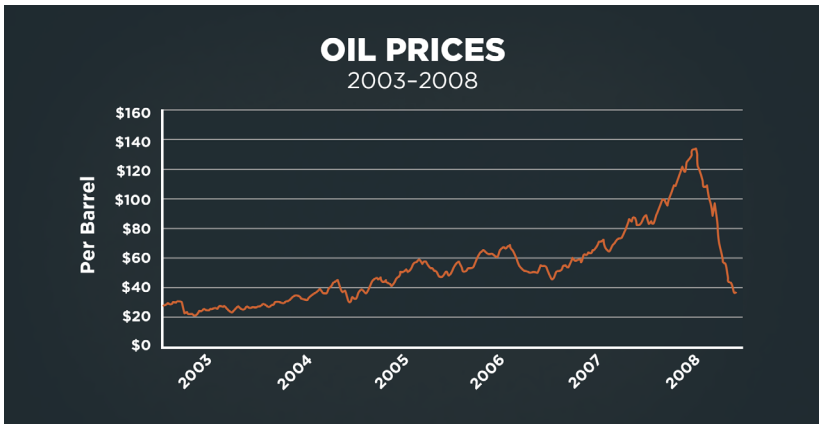
The absolute peak in crude oil prices occurred in 2008, during the midst of the global financial crisis, and it wasn't the result of events in the Middle East or North Africa. The price per barrel that year was equivalent to about $149 in today's adjusted terms. But even if the Middle East and North Africa did not provoke the financial crisis, the region did feel the results of the crisis.

For example, if an oil-rich country sets its 10-year spending plans when oil is $50 and it suddenly jumps to $120 a barrel, the country would be lucky enough to find itself with a budget surplus. But if instead the price of oil drops from $50 to $30 a barrel, the country's revenues won't be sufficient to meet the government's spending commitments. Even the richest oil-producing countries have been forced to introduce taxes in recent years.

Conclusion

In 1900, the Middle East and North Africa were among the poorest places on earth. The fact that the Arabian interior wasn't occupied by the Ottoman Turks or one of the Western European powers was as much because it was inaccessible and inhospitable as that nobody, not even the locals, thought there was anything there worth taking. When the first oil workers approached local rulers for permission to drill for oil, they were often asked if they could drill for water instead.

The discovery and extraction of oil changed all of that. By the 1970s, the Middle East and North Africa had become arguably the most geostrategically important region on earth. And so long as the global economy is driven by oil, oil will always be a political issue—and possibly a weapon, too.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East.*

Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East.*

Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East.*

Lippman, *Arabian Knight.*

Owen and Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century.*

Yergin, *The Prize.*

Questions

1   To what extent do you think the presence of large oil and gas deposits has hindered the emergence of more democratic states across the Middle East and North Africa? What accounts for the continuing relative lack of democracy in those countries of the region that are not energy exporters?

2   If the world continues to move to adopting more renewable, non-petroleum sources of energy, what will happen to the oil- and gas-rich nations of the Middle East and North Africa?

LEBANON'S
CIVIL WAR AND
RISE OF INTOLERANCE

The modern history of Lebanon as a nation dates back much further than many of its neighbors. It gained independence from France in 1943 and managed to hold itself together because its different religious and ethnic groups understood the importance of getting along. But when foreign neighbors moved in, the center failed to hold. Beginning in 1975, the country was torn apart by 15 years of war.

Religious Groups in Lebanon

The roots of Lebanon's 15-year civil war were first sown in 1920, when the newly formed League of Nations granted France a mandate to administer Lebanon and prepare it for eventual independence. Even before French rule, Lebanon was the most religiously diverse country in the region. The Lebanese constitution of 1926 recognizes 18 different religious groups.

In 1932, a French-conducted census put the population of Lebanon at just under 800,000. Of these, more than 28% were Maronite Christians, 22% were Sunni, and 20% were Shia. Overall, Christians were said to make up slightly more than 50% of the total population. The French tried to sell the exercise as a tool solely used to make sure power was shared equally, but there were suspicions among the non-Christian population that the census would cement French rule in the country, favoring the country's Maronites and other Christian groups.

Then, the National Pact of 1943 was agreed to by the main confessional groups. Under its terms, the president of Lebanon would always be Maronite, the prime minister would always be Sunni, and the speaker of parliament would always be Shia. The fact that Lebanon has a presidential system of government also meant that the Maronite president would always exert more influence than any Muslim politician.

This strikes many as an imperfect approach to national government, but the National Pact was essential to Lebanon gaining its independence. And the fact that all major groups agreed was an impressive achievement. On the other hand, if anything were to upset the delicate balance, who could tell if the unwritten agreement to cooperate would survive?

Refugees in Lebanon

In 1948, the State of Israel was established and roughly 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were uprooted from the former British mandate territory of Palestine. Approximately 100,000 refugees fled to Jordan and Lebanon.

By 1948, Lebanon's population was estimated to be slightly more than 1 million. So, with the arrival of 100,000 displaced Palestinians, Lebanon's population would have increased by almost 10% in a matter of months. Nobody at the time knew how long the Palestinians might be staying, but they were sure to strain Lebanon's resources, from water to employment.

In June 1967, a coalition of Arab armies was routed by Israeli forces in the Six-Day War. Fighting displaced more than 300,000 Arabs from the territories Israel captured, including the West Bank in Jordan. Large numbers of these were Palestinian refugees from the 1948 war. Now, they migrated in large numbers to Jordan, Lebanon, and elsewhere, straining the host nations' resources. In Lebanon, there was also strain at a societal level.
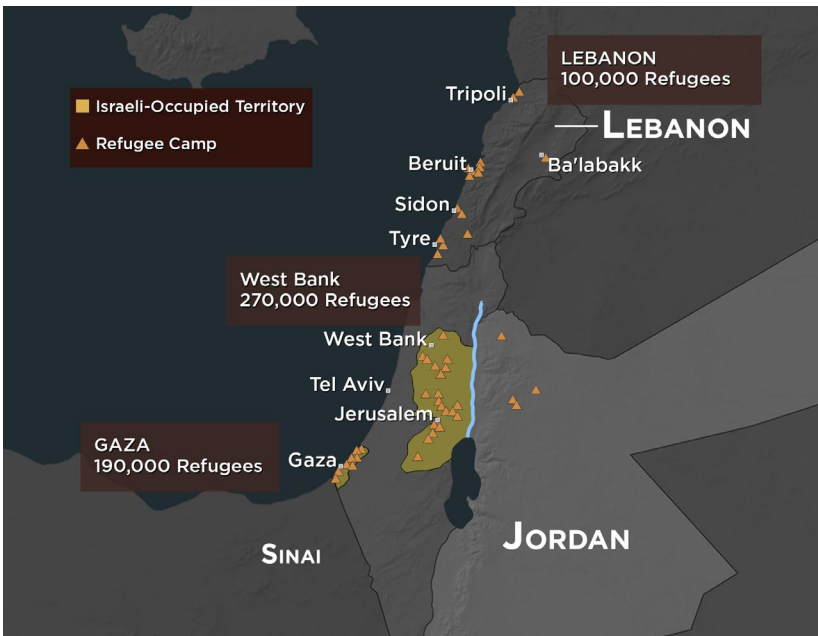
Because the vast majority of the new arrivals were Muslim, Lebanon's Christian Maronites—who constituted the backbone of the country's armed forces and enjoyed outsize shares of the country's wealth and governmental power—felt increasing pressure. Some pressure was felt because Lebanon had taken a less militant line toward Israel than Arabs had. Meanwhile, the Palestine Liberation Organization established bases in Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria and began to launch attacks against Israel.

Palestinian Fedayeen in Jordan

By 1970, about 500,000 Palestinians lived in Jordan out of a total national population of 3 million. These included Palestinian fighters known as fedayeen who had relocated to Jordan after 1967. The term *fedayeen*, which comes from an Arabic word that means "those who sacrifice themselves," became shorthand for any violent militant group.

The Palestinian fedayeen in Jordan operated beyond the control of the Jordanian authorities, eventually emerging as a virtual state. Some PLO factions even called for the overthrow of King Hussein and the dissolution of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. There were more than a dozen failed assassination attempts against Hussein by some estimates.

In September 1970, a Marxist-Leninist branch of the PLO known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or PFLP, hijacked four commercial airlines. Forcing them to land at the remote airstrip of Dawson's Field, near the Jordanian city of Zarqa, the Popular Front blew up three of the aircraft in front of the international media. A fourth aircraft was blown up at Cairo's airport almost the minute after the last of the passengers were evacuated.

This was the breaking point for Jordan's King Hussein. On September 16, he dismissed the country's civilian government, imposed martial law, and declared a state of emergency. Next, the king ordered Jordan's armed forces to attack those districts where the fedayeen of the PLO had become established and were acting as a law unto themselves, including in Jordan's capital, Amman. The Jordanian military waged a largely successful 10-day campaign rooting out and expelling the PLO from Jordan and repelling an attempted invasion of the country by Syria.

On September 21, King Hussein received a largely hostile reception from fellow Arab leaders at an emergency Arab League summit meeting in Cairo. Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, brokered talks between the PLO's leader, Yasser Arafat, and King Hussein. The two men agreed to a cease-fire on September 27 as well an agreement to regulate PLO activities in Jordan. The following day, President Nasser died of a heart attack at the age of 52.

One result of these events was the founding of the Black September Organization, a terrorist group dedicated to attacking Jordanian government targets. It also carried out the Munich massacre against Israeli participants at the 1972 Olympics.

Lebanon's Civil War

In July 1971, the fedayeen surrendered and were escorted out of Jordan, but they were allowed to resettle in Lebanon. Meanwhile, Maronite Catholic militias in Lebanon were also operating independently of the national government. Believing their country was being drawn into the Arab-Israeli conflict, Maronite militias started attacking PLO fedayeen. At the same time, some Lebanese Muslims, resentful of the Maronites' perceived dominance, began to push back.

The country sank into civil war on April 13, 1975, when Maronite militia, called Phalangists, attacked a busload of Palestinians. The PLO responded violently, setting off street battles between PLO and Maronite Catholic militia groups across Beirut. The PLO fighters were soon joined by leftist Muslim and pan-Arab groups.

Within days, the Lebanese government and the country's armed forces effectively split along ethnic, linguistic, and religious lines. Battling forces established demarcation lines throughout the capital, and numerous militia groups emerged. Hundreds of civilians were murdered by rival groups, and many others were taken hostage as bargaining chips in the increasingly personal war.

The involvement and interference of various regional powers—including Israel, Syria, and Iran—would lead to the prolongation of this war for 15 years. By 1976, 50,000 people had died and the PLO and their Druze allies controlled about 80% of the country. The Maronites, needing help, asked Syria to deploy troops to end the fighting.

Once Syrian troops arrived, Lebanon enjoyed a short-lived period of relative peace. But in June 1982, Israeli forces invaded, hoping to halt PLO attacks against it from Lebanese territory. Israeli forces pressed far enough north to lay siege to Beirut, prompting the intervention of an American-led multinational force to help negotiate the PLO's withdrawal.

After two months of Israeli bombardment and heavy civilian casualties in Lebanon, Yasser Arafat agreed to leave the country. Following the relocation of the PLO, American troops were also withdrawn. What happened next was one of the most infamous moments in a monstrous war.

Between the evening of September 16 and the morning of the 18, as many as 3,500 Palestinians and Shia Lebanese men, women, and children were massacred by an estimated 300 to 400 members of right-wing Catholic Maronite militias in the southern Beirut district of Sabra and the adjacent refugee camps of Shatila. The Israel Defense Forces stood by and allowed the Maronite militias to carry out the massacres, even assisting the slaughter by blocking exits to fleeing civilians.

The international response saw a return of the multinational force and a period of mayhem in Lebanon. In April 1983, the US embassy in Beirut was blown up by a suicide bomber, killing 64 people. Six months later, on October 23, two truck bombs struck the housing of American and French peacekeepers, killing some 307 people. A Lebanese Shia group calling itself Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility. As the conflict progressed, more Shia militias emerged and became increasingly radicalized thanks in large part to Iranian financing.

Conclusion

By 1988, internal divisions had weakened the Maronites, Sunni, and Shia alike. Syria and the Arab League were now able to arrange peace talks, and in October 1989, Lebanese parliamentarians signed off on the National Reconciliation Accord. Signatories accepted the principle of mutual coexistence and a restructuring of the long-standing National Pact.

Some power was shifted away from the Maronite president in favor of the Sunni prime minister. In addition, Syria was granted a significant, multiyear role in Lebanon's political affairs. Syrian troops would remain in Lebanon well beyond the end of the war in 1990, leaving only in the face of mass demonstrations in 2005.

Like so many conflicts, accurate figures for the dead and missing in Lebanon will probably never be known. Best estimates put those killed in the country between 1975 and 1990 at upward of 125,000. More than a million people suffered displacement. Lebanon hosts roughly 1.7 million refugees today out of a total population of about a million, according to the United Nations.

Reading

Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.
Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.
Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation*.
———, *Pity the Nation*.
Milton-Edwards and Hincliffe, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945*.

Questions

1 Given the mass influx of Palestinian refugees into Lebanon after 1948 and subsequent intraregional wars, was the Lebanese Civil War inevitable?

2 Does Lebanon's National Pact remain a viable agreement for future generations? Or is it time to conduct a new national census to discover and deal with whatever demographic shifts have occurred since the last census was conducted in 1932?

Lecture 16

TERRORISM, ISLAM,
AND SAYYID QUTB

September 11, 2001, was the first time most people in the West came face-to-face with al-Qaeda and the deadly intent of terrorism coming out of the Middle East and North Africa. Formed in 1988, al-Qaeda is a product of forces that had been at work for much of the second half of the 20th century, including secular Arab nationalism, Jewish nationalism, Islamic reformist movements, and the Cold War. This lecture explores the roots of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa.

Islam and Terrorism

Terrorism is the use of threats and intimidation to advance political, religious, racial, and ideological causes. It is absolutely forbidden in sacred texts like the Qur'an and hadith, or sayings of the prophet Muhammad and 1,400 years of Islamic tradition and jurisprudence.

Because the religion of Islam rejects and condemns terrorism, there is no such thing as Islamic terrorism. An individual might try to justify their act of terrorism by calling on their faith, but the religion does not agree with or reflect any such claims.

Like all such terms, the definition of *Islamism* has evolved over time. At a basic level, an Islamist believes that the state—or even the entire world—should be run according to Islamic, or sharia, law. But there's no one definition of what's meant by *sharia law*. Different countries that base part or all of their legal codes on sharia law look very different from one another.

These Islamists, both political and apolitical, can also be thought of as Muslim fundamentalists. Like fundamentalists of any faith come, they seek a return to the fundamentals of their religion. This generally means a high degree of reliance on, and often a literal interpretation of, their sacred texts.

During the last decades of the 20th century, a clear majority of Islamists wanted to effect change within their own countries via peaceful means. Some tried to do this through elections, while others abjured political involvement, seeing elections as Western or un-Islamic. They tried to effect change in society by example and by leading a good life.

In contrast, Muslim terrorists—also called radical Islamists or jihadists—use or threaten to use violence to achieve their goals. They operate outside of state institutions, and they are not particularly bound by state borders in pursuing their objectives.

The Arabic word *jihad* has two distinct applications in Islamic theology. One meaning is to struggle, or fight, in the sense of holy war, from where contemporary jihadists take their inspiration. Through centuries of Islamic jurisprudence, this meaning has been known as the lesser jihad. Only beginning in the 20th century has it been more widely misinterpreted by jihadists as justifying their violent acts. The other meaning of the term, the so-called greater jihad, is the personal struggle to be a better person and to do the right thing.

> We shouldn't conflate terrorist groups hailing from the Middle East or North Africa as necessarily being religiously oriented. The Palestine Liberation Organization, for instance, was established in 1964 as a secular nationalist organization with the liberation of Palestine as its goal. Still, attacks by Palestinian groups were frequent to achieve their aims.

Sayyid Qutb

Having distinguished between Islamists, who are predominantly religious-minded thinkers who also want a political role, and Muslim terrorists, who are violent criminals who happen to be of the Muslim faith, it's nevertheless true that both groups take their inspiration from the same place. This is the original Muslim-ruled community, the city of Medina, as it was organized and ruled by the prophet Muhammad in the early 7th century.

Many contemporary terrorist groups inspired by Islam have as a goal reestablishing the traditional caliphate—or combined political-religious state—that historically governed the Muslim world. It last did so from the former Ottoman capital, Constantinople. But in 1924, Atatürk—the founding father of the Republic of Turkey—signed an order abolishing the caliphate, thus ending a 1,300-year-old Muslim tradition.

While it's true that caliphs held very little real power for centuries, the abolition of the institution was still an important psychological blow to many in the Muslim world. Contenders came forward from the Middle East, India, and elsewhere, keen to become the new caliph. The dream of reestablishing the caliphate ultimately came to nothing, though the embers of the dream still burned in some hearts.

Eventually, the Egyptian scholar, writer, and Islamic thinker Sayyid Qutb emerged from a village in southern Egypt. Qutb was devout from a young age and was able to recite the entire Qur'an from memory by the age of 10. Still, his earliest writings were secularist in tone. He was critical of traditional imams, or prayer leaders, and of schools that taught nothing but religion.

Qutb joined the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist social and political organization viewed with suspicion by the secular Egyptian monarchy. Indeed, the government had banned the Muslim Brotherhood and arrested several of its leaders after linking it to bombings and assassination attempts. Nevertheless, Qutb served as editor of the brotherhood's weekly newspaper and was an important voice for its cause. He also served as a liaison between the Muslim Brotherhood and the nationalist political movement of Gamal Abdel Nasser.

> The Egyptian Ministry of Education sent Qutb to the United States from 1948 to 1950 to research Western teaching methods. But on his return to Egypt, Qutb published a critical article titled "The America That I Have Seen," which took issue with Western materialism, free mixing of the sexes, racism, boxing, and jazz.

After a failed assassination plot against Nasser and the government of Egypt in 1954, Nasser ordered a crackdown against the Muslim Brotherhood. Qutb was among many of the group's leadership to be arrested. It's likely his treatment in prison—and the widespread torture and executions of other Muslim Brotherhood members—had an important role in his radicalization. He became staunchly anti-Nasser and in favor of reforming Egypt along more religious, Islamic lines.

King Faisal of Saudi Arabia offered many of the Muslim Brotherhood safe haven, perhaps seeing an opportunity to undermine Nasser. Qutb was released from prison in 1964. He then published a work called *Milestones* that challenged Nasser's ruling legitimacy. Qutb was rearrested in 1965 and hanged the next year. Some Muslims viewed him as a martyr for resisting a government whose legitimacy he rejected.

Many jihadists today claim that Qutb would support their terrorist practices and indiscriminate killings, although most contemporary scholars who are familiar with Qutb's literary output—Muslim and non-Muslim alike—don't agree. What's beyond doubt is that he and his writings are extremely influential on Sunni and Shia Muslim jihadis.

Al-Qaeda

In 1988, al-Qaeda was formed in Pakistan in response to the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan. It was established to provide funding and assistance to Arab men who wanted to travel to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets.

As invaders of a Muslim-majority country, and also as representatives of atheistic communism, al-Qaeda justified its actions as a so-called holy war against the forces of the Soviet Union. Osama bin Laden put some of his own money into the organization and was an active fundraiser for the group in Saudi Arabia.

After the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, al-Qaeda turned its attention to the government of Saudi Arabia and other states it viewed as being not sufficiently Islamic. In 1990, Iraq—under Saddam Hussein—invaded its small, but oil-rich, neighbor Kuwait. Osama bin Laden now briefly changed course and offered to defend Saudi Arabia with his battle-hardened al-Qaeda fighters rather than permit non-Muslim fighters, such as the US-led coalition, to do battle for them.

The Saudi Arabian authorities rebuffed bin Laden's grandiose vision of driving the Iraqi army out of Kuwait. This angered the al-Qaeda leader, who moved to Sudan, then back to Afghanistan, all the while plotting and carrying out attacks against Saudi and Western targets. In this way, al-Qaeda evolved from an anticommunist force to one with a broader, anti-Western and anti-capitalist agenda that also happily embraced a range of anti–Middle Eastern targets.

Conclusion

Responses by Muslim authorities to these terrorist groups often don't get the airtime they deserve, and this feeds the entirely false claim that Muslim authorities don't condemn terrorism committed by Muslims. Instead, many Sunni and Shia Muslim scholars have made countless condemnations of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, the September 11 terrorist attacks, and terrorism committed by Muslims more generally.

Reading

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.
Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*.
Kepel, *Jihad*.
Qutb, *A Child from the Village*.
———, *Milestones*.
Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood*.

Questions

1   To what extent can it be argued that terrorist groups emerged in the Middle East and North Africa in the second half of the 20th century as a response to repressive regimes and in the absence of other, legitimate means of expression or political opposition?

2   What is the difference between so-called Islamic terrorism and a Muslim terrorist? Think about the central importance of accurate terminology and other labels in both understanding and confronting a problem such as terrorism.

Lecture 17

HOW 1979
TRANSFORMED
IRAN, EGYPT, AND IRAQ

This lecture assesses four pivotal events in the Middle East and North Africa during the shape-shifting year of 1979: the Iranian Revolution, the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, Iraq's Ba'ath Party purge, and the siege of Saudi Arabia's Grand Mosque of Mecca. Each of these flash points was significant in and of itself. Taken together, they make 1979 among the most groundbreaking and revolutionary years of the 20th century.

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi

The Iranian Revolution is sometimes spoken of as marking the end of a dynasty, though that claim is somewhat overblown given that Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was only the second member of this dynasty. His father had been prime minister in what was then Persia before a biddable parliament appointed him shah, or king, in 1925.

Persia became Iran in 1935. In 1941, Britain and Russia invaded and occupied Iran, forcing the elder shah to abdicate and go into exile. Germany had been Iran's biggest trading partner before the war, and the Allies were worried about the shah's pro-Nazi sympathies.

The first shah was replaced with his son, who would reign for 38 years. During that period, Iran grew rich thanks to its oil reserves. The country witnessed a period of great economic growth, industrial development, and government spending on health, education, and other sectors. Nevertheless, the country's influential Shia clergy viewed the shah as having grown too close to the West—and Western oil companies in particular.

In 1951, Iran's democratically elected prime minister, Mohammad Mosaddegh, nationalized the country's oil industry. Wildly popular in Iran, the announcement panicked Western oil companies and governments. Two years later, US and British intelligence agencies backed a coup to remove Mosaddegh from power, with an edict signed by the shah. The shah's opponents never forgave this.

The shah's reign was marked by allegations of widespread corruption, conspicuous personal consumption, and rising inflation in the years that followed. The gap grew between Iran's rich and poor. The suppression of opposition voices also became increasingly harsh, with the country's feared secret police, SAVAK, widely accused of the brutal torture and murder of thousands of political opponents. All of this made the shah many enemies.

Ruhollah Khomeini

One Shia religious leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, was detained and placed under house arrest after criticizing the shah. This resulted in three days of rioting and hundreds shot dead by security forces to restore order. The next year, Khomeini began 14 years in exile, mainly in Najaf, Iraq.

In January 1978, spontaneous pro-Khomeini demonstrations caught the shah by surprise, and he promised democratic elections within a year. He dismissed the head of SAVAK and convened talks with moderate religious leaders. By the summer of 1978, popular protests dwindled.

But demonstrations erupted again in August, and protestors soon numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Martial law was declared in September, and public protests were banned. People called for the return of Khomeini and the establishment of an Islamic republic. In an incident known as Black Friday, the army fired into a crowd of about 5,000 demonstrators. Nearly 90 were killed.

Millions had come out against the shah, but millions more were against much—if not all—that Khomeini stood for. Khomeini dismissed democracy as a Western style of government that would have no place in his so-called Islamic republic.

The shah now faced a general strike and continuing demonstrations in his country by an opposition that was becoming increasingly armed. He installed a military government with a general at its head in November 1978. But even this failed to halt the unravelling of his rule. Further protests were organized to coincide with the December 11 festival of Ashura, which is one of the holiest days in Shia Islam.

The writing was on the wall for the shah. On January 16, 1979, he boarded a flight out of Iran for the last time, and exuberant celebrations broke out throughout the country. Two weeks later, Khomeini, now in his late 70s, returned in triumph. The Iranian Revolution was reimagined as an Islamic revolution, and the shah's government collapsed on February 11.

The Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty

The second major event of 1979 was the signing of the Egypt-Israeli peace treaty in Washington. Egypt had fought four wars against Israel beginning in 1948, and Egypt had lost each encounter. Not only were these defeats a source of national humiliation to successive Egyptian governments, but they were also damaging to Egypt's economy.

Egyptian forces had enjoyed significant gains during the early stages of the Six-Day War of 1967. For the Sadat government, this scored a domestic political victory even amid the ensuing military defeat. Having restored a degree of national pride, Sadat was positioned to explore the possibility of secret peace talks with Israel. He understood how important it was to develop Egypt's ailing economy. Sadat also thought an agreement with Israel would clear a path for other Arab states to also reconcile.

Israel faced its own domestic political reckoning. Gone was the earlier bluster and confidence in its ability to take on all comers in the Middle East. During the course of the 1967 war, there had been moments of concern about the country's very survival. Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin also saw economic and strategic benefits of a peace with Egypt in the event of another Arab-Israeli war.

The 1979 peace treaty was agreed to after almost two weeks of secret talks hosted by US president Jimmy Carter at Camp David. Carter pressed both sides for peace and was willing to reward them with economic and military aid if a deal could be reached. So, at the stroke of a pen, Egypt became the first Arab country to recognize the State of Israel 31 years after its founding.

Rapprochement proved to be deeply unpopular across much of the Middle East and North Africa. Egypt was expelled from the Arab League, though it was allowed to rejoin a decade later. Egypt also lost its role as a leader of the Arab world.

The Ba'ath Party Purge

At the start of 1979, the president of Iraq and chair of the Revolutionary Command Council—its highest decision-making authority—was Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr. Al-Bakr and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party had come to power through a coup more than a decade earlier. Now, al-Bakr announced plans to enter into a treaty with Syria, leading to the eventual union of the two countries.

The plan was to unite two Ba'athist-ruled states with al-Bakr as leader and Syria's president, Hafez al-Assad, as deputy. But al-Bakr's deputy in Iraq, Saddam Hussein, was anxious about being sidelined in the new union. Already something of an authoritarian voice inside the government, Saddam forced the aging and ailing al-Bakr to resign and assumed the presidency himself.

Six days after elevating himself to the presidency, Saddam called an emergency meeting of about 400 senior party members of the ruling Ba'ath Party in a packed conference hall. Muhyi Abdel-Hussein, secretary of the Revolutionary Command Council, had objected to Hussein's power grab. Having endured days of torture and threats to his family, he now stood at a lectern in the crowded hall and read out a scripted confession stating that he'd been plotting to overthrow Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath Party government.

And, he said, he had not been acting alone. One by one, Abdel-Hussein read the names of 68 accused. Each man stood up in turn to be led out by plain-clothes security. The confession and the purported plot were clearly false. Still, of the 68 who were led out of the hall, 22 were found guilty of treason. Those found not-guilty were handed weapons and ordered to kill their erstwhile colleagues.

In the weeks that followed, hundreds more Ba'ath Party members were executed on Hussein's orders, including the Revolutionary Command Council secretary Muhyi Abdel-Hussein. Saddam Hussein had stamped his brutal authority on the country, and he would rule for the next 24 years, until 2003.

The Siege of the Grand Mosque

The final event of 1979 this lecture discusses is the siege of Saudi Arabia's Grand Mosque in Mecca. On the morning of November 20, tens of thousands of worshippers prepared for their dawn prayers. The annual hajj pilgrimage had just come to an end, so Mecca was busier than almost any other time of year.

At that moment, about 500 insurgents pulled hidden weapons from under their robes. They chained shut the gates of the Grand Mosque and broadcast a list of demands over the mosque's loudspeakers. Foremost among their demands was for the overthrow of Saudi Arabia's ruling family, the house of Saud, and an end to oil exports to the United States. Additionally, they insisted on the expulsion of all non-Muslim foreigners from the Arabian Peninsula.

Saudi Arabian troops attacked the insurgents barricaded inside the mosque, although military intervention first had to be sanctioned with a fatwa, or religious judgement, from religious authorities. The insurgents managed to fend off the troops for two weeks. On December 4, the government, with the help of Pakistani special forces and French paratroopers who were said to have converted to Islam to enter the holy site, overpowered the terrorists. By the end of the affair, at least 380 people were dead and more than 560 were injured.

About 70 insurgents who survived the assault were arrested and found guilty of crimes that included violating the sanctity of the Grand Mosque, killing fellow Muslims and others, and disobeying authorities. More than 60 rebels were publicly beheaded in eight cities across Saudi Arabia, thereby guaranteeing maximum public exposure and offering a warning to anyone else tempted to follow the radicals' example.

Conclusion

The shah of Iran, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, traveled to the United States to be treated for cancer in October 1979. Anti-American feelings were already running high in Iran. Demonstrators responded by storming the US embassy in Tehran, taking hostage 52 diplomats and civilians and holding them for 444 days. The hostage situation broke many of the ties between the two countries and contributed to the ascendancy of Khomeini's revolutionary regime.

In Egypt, President Sadat was assassinated two years after signing the peace agreement with Israel. His assassins were army officers who were also secretly members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad terrorist group. In spite of some vocal opposition at home, Menachem Begin's political career survived, ending with his resignation in 1983 due largely to ill health.

In Iraq, Saddam Hussein was toppled following an American-led invasion in 2003. But the country's path to peace, prosperity, and democracy remains trapped by violence and instability, fostered by individuals and groups keen to promote ethnic and religious division instead of national unity.

In Saudi Arabia, the house of Saud remains in power. It became even more conservative after the siege in Mecca. The country's religious establishment gained power and influence, and it became richer in the years that followed.

Before 1979, you would have been hard-pressed to find many serious voices discussing the role of Islam in national politics. After 1979, it was hard to hear political discussions that talked about much else. There's no doubt that it was a truly revolutionary year.

Reading

Ansari, *Iran*.

———, *Modern Iran since 1797*.

Cleveland and Martin Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*.

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.

Goldschmidt and Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East*.

Lesch, *1979*.

Shawcross, *The Shah's Last Ride*.

Questions

1 The year 1979 was pivotal for the Middle East and North Africa. Why did so many important events of lasting consequence converge in that year?

2 Are both the Middle East and the West still living with the consequences of 1979? What might this mean for the remainder of the 21st century?

THE **IRAN-IRAQ WAR**
AND A DECADE OF **HORRORS**

The Iranian Revolution that swept Mohammad Reza Pahlavi from power in January 1979 upset the strategic balance in the Middle East and North Africa. Two weeks later, the Shia Muslim cleric Ruhollah Khomeini returned from exile in France and began promoting Islamic revolutions throughout the region. Neighboring Iraq was also a Shia-majority country, but Khomeini called Iraq "the puppet of Satan," perceiving a closeness to America that was likely overstated. Saddam Hussein, himself a Sunni, ruled over this secular Arab nationalist state. Worried by Khomeini's threats of Islamic revolution, Iraq invaded Iran in September 1980.

The Shatt al-Arab Waterway

The war started on September 22, 1980. On the first day, the Iraqi air force hit Iranian airfields, hoping to render them useless ahead of a ground invasion. These attacks were only partially successful. Most Iranian aircraft were safely stored in reinforced shelters. The next day, Iraqi ground forces invaded Iran along a 400-mile front, amounting to slightly less than half of the 1,000-mile shared border.

Iraq focused the bulk of its forces in the south, against the Iranian province of Khuzestan. Gaining control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway, which demarcates part of the border between Iraq and Iran and serves as the maritime route through which oil from these two major producers is shipped to the rest of the world, was crucial to Hussein's plan to win the war.

But Iranian forces put up stiff resistance in Khuzestan despite being greatly outnumbered. Iran was able to sustain a tenacious six-week defense of the provincial capital of Khorramshahr. By the time the city fell, each side had lost an estimated 7,000 men, killed and wounded. And the victorious Iraqi troops found themselves in possession of an almost empty and destroyed municipality that they would hold for little more than a year.

Iran gained battlefield numbers with the help of eager volunteers. Soon, its forces were on numerical parity with Iraq, although many of the Iranians were untrained and untested in combat. Iran, suffering a shortage of heavy weapons, used its untrained masses in large-scale frontal assaults. These became known as human wave attacks.

Large-scale tank battles produced periodic small victories rather than major strategic breakthroughs, until May 1982, when Iran launched an offensive that retook Khorramshahr. Saddam ordered a tactical retreat from much of Iran. But Iraq managed to hold on to the parts of the Shatt al-Arab waterway it already controlled. Saddam also ordered the executions of at least a dozen senior officers he held responsible for the recent setbacks.

In 1984, Iraq instigated what became known as the Tanker War, which saw attacks against Iranian oil tankers and other merchant vessels. The maritime insurer Lloyd's of London reckoned that 546 commercial vessels were damaged and 430 merchant sailors lost their lives over the course of the war.

International Response

While Saddam started the war, fighting lasted as long as it did partly because Khomeini rejected numerous calls from Iraq and the United Nations for a cease-fire and negotiations. Khomeini was determined to see the Iraqi government overthrown, and he stated explicitly that he would not stop until the Ba'ath regime was replaced by an Islamic republic. Still, Iran's incursions into Iraq were far less successful than Khomeini would have wanted.

Most Arab states in the Middle East supported Iraq in this conflict. Saudi Arabia and its Sunni leadership provided significant financial support for Iraq. Saudi leaders were disturbed by the possibility of a Shia uprising in their eastern province. Kuwait and Bahrain, both of which had large Shia populations, supported Saddam's war for the same reason.

Egypt sent troops to fight alongside Iraqi units, winning a degree of redemption among fellow Arabs after having made peace with Israel in 1979. By comparison, the most prominent Arab states to support Iran were Libya and Syria. Israel also supported Iran, despite the fact that Iran didn't officially recognize Israel. Still, Iran was an important market for Israel's arms industry, and it was a useful counterweight to Iraq, which was itself vehemently anti-Israeli.

In 1982, the United States began backing Iraq, but its support was intended to hinder Iran as much as it was to help Iraq. Khomeini was quick to link Iraq to the United States in speeches, and he increasingly employed religious language to portray the war as an existential fight between good, or Islam, and evil—the ungodly Saddam and his American backers.

But even as Khomeini was saying this, the administration of US president Ronald Reagan was secretly facilitating the sale and transfer of weapons to the Khomeini regime, in spite of official denials and contrary to a congressional arms embargo. The arms sales to Iran were devised to gain Iran's help in freeing US kidnapping victims, who were believed to be held hostage in Lebanon, while also secretly funneling funds to anti-communist rebels in Nicaragua's civil war.

The Soviet Union also backed Iraq and became a major arms supplier to the Arab country. It was something of an anomaly for both superpowers to be on the same side during the Cold War.

At least nine arms shipments to Iran were completed by the time the scandal became public in November 1986. Contradicting the official explanation, it was discovered that the first arms sales to Iran had been agreed to and delivered as far back as 1981, before the Iranian-backed Shia militant group known as Hezbollah had taken any Americans hostage in Lebanon. US authorities charged 14 people with criminal offenses in the scandal.

Chemical Weapons

By the end of 1987, Iran's forces were even more seriously depleted and war-weary than their Iraqi opponents, in large part because the Iranian war effort relied heavily on popular mobilization, which had tailed off since the start of the fighting. Thus, the balance of power was with Iraq.

In 1988, Iraqi airplanes dropped poison gas on a number of Iranian villages and towns close the border with Iraq, killing thousands of civilians instantly and leaving thousands more with life-changing injuries and long-term health issues. It should be remembered that Saddam Hussein dropped poison gas on Iraqis, too, perhaps most infamously on the city of Halabjah. An estimated 5,000 Iraqis were killed immediately, with another 7,000 suffering long-term health complaints.

An estimated 30% of Iran's urban population now fled to the countryside. And the Iranian leadership, having heard little international condemnation about the poison gas attacks, grew concerned that it was dangerously isolated.

Then, in July 1988, an American warship shot down an Iranian commercial air flight, killing all 290 people on board. Although the US government expressed regret for the deadly mistake, Tehran feared that Washington was about to become directly involved in the conflict, on the side of Iraq. Against this backdrop, Khomeini accepted a cease-fire.

Just like that, the Iran-Iraq War ended on August 20, 1988. After eight years, the death grip of these two neighbors had ended in a stalemate with no territorial gains on either side. Estimates of the combined war dead range anywhere from 500,000 to more than a million. This includes as many as 90,000 Iranian child soldiers, mainly between 15 and 17 years of age.

About another 50,000 Iranians died from poison attacks. Some 100,000 or more survivors required long-term treatment. Iraqi documents show that its chemical weapons were developed with help from American, West German, British, Dutch, and French companies. The United Nations Security Council issued statements condemning the attacks on two separate occasions. But in spite of this, the attacks continued without sanction.

Conclusion

Khomeini died in 1989 at age 86, revered by millions of Iranians in spite of his failure to overthrow Saddam Hussein and export the Shia revolution to the Arab world. Khomeini's defiance of its neighbor and the might of the American superpower nevertheless restored national pride in Iran, a country that had long been beholden to foreign powers and which felt accordingly aggrieved.

Less than two years after the end of the war between Iran and Iraq, Saddam Hussein once again invaded a neighboring country—and once again badly miscalculated the outcome of his actions. The invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was met with dramatic international response and resulted in the Gulf War, followed by years of civil war and the humiliating US invasion in 2003.

As for Iran, it dealt with the damage to its oil and transport infrastructure to reemerge as a regional power surpassing Iraq and rivalling Saudi Arabia. At the end of the 20th century, not only was Iran pulling the strings of populist sectarianism in Iraq, but it also had a significant role in Lebanon and was an active supporter of Palestinian grievances.

Sectarianism is not the main source of contention in regional politics, and the real differences that exist between Shia and Sunni Muslims revolve primarily around matters of religious practice rather than theology. Any unreconcilable difference between the nations is largely a modern, nationalistically driven and somewhat artificial divide, fanned at the convenience of those holding the reins in this tumultuous region.

Since the dawn of its national revolution in 1979, Iran has abandoned its traditionally close relationship with the United States. Western European nations and Russia retain significant geostrategic interests in Iran but find their ambitions blocked by the United States. And the US, not finding success in its attempts to make Iraq a cornerstone of a more Western-friendly Middle East, is similarly frustrated.

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Questions

1 Was the Iran-Iraq War inevitable following the ascent to power of Ruhollah Khomeini in the wake of Iran's 1979 revolution?

2 Would the Iran-Iraq War have lasted as long as it did if both Saddam Hussein and Ruhollah Khomeini had not actively fostered sectarian differences?

THE FIRST **GULF WAR** IN **KUWAIT**

On the morning of August 2, 1990, tens of thousands of Iraqi Republican Guard forces invaded Kuwait. Kuwait was not expecting this confrontation in spite of months of saber-rattling by the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, and its forces were ill-prepared to mount a credible defense. By August 3, the invasion and conquest were more or less complete. Iraqi forces would remain in Kuwait for seven months, until forced out by a US-led international military coalition in the action code-named Operation Desert Storm. Still, even this would be far from the end of the story.

Financial Devastation in Iraq

Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait less than two years after the conclusion of a disastrous war with another of his neighbors, Iran. The invasion of Kuwait was another essentially unprovoked act of aggression. Saddam made little effort to conceal how keen he was to establish himself as the strong man in the region, with Iraq as hegemon. If successful, he would gain strategic influence across the Arab world and weaken his domestic opposition inside of Iraq.

A decades-long border dispute between Iraq and Kuwait had maintained ragged relations between the two countries. And in 1990, Saddam used this as justification for his invasion, even identifying Kuwait as the 19th province of Iraq. Still, despite tensions, the two countries had also grown closer during Iraq's eight-year war against Iran. Kuwait had provided Iraq with important financial support, as did Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other countries.

After the war, Iraq's financial benefactors wanted to be paid back. But Iraq had been devastated by the war, financially and otherwise. Not only was Saddam unable to repay the money Iraq owed, but he was in dire need of even more financial assistance. Rather than asking for advice from experts in international finance, he opted for a more aggressive approach.

In the first months of 1990, Saddam accused Kuwait of stealing Iraqi oil across their mutual border. But this was a charge without basis in fact. He also demanded that his foreign lenders forgive Iraq's debt. Later, this was understood as something of a smokescreen. He had already started planning to seize Kuwait's massive oil fields and steal his way out of economic ruin. But Kuwait refused Saddam's demands. The loans would not be forgiven.

International Response

Saddam Hussein badly misread the international response and would soon confront virtually unanimous international condemnation of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. On the very day of the invasion, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 660, condemning Iraq and demanding its immediate and unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. Russia and America were on the same side of the argument.

The Arab League, which initially wanted to send an all-Arab force to contain Iraq and negotiate with Saddam, ultimately threw its lot in with a military coalition the United States was putting together. Never before had the Middle East and North Africa seen such an alliance of former rivals.

Within days, Iraq found itself isolated politically and economically. Resolution 661 was passed on August 6, hitting Iraq with trade, financial, and arms embargos. Most significantly, it prevented the import of all products and commodities originating in Iraq or Kuwait, including oil. The resolution also prohibited the sale of weapons or other military equipment to Iraq and Kuwait.

By early November 1990, the US-led coalition had deployed more than 320,000 troops to Saudi Arabia. Saddam responded by sending 200,000 more Iraqi troops to Kuwait, on top of the roughly 100,000-strong force that had invaded in August. On November 29, the Security Council passed another edict, Resolution 678, requiring Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait before January 15 or face military action.

By the UN-set deadline, 700,000 coalition troops from 39 nations had taken up stations across the Gulf region to confront an Iraqi force of 540,000. Still, Iraq gave no indication that it was willing to withdraw.

Operation Desert Storm

Operation Desert Storm began on January 17. For the next 40 days, coalition aircraft flew more than 100,000 sorties and dropped almost 90,000 tons of bombs—more than during all of the Second World War. The coalition knocked out most of Iraq's antiaircraft batteries and succeeded at grounding or downing its military planes.

With the aerial-only phase of the war completed, coalition forces under the command of the American general Norman Schwarzkopf launched a massive ground offensive from Saudi Arabia into Kuwait on February 24, 1991. General Schwarzkopf's assault plan relied on two main actions: a marine-led invasion of Iraq-occupied Kuwait from the south and an attack against Iraqi rear positions by army tankers. This latter move would cut off the possibility of an Iraqi retreat and force a confrontation with their Republican Guard forces.

Saddam ordered a retreat and withdrawal from Kuwait on February 25. In just 100 hours, the coalition had pushed the Iraqi military back across the border into Iraq. But the coalition forces stopped short of invading Iraq and perhaps consolidating Saddam's defeat. On February 28, US president George H. W. Bush declared the liberation of Kuwait and a halt to coalition military advances just 100 miles from Baghdad.

One of the biggest challenges facing Schwarzkopf's plan was the sheer size of the Iraqi army. Iraq at that time boasted the world's fourth-largest army, with some 650,000 deployed in the field and about 1 million in reserve.

George Bush and Sheikh Jabir al-Ahmad al-Sabah of Kuwait

On April 3, Security Council Resolution 687 ratified the cease-fire and required Iraq to dispose of its weapons of mass destruction. It also set up a monitoring mission under the newly created Special Commission to ensure Iraq's compliance with the resolution.

Saddam agreed to the UN resolutions, which included his acceptance of Kuwait's sovereignty, an agreement to pay reparations to Kuwait, and an agreement to abide by sanctions until all weapons of mass destruction had been destroyed to the satisfaction of the UN inspectors. On acceptance of the terms of this resolution, a formal cease-fire came into effect.

After the War

While many countries viewed this moment as a golden opportunity to see an end to Saddam and his brutal regime, President Bush said that the coalition had accomplished all that was required—and allowed—under the UN Security Council resolutions.

Two sectors of Iraqi society that had suffered years of oppression or neglect under Saddam's government—the Kurdish minority in northern Iraq and Shia populations in the south—now mounted domestic rebellions. But both groups found that while they enjoyed large degrees of international sympathy, this wasn't matched with material support.

Further, the Iraqi military was allowed by the UN to continue flying armed helicopters, ostensibly for transport purposes, under terms of the cease-fire agreement. And soon enough, Iraqi military helicopters were busy targeting and attacking rebel territories. A more complete no-fly zone was imposed by coalition forces in the south the following year. But by then, Iraqi troops had carried out assaults that resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and displaced roughly 2 million people from their homes.

> Many more Iraqis were forced to flee when Saddam's government drained large areas of the Mesopotamian marshes in southern and southwestern Iraq. This was an ecological crime of magnitude and a disaster for the Shia Arabs for whom the marshes were home.

International observers would find that some 350,000 Iraqi children under the age of five died over the subsequent decade as a direct result of the war as well as through the destruction of national infrastructure, resulting in limited access to clean water and insufficient regular supplies of food and essential medicines. On top of this, London's Imperial War Museum says between 20,000 and 35,000 Iraqi soldiers died during the ground war. Estimates for civilian deaths range from 100,000 up to 200,000.

In Kuwait, hundreds of people were killed or tortured, and thousands lost their homes in the wake of the Iraqi invasion and occupation. And as Iraqi forces fled, they set fire to hundreds of Kuwaiti oil wells, doing their best to damage the country's economy and creating a petroleum environmental crisis on a scale the world had never seen. Damage to Kuwait resulting from the invasion and subsequent destruction cost the country an estimated $100 billion. Ten years later, most observers would have agreed that Kuwait made virtually a full recovery.

Conclusion

At the end of this decade, Saddam remained an international pariah, but he retained a firm grip in Iraq. At the same time, he was worried about plots to unseat him and the risk of arrest in another country. He never left Iraq again. In his remaining years in power, he did little to rebuild the country's economy, which continued to struggle under the oil embargo that the UN had imposed prior to the start of the war.

To ease human distress in Iraq, the United Nations authorized an Oil-for-Food Program in 1995, which was designed to allow Iraq to sell its principal economic commodity on the international market in exchange for food, medicine, and other humanitarian needs. The UN program prohibited Iraq from using the oil trade to build up its armed forces.

In terms of feeding the Iraqi people and preventing Saddam from reestablishing a program to build weapons of mass destruction, the Oil-for-Food Program was a success. On the other hand, it was also subject to widespread abuse and corruption, including allegations that profits were sometimes unlawfully diverted to members of the Iraqi government and UN officials. And to some degree, Saddam was able to get around it.

An ongoing US presence in the Middle East, and Saudi Arabia in particular, was another legacy of the war. The United States wanted to be on hand in the event of future threats in the region. US troops in Saudi Arabia were one factor in al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden's decision to declare a holy war against the United States and the West more generally, leading to terror attacks against targets in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, including US embassies in the sub-Saharan nations of Kenya and Tanzania. This was the road that would lead to the September 11 terror attacks in the United States and later US intervention in Iraq.

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Questions

1 Why did Saddam Hussein so badly misread the likely international response to his August 1990 invasion of Kuwait?

2 Why did the international community fail to predict, and thus miss the opportunity to try and prevent, Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait?

A PATH THROUGH OSLO TO ARAB-ISRAELI DÉTENTE

I n the woods outside of Oslo, Norway, small groups of diplomats took periodic walks together starting in December 1992 with one of history's knottiest problems foremost in their minds. They discussed their opposing standpoints, eventually laying out the broad terms of a possible agreement. In September 1993, this agreement was formalized in a set of peace accords between the government of Israel and representatives of the Palestine Liberation Organization. The Oslo Accords were a groundbreaking moment in relations between the two main protagonists in the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. And yet the promise of the accords failed to live up to the expectations of either side.

The First Peace Talks

The State of Israel was founded in the wake of the Second World War, so it came with fresh memories of the Holocaust and the murder of some 6 million European Jews along with millions of others. The United Nations partitioned Israel out of the former British mandate of Palestine, leaving some 700,000 Muslim Palestinians displaced. A coalition of Arab neighbors then went to war with Israel in an attempt to destroy it. But Israel's victory validated its existence, as did subsequent victories over Arab armies in 1956, 1967, and 1973.

By the mid-1970s, however, the world was a different place with a new generation of leaders and evolving geopolitical and economic priorities. The Arab world was newly empowered by their oil riches and the petroleum deficit in the industrialized West. And the first generation of nationalist leaders in the Arab world had given way to more sophisticated and internationalist thinkers such as Egypt's Anwar Sadat and the PLO's Yasser Arafat.

All of this came into play to make possible the 1978 Camp David peace agreement between Egypt and Israel—the first such agreement between Israel and a government of the Middle East or North Africa. At the time, Egypt was seen by other Arab nations as having betrayed their mutual agreement to not recognize or negotiate with Israel. The Camp David agreement also called for the creation of a Palestinian state in Gaza and on the West Bank. But because the Palestinians weren't directly represented at the Camp David talks, the United Nations did not formally sanction the agreement.

Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader since 1969, had fought against Israel during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and consistently denied its right to exist as a country. By the late 1980s, however, he had accepted Israel, a position informed by the 1979 Egypt-Israel peace treaty and almost unanimous Arab cooperation with the US-led coalition against Iraq during the Persian Gulf War. Indeed, both of these events opened the door to a possible Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement.

The Madrid Conference in 1991 was a set of bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations with other Arab nations also present, including Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon. Coming in the wake of the war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, it was cosponsored by the United States, under President George H. W. Bush, and the president of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev. Another step on the long and winding road toward peace in the Middle East, it reflected continuing shifts in the new world order that were coming about as the Cold War came to an end.

> The Palestine Liberation Organization's stated purpose was the liberation of Palestine through armed struggle. Most of this violence was aimed at easy, nonmilitary targets—which is to say Israeli civilians. It was for this reason that the PLO was considered a terrorist organization by both the United States and Israel until the Madrid Conference.

The conference ended with a high degree of optimism on the part of all participants and, more practically, a road map toward reconciliation. But in spite of making progress toward a just, equitable, and lasting peace for Israel and the Palestinian people, both parties had their detractors, internal and external. It was for that reason that the negotiators decided it was better for them to meet in private in the woods outside of Oslo.

The Oslo Accords

In all, the Israeli and Palestinian delegations held 14 secret meetings. The first tangible outcome of this was a letter of mutual recognition in which the PLO, for the first time, recognized Israel. Israel also acknowledged and accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people.

This was followed in September 1993 by the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. Its main provision was to establish the Palestinian Legislative Council, which was essentially an elected parliament. In addition, both parties agreed to Palestinian self-rule in Gaza and Israel's phased withdrawal of its forces from Gaza and the Jericho area of the West Bank within a five-year period, or the year 2000. Israel's promise was possible only as a result of the Palestinians' agreement to renounce terrorism and the use of violence.

On September 13, 1993, the prime minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin, and PLO leader Yasser Arafat signed the Oslo Accords on the White House lawn. Two years later, Oslo II was signed in Taba, Egypt. It gave the newly constituted Palestinian Authority limited controls over Gaza and the West Bank while allowing Israel to annex other parts of the West Bank. Oslo II also established parameters for economic and political cooperation between the two sides.

What the Oslo pacts failed to do was to produce a genuine peace between Israel and Palestine. A number of Palestinians and Israelis rejected the agreements and refused to accept their leaders' decision to negotiate with long-held foes.

Rejectionists on the Palestinian side, many of whom were refugees in Arab countries, thought Arafat had betrayed them. They responded with anger and violence. From bases in southern Lebanon, the Muslim militant group Hezbollah—a PLO rival for Palestinian leadership that had always opposed the PLO's secular brand of Arab nationalism—began to launch attacks against Israel.

Rejectionists on the Israeli side directed their fury at Israel's promise to return some of the land it had seized in previous wars, notably the territorial gains it made during the Six-Day War of June 1967. Some Israelis believed the land should remain theirs in perpetuity.

In February 1994, an American-Israeli settler opened fire on Palestinians at a mosque in Hebron, killing 29 and injuring others before he was killed by members the congregation. Some pro-occupation Zionists celebrated him as a hero and martyr.

In spite of escalating violence, Israel went through with its treaty obligations and withdrew from roughly 60% of Gaza and Jericho in May 1994. And in July, Arafat returned from a 27-year exile spent mostly in Tunis—where the PLO had moved its headquarters—to lead the new Palestinian Authority in Gaza.

Aftermath of the Accords

In October 1994, Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin, and Israeli foreign minister Shimon Peres were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. That same month, Jordan and Israel signed their own treaty after encouragement from Egypt's president and a promise from President Clinton to forgive all debts owed by Jordan to the United States. The peace treaty made Jordan the second Arab state to reach peace with Israel. But any momentum gained at Oslo would prove to be short-lived.

In November 1995, Prime Minister Rabin was murdered by a radical Jewish rejectionist who had objected to Israel's agreement with the Palestinians. This was followed by a string of terrorist attacks against Israeli citizens by Hamas, the Sunni Muslim, militant Palestinian nationalist group. The attacks by Hamas undermined support for the late Rabin's Labor Party in elections the following year. An anxious electorate now handed victory to the conservative Benjamin Netanyahu and his Likud Party, which historically opposed Palestinian statehood.

In 1998, Palestinian officials accused Israel of not following through on troop withdrawals from Gaza and Hebron. Meanwhile, the construction of new Israeli settlements began again anew, after having slowed at the request of the Clinton administration.

In May 1999, the Israeli Labor Party's Ehud Barak defeated Netanyahu in national elections. Barak predicted he could reach new peace agreements with Syria and the Palestinians in 12 to 15 months. He also pledged to withdraw Israeli troops from southern Lebanon, where they'd been since the 1982 Lebanon War.

Encouraged by the withdrawal of Israeli forces, and at Barak's insistence, President Clinton convened a follow-up Camp David summit in July 2000. At this meeting, Clinton, Barak, and Arafat tried—and failed—to reach a final agreement on the West Bank and Gaza. Accounts differ as to why the talks broke down, but it's clear that a gulf remained over Israeli-Palestinian borders, refugees, and the future of Jerusalem.

In 2001, Barak lost a special election for prime minister to Likud leader Ariel Sharon. Meanwhile, Israeli-Palestinian violence continued unabated, and the prospects for peace seemed further away than at any point since the signing of the first Oslo Accords seven years earlier.

Conclusion

Where do the borders of Israel end and Palestine's begin? What right do Palestinian refugees have to the West Bank, including settlements now inhabited by Israelis? And how can the status of Jerusalem—which both sides claim as their capital—be resolved? To get the peace process kick-started at Oslo, these important and hard-to-settle questions were deliberately left to future talks.

Indeed, the Oslo agreements were never meant to be an end in themselves but rather a foundation on which to build greater cooperation and understanding. Although things did not play out as they were supposed to, the diplomatic breakthroughs achieved at Oslo remain the basis for cooperation today. As such, the Oslo Accords represent a landmark moment in the pursuit of peace in the Middle East and in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

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Questions

1 To what extent is the success or failure of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks dependent on domestic politics?

2 Should the fact that the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is a modern, 20th-century dispute provide reason for hope that it's not as intractable a problem as it's often portrayed?

Lecture 21

US INVASION OF
IRAQ AND ITS
CONSEQUENCES

The terrible events of September 11, 2001, left many with lasting memories of the dead and wounded in the United States and caused unspeakable pain to the victims' families and friends across the world. Yet the long-term impact of 9/11 was perhaps felt more powerfully in the Middle East and North Africa than anywhere else. The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the war that followed were events of such importance for the region that they caused even greater seismic shifts than the redrawing of the Ottoman Empire and colonial-era borders after the First World War. But it's still too soon to know what the fallout will ultimately mean.

After the 9/11 Attacks

The Middle East and North Africa were largely quiet as the calendar closed on the 20th century. Among other things, this meant widespread political stability but also many dictatorships—both military and pseudo-civilian—with widespread repression and little democracy. There were lavish arms budgets for countries that could afford them and a continuing failure to find a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian question.

In September 2001, however, a group of terrorists from the Middle East—15 from Saudi Arabia, two from the United Arab Emirates, and one each from Egypt and Lebanon—carried out a series of sophisticated attacks in the United States that killed almost 3,000 people and injured thousands more. This violent assault led fairly quickly to the end of the apparent political stasis in the Middle East and, in turn, hundreds of thousands of deaths in the region.

Once it was clear that the terrorist group al-Qaeda was responsible for the attacks, US forces invaded Afghanistan in October, launching a war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Afghanistan's Taliban government had offered safe haven to the terrorist group responsible for the 9/11 attacks. The regime was swiftly overthrown. But it wasn't long before neoconservatives in the West were directing the drums of war against other long-time foes, Iraq and Iran.

The United States no longer had a superpower counterweight to concern it after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. The first example of how things might work in the new world order had come in response to Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait. The United States and the Russians were on the same side of a UN Security Council resolution backing a military response to Iraq. The subsequent 1991 Gulf War gave the US an opportunity to expand its military presence in the Middle East and its influence more broadly.

> Numerous voices spoke out against a US invasion of Iraq. There were some 3,000 antiwar demonstrations and other protests against the imminent action in cities around the world, bringing together an estimated 36 million participants.

After the 9/11 attacks took place a decade later, those who wanted Saddam gone saw it as a golden opportunity. The administration of George W. Bush developed intelligence seeming to connect al-Qaeda to the Iraqi regime. But that link was illusory; there were no meaningful connections between the 9/11 attackers and Saddam Hussein. Instead, the Bush administration cherry-picked its intelligence to make the case for an American-led invasion of Iraq and possibly beyond.

The intelligence rationale for the invasion was that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction—biological, chemical, nuclear, and radiological—that posed an imminent threat to the United States and its allies. Iraq's WMD program had in fact been abandoned in 1991. Still, a central appeal of the invasion argument was that it would entail the straightforward task of removing Saddam Hussein from power and the destruction of WMDs while also securing Iraq's petroleum infrastructure.

An invading force would also be in a position to destroy any Islamist militant, or terrorist, groups in the country. As in Afghanistan, the initial invasion and government overthrow would be achieved quickly. But the subsequent chaos would spawn an insurgency and the birth of new terrorist groups.

The Invasion of Iraq

The invasion of Iraq began on March 20, 2003. Less than three weeks later, Baghdad fell, ending Saddam's 24-year tyrannical reign. This led to spontaneous outpourings of genuine relief and gratitude among large sections of the Iraqi civilian population. But it also unleashed widespread civil unrest and criminal looting on a scale unthinkable under the previous regime. Coalition forces were slow to respond.

By the Pentagon's own reckoning, about 650,000 tons of military ordnance—arms, ammunition, and explosives—was stolen from Iraqi government arsenals, underground bunkers, and various other storage facilities. Later, this would support a prolonged and well-armed insurgency that US and coalition forces were ill-prepared to tackle. Looting also extended to the country's museums, shops, and restaurants.

Three weeks forward from the fall of Baghdad, President George W. Bush stood on the deck of the aircraft carrier *USS Abraham Lincoln* off the coast of California and declared the end of major combat operations in Iraq. On May 6, President Bush appointed US ambassador L. Paul Bremer as administrator of a temporary governing body in Iraq. Known as the Coalition Provisional Authority, it would hold power and oversee national elections until occupying forces could restore stability.

On his first day in charge, Bremer issued Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 1, which excluded all members of the Saddam-dominated Ba'ath Party from holding office in the new Iraq. While arguably well-intentioned, this decision was poorly thought through and implemented without due caution for the possible results. Under Saddam, many Iraqis—including some 40,000 teachers—had joined the Ba'ath Party solely to get a job. Now, roughly 100,000 Iraqis were immediately unemployed and without salaries to support their families.

Following this, the CPA announced a decision to dissolve the Iraqi army, police, and other national security forces. Hundreds of thousands of military-age men suddenly had nothing to do. Many of them were owed months of back pay and had hoped the CPA would hire them to help secure the country. Overnight, out-of-work soldiers initiated attacks against coalition forces. The CPA reversed its decision, but the damage was done. Those organizing the insurgency could now recruit from a pool of idle hands that were trained to carry and fire weapons.

Insurgency and Instability

Insurgents used the gamut of guerrilla tactics against the coalition's conventional forces, including mortar and missile attacks, suicide bombers, roadside improvised explosive devices, car bombs, small-arms fire, and rocket-propelled grenades. In the spring of 2004, a Sunni-led insurrection spread, now for the first time attracting war fighters from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa.

This insurrection was joined by a Jordanian terrorist named Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who led an extremist Sunni network known as al-Qaeda in Iraq. It would morph into the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, alternatively known as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL. This group would present a new threat to regional and international interests.

Al-Zarqawi and other like-minded militants actively fomented Sunni-Shia discord in Iraqi society while also mounting attacks against coalition and national forces as well as civilians. The insurgency mounted more than 26,000 incidents in 2004, rising to more than 34,000 in 2005. Iraq's civilian population caught the brunt of these attacks.

Despite fears that Iraqi society might dissolve into civil war, national elections in December 2005 brought a democratically elected National Assembly and new government to power. Still, most national power resided not in the National Assembly headquartered in Baghdad but in traditional ethnic and tribal centers from Shia-dominated Basra in the south to Kurdish-dominated Erbil in the north. Members of the new National Assembly seemed to have little illusion that their installation would centralize power in the new government or that it would mean an end to sectarian violence.

On December 30, 2006, Saddam Hussein was found guilty of crimes against humanity in an Iraqi court and hanged. But this would not necessarily settle national or regional instability. As the new year dawned, the United States added more than 20,000 troops to the approximately 150,000 foreign service personnel already in the country. The threat to Western troops occupying Iraq had fallen, but sectarian murders were increasing, fostering societal divisions and mistrust.

And while Iraq now had a national government, it was notoriously corrupt and proved incapable of fostering national unity or even functionality. Shia members of the country's police force were found guilty of murdering Sunni civilians, and the state's inability to maintain effective control of law and order meant that both Shia and Sunni militia groups were able to act with virtual impunity.

Car bombs and other terrorist attacks increased in number and at times seemed to target everyone and anyone. Kidnappings, torture, and murders were daily occurrences. Into this vacuum stepped numerous informal groups that were only too happy to exploit the absence of law and order by inserting themselves as guardians of the community.

Conclusion

In December 2007, President Bush agreed to a phased withdrawal of US combat troops from Iraq. His successor, Barack Obama, completed the military exit by the end of 2011.

Yet Iraq was still in tatters. Its Shia majority, after having been silenced for decades, controlled the national government, but it was hopelessly divided even among itself and incapable of acting to inspire a sense of national unity. The Shia prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, who ruled from 2006 to 2014, succeeded mostly at uniting competing Shia groups long enough to deny power to any coalition of Sunni parties.

Many Sunni politicians, police, and civilians felt marginalized and drifted away from participating in attempts to govern at the national level. By June 2014, the militant Sunni-powered Daesh, or so-called Islamic State, had emerged as a force strong enough to openly confront Iraqi police and army units. It grew to hold large swathes of territory in northwestern Iraq and across the border in northern Syria. And when Shia militias mobilized to push back, they sometimes targeted ordinary Sunni civilians.

The US intervention was never meant to bring about greater Iranian influence in Iraq, but it did just that as Iraqi Shias welcomed Iran as a preferred ally to the Americans and Iranian intelligence became more active in Iraq's domestic affairs. Nor did the United States and its allies mean to create the circumstances in Iraq making possible decades of regional instability. Yet these are some of the ongoing consequences.

Reading

Brown, *Diplomacy in the Middle East*.

Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*.

Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation*.

Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*.

Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*.

Milton-Edwards and Hincliffe, *Conflicts in the Middle East since 1945*.

Richards and Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*.

Sluglett and Farouk-Sluglett, *Iraq since 1958*.

Tripp, *A History of Iraq*.

Questions

1 To what extent was Iraq's post-invasion descent into chaos and civil war the result of the West's failure to plan for the rebuilding of the country or a failure to appreciate the dysfunctional nature of the Iraqi state after more than 20 years of rule under Saddam Hussein?

2 Is Iraq better or worse off today because of Saddam Hussein's removal from power?

ARE DEMOCRACY AND ISLAM COMPATIBLE?

According to the waves of democracy theory, there were a number of periods during the 20th century and later when new democratic countries emerged from nondemocratic political entities. These waves frequently were connected to a major shift in the distribution of power among the more powerful nations and empires. When such shifts happen, a space opens up from which domestic reforms, and possibly democracy, can emerge. This lecture discusses three waves of democracy during the 20th century and the role of Islam in the governments of the Middle East.

The Collapse of the Ottoman Empire

For much of the 19th century, Western nations were moving away from authoritarian rule toward representative, liberal democracies. People were demanding—and winning—certain rights that became enshrined in law. These very same conversations were also taking place in the Middle East. The issues debated included citizens' rights, the rule of law, the role of religion, and whether women should have the right to vote.

At the same time, most of the Middle East was ruled by two absolute monarchs, both of whom claimed a mandate from God. The Ottoman sultan in Constantinople ruled over much of the Arab world. And a king, or shah, ruled over Persia. Then, the storm of the First World War broke, destroying much of what had been in place before it. The centuries-old Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1922. At this time, it might have been possible for the region to see the birth of a number of independent, democratic states.

> Even if one sees the road from autocracy to democracy as a sign of progress, the journey isn't necessarily going to be smooth or straightforward. States can easily revert or become less democratic. And political scientists who loudly trumpet the move to democratization are often able to do so only by ignoring half the population, which is to say women's suffrage is all too often overlooked.

That was the situation envisioned by US president Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points statement in January 1918. Entering the last year of World War I, Wilson viewed the points as the basis for a negotiated postwar peace. His principles revolved around the concepts of national self-determination, freedom of the seas, and redrawn borders. He also called for the end to secret treaties, a criticism that he directed at French, British, and Russian claims to Ottoman territory in the Middle East.

Wilson specifically addressed his preference for the independence of a post-Ottoman Turkey and other nationalities within the disintegrating empire. But it was not to be. Instead, another product of the Fourteen Points, the League of Nations, awarded Britain and France administrative control over much of the Arab Middle East. Britain was given a mandate to administer Iraq, Jordan, and the historical territory of Palestine, which included modern-day Israel. France was awarded the mandate for Syria and Lebanon.

There was a moment in 1919, before the French established their mandate in Syria, when Islamists and secular Arab nationalists drew up a mutually acceptable constitution for an independent state and established a Syrian National Congress. In March 1920, they declared the Arab Kingdom of Syria, independent from the Ottoman Empire in its final days.

But this early experiment in Arab democracy ended when the French sent in their army to stake mandate claims to Syria and Lebanon. Indeed, although the League of Nations explicitly said the mandates were not to be treated as colonial territories, this was in practice how Britain and France treated them until the mandates ended following the Second World War.

Middle Eastern Oil and Cold War Intrigues

Still, there was at this time a global move away from empires and colonies toward independence. This was especially notable in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia. New borders were carved across the Middle East and North Africa after World War I, but many of these new states didn't gain full independence until after World War II. Independence arrived to most of the region in the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, many of these new countries allowed political parties and national parliaments to form. But in most cases, they were window dressing with no real substance.

The West's growing need for Middle Eastern oil, combined with Cold War intrigues that saw the United States and Britain jockeying for leverage and power in the region, seem to have delayed or depressed independence and democracy's potential in the region. Indeed, the West was happy to accept—and collude with—the absolute monarchs that reigned in the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula, as in Iran and Saudi Arabia.

They also cooperated with autocrats ruling as presidents as the result of military coups over supposed republics, as was the case in Syria. Many of these regimes became increasingly security-driven states, more invested in the apparatus of internal security and surveillance than in education or other trappings of a functioning democracy.

One voice of liberalism in the Middle East during what can be understood as the second wave of democracy was heard during the relatively brief term of Mohammad Mosaddegh as the democratically elected prime minister of Iran. In this role, Mosaddegh presided over a genuinely popular nationalist administration for two years, introducing wide-ranging social and economic reforms.

Mosaddegh's most significant policy was his decision to nationalize Iranian oil. Doing so meant tearing up a deeply unfair and unpopular 1913 concession to the British-owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company that had paid the country a small royalty on its rich natural resource. Nationalization was seen as an anti-imperialist measure that, in the era of the Cold War, was perceived as moving Mosaddegh and Iran closer to Soviet interests. So, he was overthrown in 1953 in a coup directed by US and British intelligence agencies.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union

Some two decades later, a third wave of new democracies started in the 1970s and continued until after the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European satellites. The end of communism in Europe and elsewhere around the world had been a goal of the United States and its allies since 1945. So, backing pro-democracy groups in Eastern Europe was always consistent with US policy objectives.

But pro-democracy movements in the Middle East were typically at odds with pro-Western authoritarian regimes, as in such places as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere. At the same time, the Middle East and North Africa weren't monolithic or ideological adversaries the way communism was. Instead, the region consisted of roughly 20 independent countries.

Starting in the 1990s, the United States and other Western powers embraced democracy promotion as a central plank of their foreign policy in the region. But while such promotions were categorized as supporting democracy, the policy wasn't meant to promote regime change. Rather, the West was happy to see the status quo preserved because their relationships with existing Arab regimes helped to secure Western interests in the region, from energy supplies to military cooperation.

Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen gave the superficial appearance of change while preventing anything that might lead to democracy. But there were sometimes surprises. In 2006, elections held in the Palestinian territories delivered a shocking result. Instead of producing a victory for moderate secular nationalist parties that were acceptable to the United States, the radical Islamist group Hamas secured a clear, if unexpected, majority in a vote that was declared free and fair by all sides.

Islam and Democracy

From the 1990s on, one of the more persistent explanations offered for the lack of transition to democratic states in the region was the theory of Arab exceptionalism. It held that the absence of democratic governments was because Arabs were different from other peoples, and the root of this difference was the region's majority faith, Islam.

Such claims are flawed, of course. The five countries with the world's largest Muslim populations are considered democratic, albeit flawed. These are Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and Nigeria. Also, the majority of states in the Middle East and North Africa have not been ruled along avowedly Islamic lines since independence.

Only two states in the Middle East and North Africa today claim to be wholly Islamically governed: the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is ruled as a form of theocracy, and the absolute monarchy of Saudi Arabia.

While most governments in the region incorporate at least some elements of sharia, or Islamic, law in their constitutions and legal codes, their governments tend to be civilian- or military-run secular regimes that are determined to suppress viable opposition, Muslim or otherwise.

Middle Eastern leaders often present the false dichotomy that the West has a choice between Western-leaning secularists who must keep a lid on democratic institutions and practices to maintain stability, and their opposites, violent Islamist radicals hostile to the West. But this is not accurate, as the popular but ill-fated protests known as the Arab Spring, which started in December 2010, made clear. The Arab Spring protestors demanded social justice, jobs, proper administration, and an end to corruption—not new constitutions.

Still, the region's secular rulers and politicians typically agree with the argument that Islam is incompatible with democracy. They do so as a defense mechanism. Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, US policymakers have themselves often held to the misguided false dichotomy that the only alternative to undemocratic secular regimes is radical Islamist theocracy. In turn, the West's widespread acceptance of this false dichotomy—and support for military dictatorships—has worked against it in delegitimizing the Western model.

The suppression of political and civil opposition fuels Islamist movements, and Islamist politics are popular in the region today because it fills a void where free, democratic representation should be. So, when undemocratic Islamist regimes in the Middle East and North Africa follow undemocratic secular regimes, that might reflect a ruling tradition of the land and its people rather than any inherent conflict between faith and democracy.

Conclusion

Many of the democratic movements in the region are only decades old. There are many pro-democracy movements that belie the idea that the region's peoples don't want democracy. Belief in various forms of democratic, representative, and constitutional politics continues to thrive in the Middle East and North Africa, as it has for much of the 20th century.

As Middle Easterners come to learn more about the region's history, there will be a growing understanding that democracy very much has its own local, Middle Eastern traditions, with roots in both secular and religious traditions. This provides an opportunity to remove the taint of foreignness from the concept and practice of democracy in the Middle East and North Africa.

Reading

Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East*.

Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.

Gelvin, *The New Middle East*.

Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*.

———, *The Middle East in International Relations*.

Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*.

Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East*.

Owen, *Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*.

Rubin, *The Muslim Brotherhood*.

Questions

1   Is the general absence of democratic governments in the majority of states across the Middle East and North Africa due more to some inherent antidemocratic leanings in the general population or to a variety of factors, among them the region's strategic geopolitical location in a globalized world?

2   How can Western countries balance the strategically important need for political stability among its Arab allies with the possibility of violence, turmoil, and political instability that many on both sides of the argument say might be the inevitable birth pangs of genuinely democratic nation-states in the Middle East and North Africa?

TAKING STOCK OF **PROGRESS** IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The 14th-century North African philosopher and historian Ibn Khaldun argued that history, like science, requires research backed by data. He saw history as being divided into two main parts: historical events—what happened when—and historical essence, or the political and social environment in which things happen. Instead of dealing with an event or individual in the Middle East and North Africa, this lecture looks at history in a broader sense across a century's time.

Life Expectancy

Hans Rosling, a Swedish physician who specialized in data visualization as a means to surprise and inspire, often spoke about how wrong most people are in their assumptions about the state of the world, which we incline to prefer over facts.

Most indicators of health and wealth have been on an upward trajectory across the 20th century. But when asked where they think their country is according to these measures, most people place it on the scale more or less where it was in the year they were born. In other words, we consistently fail to appreciate how much progress has been made.

Not one country in the Middle East or North Africa had an average life expectancy above 50 years at the beginning of the 20th century. But by its end 100 years later, no country produced an average life expectancy below 50. Many factors contributed to this upward trend, including access to clean water and vaccination programs.

But it's easy to reverse the trend, too. Wars in the region have been shown to have an immediate detrimental effect on life expectancy, both in terms of direct casualties and indirectly through the destruction of medical facilities and other infrastructure. The impact of such destruction is felt long afterward.

Population

In 1900, the best estimate for the population of the Middle East and North Africa—including Ottoman Turkey and Persia—was about 69 million. By the mid-century mark, it was just about to pass 100 million. And by the year 2000, the area's population had risen to roughly 340 million.

> Increased wealth and the growth of the middle class have led to a rise in the sorts of health complaints typical in wealthier countries, from increased rates of heart disease and obesity to type 2 diabetes.

The Middle East and North Africa were considered remote from Europe, and more so from North America, in 1900. Anyone from the West traveling through the region was likely to be a soldier, a missionary, an oil engineer, or otherwise employed by a European power, possibly en route to India, Hong Kong, or other parts of the Far East. The port city of Dubai in the United Arab Emirates was known to a few sea captains but to few other outsiders.

When Dubai's airport opened to the public in 1960, the country's population was less than 40,000, though it had grown fourfold since the turn of the previous century. But today, the airport serves about 240 cities and 90 million travelers a year. That city of tens of thousands is now home to 3.4 million, and less than 20% are native Emiratis.

Education and Literacy

Another measure of progress is rising education levels, specifically increased literacy rates, spurred by increased government investment in education. In 1900, an estimated 5% of the population of the Middle East and North Africa was literate, and the number varied significantly. For instance, only 1% of Egyptians were believed to be literate. But by 1976, literacy in Egypt was 36% and close to that same level in Iran and Yemen. By 2000, the literacy rate in Egypt was about 75%. Yemen's was just shy of 70%. Ten countries in the region had literacy rates above 90%.

Access and enrollment in national school systems also increased. There were no national education systems in the region in 1900, but 100 years later, primary school enrollment stood at 86% and has continued to rise. Still, international bodies and local educators alike recognize that there is room for improvement.

Along with the large and growing gap between rich and poor nations and individuals, war and political instability are hugely detrimental. Children are forced to drop out of school, often never to return. But enormous strides have been made. The gap in enrollment rates between boys and girls is also closing, with more girls completing more years of education.

Feminism

Middle Eastern women sometimes complain that Westerners interested in discussing the region's women seem to have little to say beyond expressing curiosity about their veils. Yet women's interests and concerns are much broader and include everything from access to healthcare and employment to the rule of law and security in society.

Women in Saudi Arabia gained the right to vote in 2015 and the right to obtain a driver's license without permission from a legal guardian in 2018.

In 1899, a Cairo-based lawyer and activist named Qasim Amin published a book called *The Liberation of Women*, which ties feminism to Egypt's national interest. It is regarded as an early proponent of Islamic feminism, whereby Muslims examine and offer interpretations of religious texts more in keeping with norms to which they aspire rather than centuries-old rulings that many consider out of date. Amin was critical of certain customs in gender relations, including polygyny—a man's right to have up to four wives at one time—which he argued went against the spirit of Islam.

A towering feminist writer and campaigner for women's rights from the second half of the 20th century was Nawal El Saadawi, an Egyptian psychiatrist and activist. She wrote numerous books about women in Islam and was active in campaigning against the practice of female genital mutilation, a pre-Islamic practice found among Nile valley cultures and elsewhere.

Another Middle Eastern woman whose work has had an impact on women's rights is Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian lawyer, political activist, and former judge whose work centers on strengthening the legal status of children and women. In 2003, Ebadi became the first Iranian, and the first Muslim, to win the Nobel Peace Prize.

Tawakkul Karman

Eight years later, amid the popular uprisings known as the Arab Spring, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded jointly to three other women, including the Yemeni journalist and human rights activist Tawakkul Karman, "for their nonviolent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peacebuilding work." Karman became the first Arab woman, and the first Yemeni, to win any of the Nobel Prizes awarded.

Conclusion

In everything from transport to medicine, scientific advances from 1900 to 2000 have had positive impacts on the lives of countless millions of people. Sometimes these advancements have simply made life a bit easier; other times they've created employment or in many other ways enriched and saved lives.

Still, there's an enormous gap between the haves and have nots of the region, with poverty being a fact of life even for some who live in the wealthiest oil-rich Gulf states. This situation is much more serious for people whose lives have been upended by war and who find themselves stuck in refugee camps that have taken on the worrying look of permanent settlements.

On the other side, the poverty that one would have encountered in 1900 is not nearly as widespread today. Statistics trumpeting a century of financial advances are of zero comfort if your family is starving, but the fact remains there were millions fewer people in this sad position in 2000 than was the case 100 years earlier.

Reading

Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*.

Esposito, *Islam and Politics*.

Gelvin, *The New Middle East*.

Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*.

Milton-Edwards, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East*.

Owen, *Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*.

Richards and Waterbury, *A Political Economy of the Middle East*.

Rosling, *Factfulness*.

Questions

1 Do you think things in the Middle East and North Africa are better or worse than they were 20 years ago? 50 years ago? 100 years ago? What evidence can you draw on to support your claims?

2 In 1849, the French critic, novelist, and journalist Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr wrote, "The more it changes, the more it's the same thing." Looking at the Middle East and North Africa in the 21st century, is he right?

AFTER THE
ARAB SPRING

One day in December 2010, in a central Tunisian town called Sidi Bouzid, Mohamed Bouazizi was selling fruit from a handcart. Police officers harassed and humiliated the 26-year-old and confiscated his cart and produce. As the sole breadwinner in his family, he supported his mother, uncle, and six siblings. He went to the town hall to plead the recovery of his cart and fruit, but he was brusquely sent away. Angry and frustrated, he returned to the town hall within an hour and set fire to himself. Video of his self-immolation was soon on the internet, and within days, mass protests spread nationwide and across the Middle East and North Africa. The resulting series of popular revolts is known to history as the Arab Spring.

Roots of the Arab Spring

The first wave of the uprisings led to the overthrow of four Arab presidents and four national governments as well as significant governmental changes in six more countries. The popular protests unleashed civil wars, regime crackdowns, and the imprisonment or disappearance of tens of thousands of humans—but also to new constitutions and genuine shifts toward democracy. To date, more than 600,000 deaths have been recorded in Syria, Libya, and Yemen alone.

A list of decades-old grievances and concerns in the region included a lack of democratic institutions, limited economic prospects, high unemployment, and sharp rises in food prices. The conditions underlying such dissatisfaction were rooted in the region's historical isolation, underdevelopment, and remote political control for most of the previous century under the sultan masters of the former Ottoman Empire and the imperial masters of Europe who long had ruled the land.

Mohamed Bouazizi's actions show how desperate he was. Tunisia was a repressive police state under its president, Ben Ali. Northern Europeans often flocked to Tunis for a bit of winter sun, but most did so without any idea, or interest, in what went on beyond the walls of their beach resort. Ben Ali had ruled as president for 23 years, yet it took just 28 days of protests before he decided his best option was to flee with his wife on a private flight to Saudi Arabia, which had offered the couple safe haven.

Across North Africa and the Middle East, there was a dramatic shift in the self-confidence of the people and a newfound belief that taking to the streets in sufficient numbers might bring about desired change. The protests featured united fronts across different segments of society, from working and middle-class citizens to laborers, students, and professionals. And instant mobilization was possible via smartphones and social media. In Egypt, Hosni Mubarak had been president for 29 years. But after just 18 days of mass protests, he resigned.

Uprisings across the Region

Still, the experience varied from one country to the next. Each Arab uprising, while mutually inspired, was the product of a particular national history and political, economic, and societal circumstances. For example, Algeria had a tradition of allowing protests so long as they remained relatively small and didn't pose a threat to the government. In contrast, Ben Ali's Tunisia was not a place where people spoke ill about the leadership in public.

In Libya, Muammar al-Qaddafi ruled with an iron fist. He fought back against protestors by targeting civilians with unrestrained violence. A US-supported NATO coalition quickly intervened to protect civilian populations and to enforce a UN-authorized arms embargo and a no-fly zone in the country. This tipped the balance of power against Qaddafi, who was toppled in August 2011.

Qaddafi was run to ground in October, when rebels dragged him from his hiding place and murdered him. But in the absence of any credible plans for restoring peace and rebuilding Libya, his death did not mean an end to the violence. Rather, the country dissolved into civil war, resulting in two governments: one supported by the UN, Turkey, and Qatar, and the other backed by Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt.

The protests that started in Tunisia and Egypt also inspired mass demonstrations in Yemen, one of the region's poorest countries. Ali Abdullah Saleh had been president for more than 30 years, but he was persuaded to hand over power to a deputy. Armed rebellion by a Shia Muslim minority, the Houthis, gained extensive territory in this small state, and fighting turned into a proxy war between the Sunni-oriented Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Shia-dominated Islamic Republic of Iran. Houthi rebels killed Saleh in December 2017.

The often-muddled responses, locally and internationally, to the Arab uprisings reflected the fact that protests came out of the blue and that people were often unsure what to do next. The Arab League appeared to surprise even itself when the group found consensus in supporting NATO's intervention in Libya. It also displayed a mostly united front against the Syrian regime's violent response against its citizens.

In Syria, Bashar al-Assad's regime attempted to blame the protests on a made-up US-Israeli plot. There would be no NATO intervention during the earliest days of the antigovernment protests in 2011 because Western nations were concerned that Syria's location, next-door to Israel, made any military intervention impossible. Three years after the start of the Arab uprisings, Syria faced civil war and the emergence of a new threat posed by the terrorist group Daesh, or ISIS. The Assad regime would eventually prevail, thanks largely to Russian backing.

Uprisings against Monarchies

Monarchies fared better than other powers during the Arab uprisings, with all eight of the region's royal families holding on to their thrones. Broadly speaking, wealthier states fared better than poorer ones, and intramonarchical sympathies meant that even a poorer royal family could borrow from wealthier members of the club. Oman had the largest civilian demonstrations in its modern history but was able to calm the situation by essentially buying off protestors thanks to money from wealthier Gulf monarchies.

In Bahrain, protestors demanded more democracy, in part to end the perceived widespread discrimination directed by the Sunni Muslim royal family against the Shia Muslim majority. King Hamad, who had been on the throne since 1999, responded by declaring a state of emergency and calling for assistance from his fellow Sunni-led monarchs. Saudi Arabia led a Gulf Cooperation Council military intervention. Unlike responses to regime violence in Libya and Syria, the suppression of protests in Bahrain was largely ignored.

King Muhammad VI of Morocco also managed to stave off revolution, in part by dividing the opposition with a bundle of concessions. He gave official status to the Amazigh language, and he transferred certain rights from himself to the prime minister. These relatively minor changes were enshrined in a new constitution, even though the people's demands for jobs and dignity, not for a new constitution, had brought them out onto the street. But limited compromise was a tactic that had worked before for the Moroccan royal family.

Aftermath of the Uprisings

After President Hosni Mubarak was pushed aside, Egypt convened elections in 2011 and 2012. But these were competitions that marginalized many of the activists who had led Mubarak's ouster. In large part, electoral marginalization came about as a result of the failure of the activist youth movement to appreciate the resilience of the state on its own terms and strength of the country's most important domestic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. Originally set up in 1928 as a social organization, Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood had patiently built relationships with various segments of the public. It won the national elections in 2012 that brought to power Mohamed Morsi.

Although Morsi was the country's first democratically elected president, critics said he concentrated power in the hands of fellow Islamists, notably the brotherhood, and that he mishandled the economy while also failing to address civil rights and social justice issues. Less than a year later, following further popular street protests, the Egyptian army overthrew Morsi in a bloody military coup. The Muslim Brotherhood subsequently collapsed as a parliamentary force. Its fall reflected, in part, its failure to rule in the inclusive and democratic style it had promised.

In Tunisia, the Islamist Ennahda Party learned from the Muslim Brotherhood's self-inflicted failure. It was able to connect with voters by promising moderation and delivering on the promise. The most obvious example of this was its support for the non-Islamist human rights activist, Moncef Marzouki, as president.

Elsewhere, Libya's enormous oil reserves represented great wealth. Combined with its small, ethnically and religiously homogenous population of more than 6 million people, this wealth should have given it a chance to emerge as a peaceful, prosperous state. The biggest challenge was the legacy Qaddafi had left behind. His network of paid informers as well as limits to legitimate means of voicing opposition resulted in an overwhelming sense of fear and distrust. Intercommunal suspicion ran so deep that compromise and power-sharing were viewed as tantamount to political suicide. Each group protected its own, and the country saw the proliferation of well-armed militias that destroyed what remained of the old regime while refusing to allow any new government to replace it.

Conclusion

So many of the Arab uprisings of 2011 failed to bring about the sorts of changes protestors were demanding. Perhaps this is because they were genuine mass movements that didn't rely on—or seem to need—individual leaders until the protests collapsed for want of one. It might be said that these were ideology-free revolutions, but a lack of governing thought might have sowed the seeds of their destruction, too.

President Moncef Marzouki, Republic of Tunisia

The absence of viable opposition parties all but guaranteed that any political energy that toppled long-standing leaders would disappear as soon as the serpent had been decapitated. In other words, if opposition groups had been able to form into viable political parties, it's more likely that representative democracy—or at least representative governments—might gradually have emerged to replace the deposed tyrants. Instead, the opposition remained divided and unstructured, ultimately unable to effect lasting change.

In polls conducted a decade or so after the Arab uprisings in eight countries across the region, a majority of those questioned thought their society was more unequal than before. At the same time, a clear majority in five of the eight countries said it didn't regret the uprisings. Things might feel worse—and, indeed, might be worse than before—but the people had tasted power, and they know it's possible they can again.

As during the revolutionary epoch in Europe a century prior, and in the United States the century before that, change didn't happen overnight. Most of the uprisings that occurred in Europe in 1848 would, for example, be seen as failures in a matter of years. Yet, change did follow. And it wasn't the same everywhere. Then again, don't assume that change is always for the better.

Reading

Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East*.

Chalcraft, *Popular Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

Fawcett, *International Relations of the Middle East*.

Gelvin, *The New Middle East*.

Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*.

Humphreys, *Between Memory and Desire*.

McMillan, *From the First World War to the Arab Spring*.

Owen, *Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life*.

Questions

1 The catalyst for the Arab uprisings was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor, in December 2010. If it's impossible to predict such a major turn of events, is it at least possible for national governments—Arab or non-Arab—to better prepare for how they might react to such events?

2 Are you more optimistic or pessimistic about the next decade in the Middle East and North Africa? Is your view different when you consider a particular country or sphere, such as democracy, health care, or economics?

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