



POLITICS, IDEOLOGY, AND RELIGIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

a graduate class project of
Fairleigh Dickinson University

by

Alexandra Acosta
Anwar Al-Barout
Waleed Al-Shahari
Eve Burnett
'Matankiso Chachane
Arnaud Huannou
Naseer Ahmed Faiq
Shihana Mohamed

Amanuel Ajawin
Ahmed Al-Muharraqi
Jaime Buenahora
Pilar Bustamante
Ahmad Daoudzai
Johannes de Millo
Bobette Jansen
Lila Ratsifandrihamanana

Editor
Ahmad Kamal

Published by:
Fairleigh Dickinson University
1000 River Road
Teaneck, NJ 07666
USA

May 2010
ISBN: 978-1-4507-1726-7

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The Authors

Alexandra Acosta is a Graduate Student from the USA

Amanuel Ajawin is a Graduate Student from Sudan

Anwar Al-Barout is a Diplomat from the UAE

Ahmed Al-Muharraqi is a Diplomat from Bahrain

Waleed Al-Shahari is a Graduate Student from Yemen

Jaime Buenahora is a University Professor from Colombia

Eve Burnett is a Graduate Student from the USA

Pilar Bustamante is a Communications Expert from Colombia

Matankiso Chachane is a Diplomatic Assistant from Lesotho

Ahmad Daoudzai is a Graduate Student from Afghanistan

Arnaud Huannou is an International Civil Servant from Benin

Johannes de Millo is a Diplomat from Monaco

Naseer Ahmad Faiq is a Graduate Student from Afghanistan

Bobette Jansen is a Graduate Student from Germany

Ahmad Kamal is a Senior Fellow at the United Nations

Shihana Mohamed is a Graduate Student from Sri Lanka

Lila Ratsifandrihamanana is an International Civil Servant from Madagascar

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FOREWORD

This is the second volume of a trilogy of books on the Middle East, prepared on the basis of research papers by graduate students of Fairleigh Dickinson University. Whereas the first volume had focused on current issues, this volume delves deeper into the three parameters of politics, ideology, and religions, that make the Middle East as critically important as it has become for all of us in a globalized world.

Despite its central importance and impact on events elsewhere, the fact remains that the Middle East is a complex patchwork of distinct ethnicities and beliefs, each with its own formative history and development. An analysis of these elements is not easy, and yet it has to be attempted in an effort to better understand current events, and their unfolding into the future.

Like all other parts of our world, the Middle East is of course an evolving geographical region. It is impacting the rest of the world just as it is itself being impacted by events in other parts of the world. There is nothing static in our world of yesterday and today. Everything moves constantly, everything impacts everything else. The story of history is a continuum, and a single continuum at that. As a result, the papers in this volume should only be read as part of a dynamic and fast moving situation, and not as conclusive or distinct in their views and judgments.

Nevertheless, the papers do go deeper into the details of the historical determinants which influence current events in the Middle East and beyond, and their projection into the future. The role of immediate neighbors, and that of other external players, is also analyzed in order to determine the sad history of the past, and the chances of a better contribution to peace and security in the world in future.

While every effort has been made in to do so in this volume, it is quite clear that much more needs to be done to identify the reasons why the Middle East is so centrally important to all of us. That is why the effort will be continued in the third volume of this trilogy, this last one concentrating on the economic aspects of the Middle East, and its economic impact on the worlds of today and tomorrow.

Hopefully, the completed three-part exercise will assist us all in a better understanding of the events as they unfold in the Middle East and of the inputs that are so necessary in this part of the world. The graduate students who have participated in this extended exercise are to be congratulated for their significant assiduity, for their passionate convictions, and for the competent results of their research.

THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST

INTRODUCTION

September 11, 2001 was a defining moment in history. The Western world suddenly became concerned as never before with the existence of the Middle East, and the East-West dichotomy was thrown into high relief. The then-President of the United States and self-proclaimed leader of the free world referred to the response of the US as “civilization’s fight.”¹ His “fight” sent American troops to Iraq to dethrone Saddam Hussein and to install democracy. Somehow it has not seemed to solve the problems. In opening his “new history”, published in 2006, Roger Osborne suggests that “civilization” is the thin veneer humans have created to protect themselves from their inner animalistic barbaric motives, the same ones which brought about the horrors of two World Wars. Interestingly, his historic accounts begin with prehistoric Europe and moves quite suddenly to the emergence of classical Greece. No reference is made to the accomplishments of Sumer, Babylon or the Kingdoms of Egypt.² On the other side of the world, Saddam Hussein made frequent references to Iraq as the cradle of civilization and to the accomplishments of Nebuchadnezzar II and Hammurabi. His motivation was to highlight the importance of Iraq to the Arab world and to promote his political agenda of pan-Arabism.³

The fact of the matter is that Western civilization began in Iraq. Had there never been a Sumer or a Babylon, never a Hammurabi, and never an Abraham from the Sumerian city of Ur, the course of Western history would have been quite different. To establish this, it is necessary to look at the contributions of the ancient civilizations first and also to explore when and where East and West divided.

THE FERTILE CRESCENT

While today the Middle East faces the challenge of growing desertification, the landscape of the ancient Near East favored the growth of settled societies. The nomadic populations who wandered through the African continent and lived off the flesh of hunted animals found the riverbeds of the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates and the Nile valley enabled them to live off the land. It was especially in the southern part of the river valleys where the water from the upper rivers flew into the sea that the fertility of the soil allowed for the year-round cultivation of crops. The weather was unpredictable and floods were frequent, but the collective effort of irrigation and the

¹ Osborne, Roger. *Civilization: A New History of the Western World*. New York: Pegasus Books, 2006. , p. 1

² (Osborne), pp. 20-46

³ Unknown, "Saddam Hussein." Unkown. www.wikipedia.com. 27 November 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saddam_Hussein>.

construction of platforms to save homes from flooding gave men a measure of control over nature.⁴

Living off the produce of agriculture required also the collaborative effort of separating the grain from the husk of the plant before it became removed by the wind and the rain.⁵ Agriculture thus inherently paved the way not only for the development of year-round settlements, but also of collaborative effort, social stratification and an understanding of the necessity of fore-thought. Dependence on agriculture also put these early societies in a vulnerable position with regards to the forces of nature. The attribution of certain divine characteristics to forces of nature and the fabrication of religious rites to compel the deities to heed the will of these early societies meant in turn that high social value was placed on the men and women who seemed closest to the gods. Competition for the irrigated waterways with other settlements also led to the development of methods of warfare and military organization.⁶

THE BEGINNINGS OF “CIVILIZATION”

Writing about the very early history of these societies is always fraught with difficulties. First-hand evidence comes in the form of discovered pottery shards and other remnants. The earlier existence of other societies might be completely overlooked as remains might not exist or might not yet have been revealed. However, what we have gathered is that the earliest societies were small agricultural villages sharing cult centres with other villages.⁷ One of the earliest-known of these was the city of Uruk of ancient Sumeria. Uruk developed into the first true city. The inferior quality of the pots produced in Uruk suggests that they were, in fact, mass-produced and so indicate the existence of a cadre of craftspeople able to produce such wares, and also implies the beginning of trade. Trade can only have been fostered by surplus, and it was with the availability of surplus that we can first see the beginnings of what might be called “civilization”.

What properly constitutes “civilization” is, of course, open to question. Some agreed-upon hallmarks have included: long-distance trade, the creation of new technologies, intensive agricultural production, the existence of non-agricultural craftspeople, a hierarchical society and the establishment of a ruling class, the accumulation of material possessions, and the creation of works of art.⁸ Or, as J.M. Roberts puts it quite simply, civilizations can be marked by “a level of elaboration which allows them much more variety of human action and experience.”⁹ These definitions are interesting, but inconclusive.

⁴ Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*. New York City: Penguin Books, 1976, York City, Penguin Books, p. 49-50

⁵ Nissen, Hans J. *The Early History of the Ancient Near East, 9000-2000 BC* Chicago: University of Chicago, 1988, p. 22-23

⁶ (Roberts), p. 50

⁷ *Ibid*, p.50 New

⁸ Unknown, *Civilization*. Unknown. 22 Novembe 2009
<<http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Civilization>>.

⁹ Roberts, J.M. *A Short History of the World*. : Oxford University Press, 1983

AGRICULTURAL SURPLUS AND CIVILIZATION

What can be more easily agreed upon is the fact that the development of agricultural surplus did lead to the beginning of the first recognizable cities: Ur and Uruk. Ur and Uruk developed in the extreme south of Mesopotamia and could be distinguished from the agricultural villages of earlier times by the prominence of religious structures,¹⁰ a steadily growing population and the existence of a diversity of occupations among the population of the city. No longer were the societies organized based on family-lines as they had been when the population was nomadic. The family unit could no longer be self-sufficient, but had to rely on others for its good and services.¹¹ Uruk in particular saw extremely rapid population expansion and became a central urban area surrounded by secondary settlements. Uruk artifacts and excavations confirm the existence of specialized crafts: the weaving of textiles, the smelting of metal among others. Cylinder seals were created in the Late Uruk period and spread throughout Mesopotamia: cylinder seals allowed images to be impressed multiple times.

The creation of specialized labor forces and the dissolution of the family as the main economic unit of society led in turn to the creation of the administrators who oversaw the city's output and managed the surplus. These administrators were usually members of the priestly class. A hierarchy of professions was developed and carefully maintained in the "Standard List of Professions" which not only has the distinction of being one of the first texts written, but was also a codification of professions which continued to be followed for 1500 years throughout Sumer.¹¹

SUMERIAN CONTRIBUTIONS TO CIVILIZATION

Writing

The Sumerian period of human history is one of great leaps forward in human activity. The stratification of work and of society and the development of trade led to the necessity of accounting methods and this in turn led to the creation of writing techniques. The elaborately-decorated cylinder seals used for identifying goods as personal property during the earliest days of the Sumerian era became simplified and the wedge-shaped writing style called "cuneiform" by historians was developed. Simplified writing allowed a free flow of trade between the cities and agricultural settlements of ancient Sumer and between Sumer and neighboring cultures.¹² Simplified writing also allowed for the recording of history and legend.

The Sumerians are also credited with writing the first piece of literature: "The Epic of Gilgamesh" a tale of one of the first kings Sumer spread throughout the region and appeared in different languages and contains the legend of the flood which appears in the Christian Bible. Simplified writing

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ Mierop, Marc Van De. *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004., p. 21-27

¹² Bauer, Susan Wise. *The History of the Ancient World: From the Earliest Accounts to the Fall of Rome*. New York City: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007.pp. 43-46

marked the transition from pictorial representation of thought to the expression of abstract ideas and allowed for the free flow of ideas among the different cultures of the region. It was one of the catalysts which allowed diverse nomadic peoples to settle in the same region and communicate with each other.

Early writing thus developed as trade and interdependence between the hunting nomadic populations and the settled agricultural populations grew. In turn, writing then became a civilizing force in itself, allowing for the fuller expression of thought and, as thought and ideas were exchanged between cultures, the further development and integration of cultures.

It could be suggested then that what can be called “civilization” depends not so much on the living patterns of people, i.e., on city life as opposed to agricultural village life, but on those aspects of city life that allow for the freer flow, inter-folding and unfolding of abstract thought and ideas.

Successful agricultural practices as developed in ancient Sumer led over time to the development of an agricultural surplus which led to the stratification of society and the growth of a leisure class which controlled that surplus, a privilege granted to them by divine provenance. The leisure afforded by the surplus (and by the enslavement of conquered peoples) led to a lack of preoccupation with the day-to-day husbandry of livestock and crops and an increased preoccupation with divine intention.

Religion

Preoccupation with the divine was intense in ancient Sumer. Archaeological finds indicate that the temples were the focal points of the developing cities. Sumerian religion envisioned a hierarchy of gods, dominated by a trinity of gods with “Lord Air” at the top¹³, a seeming foreshadowing of the later Christian thought.

Early Sumerian texts consist include not only lists of goods, of trades, of professions and their respective social level, but also lists of gods and these lists appear homogenously throughout the region, indicating the expansive influence of Sumerian thought.¹⁴

The complexity and diversity of religious thought of the earliest days of settlement¹⁵ had become streamlined and simplified and thus much easier to export to others.

Trade

That trade existed between these early Sumerian cultures and beyond Sumer to the early civilizations of the Indus Valley has been evidenced by the technological advances found in Sumer: glass and bronze artifacts have been uncovered which while crafted in Sumer, could not have been produced from indigenous materials.¹⁶ Sumerian crafts have been found in eastern Europe and northern Asia.¹⁷

¹³ (Roberts, A Short History of the World), p. 43

¹⁴ (Microp), p. 61

¹⁵ (Roberts, The New Penguin History of the World), p. 41

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 57

¹⁷ (Bauer), p. 21

Bureaucracy

Both the development of trade and the development of religion led to the beginnings of bureaucracy which was to become much more prominent later. Trade required accounting and administration and the religious class both managed the surplus and acted as the focal point of the society. The temple managed the collection and the distribution of the surplus. A system of standard measures was developed for trading purposes.¹⁸

THE EMERGENCE OF THE SEMITIC RACE

The end of the Sumerian era came with the emergence of the Semitic tribes from the Arabian peninsula race most likely during the fourth millennium BC. The Semites entered Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, where it was their mingling with the Sumerian race which produced the Babylonian race.¹⁹ The Semites were a nomadic peoples who spoke a distinctly different language. While Sumerian, wide-spread in its time, has no known cognates, the Semitic language became the root of present-day Arabic and Hebrew and of ancient Akkadian.²⁰ While other ancient races, including the Sumerians, have disappeared, the Semitic race lives on to this day. They were the conduit of the Greco-Roman tradition into medieval Europe and, in the pre-Christian era, founded an empire which was greater than the Roman Empire at its height.²¹ Their arrival in the Fertile Crescent set history down a different path.

The Akkadians

As the Sumerian and Semitic peoples mingled, the Semites gathered the principles of irrigation, home-building and writing and became a settled as opposed to a nomadic people.²² They then began to take prominent positions in Sumerian society. Scribes were positions of prerogative and Sumerian texts written by Semitic scribes have been found.²³ The inflected nature of the Semitic language possibly influenced the move towards a more syllabic representation of the Sumerian language. Gradually, Sumerian was supplanted as a popular language by the Semitic language, Akkadian, and Sumerian was restricted to bureaucratic and religious use.²⁴

It is under the Semites that the nature of relations between cities changed in Sumeria. The Semitic Akkadians became the dominating leaders in Mesopotamia, and especially under King Sargon I, the loose coalition of cities which then constituted Sumeria and began to build one of the first empires with a central locus of control in the city of Akkad.²⁵ Under the Akkadians, society and production became organized along more distinctly military lines.

¹⁸ (Mierop), p. 26

¹⁹ Hitti, Philip K. History of the Arabs. 10th. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, , p. 10-11,

²⁰ (Mierop), p. 34

²¹ (Hitti), p. 4-6

²² Ibid p. 11

²³ (Nissen), p. 137-139

²⁴ Ibid p. 34

²⁵ Ibid p. 64

The principal edifices of the cities were now palaces built alongside the temples, evidence that a division was growing between lay and religious life.²⁶

Babylon and Hammurabi

The Semitic influence on civilization in the pre-Christian period reached its zenith in the city of Babylon under the rule of Hammurabi. Hammurabi's kingdom extended from the Persian Gulf to the city of Aleppo in present-day Syria. It was the greatest kingdom to exist at that time, and much of its success as a kingdom was due to Hammurabi's code of law. Hammurabi's code was, in fact, a codification of laws already existing, and not an imposition of his individual will. He established a forbear of the common law system of later centuries,²⁷ and the laws upon which his code was based upon the older laws of Sumeria and covered all aspects of life. Different levels of society were clearly outlined, the duties and rights of women were spelled out in detail. Crimes were matched with even punishments depending on the social rank of the criminal.²⁸ By codifying the laws clearly, Hammurabi established a solid basis for his command over his extensive empire. History marks him as one of the great leaders of the ancient era. His era was one of prosperity which saw the construction of many new palaces and the restoration of several older ones.²⁹

Hammurabi's Code and the Commandments of Moses

Close students of the code are quick to draw comparisons to the later commandments of Moses which formed the foundation of the later Jewish and Christian faiths. Yet, the differences between the codes are also telling. Hammurabi's code makes class distinctions while the commandments of Moses did not.³⁰ Hammurabi's code matches crime and punishment, but nowhere does it detail intent, whereas the commandments of Moses do. Mosaic law became concerned with the morality of acts, a feature which, according to Graves, indicates their monotheistic background. Hammurabi's code takes a "lower view of human life" and denotes a polytheistic society.³¹ Which way did the influence flow? Were Hammurabi's laws the inspiration for the Mosaic text or did they spring from a common source? Given the difficulty of ascribing exact dates to Hammurabi's code, the question is unlikely to ever be answered definitively. What can probably be acknowledged is that they at least sprang from the same Semitic tradition.³² Hammurabi's great achievement lay in the codification and dispersal of this Semitic heritage, an acknowledgment of the importance of the rule of law in creating a harmonious society and in creating an extensive empire.

²⁶ (Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*), p. 58

²⁷ *Ibid* p. 61-62

²⁸ Graves, David and Jane. *The Scroll-Topical View-Archaeogr-Code of Hammurabi*. 1995. 1 December 2007 <<http://www.abu.nb.ca/ecm/topics/arch2.htm>

²⁹ (Davies), p. 9-10

³⁰ (Graves)

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

Three factors bear considering when looking at Hammurabi's code: firstly, they place the laws firmly in the king's hands, no longer in the hands of the priests. Even though the one remaining copy at Susa shows, and the code itself claims, that the laws were handed directly to Hammurabi from Shamsa, the Sun-God (much as Moses received his commandments directly from above), there is no question as to the final authority to be consulted. Hammurabi ruled by law and historic tradition rather than by divine rule. Secondly, Hammurabi had his code inscribed in stone and sent to every corner of his kingdom and set up in public places for all to see, thereby cancelling all chance of dispute³³ The principle of presumed knowledge of the law ("ignorance of the law is no excuse") comes to us from Roman law³⁴, but it clearly existed prior to Rome. Thirdly, given the provenance of the laws, Hammurabi paved the way for the continuation and rise of a specifically Semitic (or Judaic) civilization.

Abraham

The father of the three great monotheistic religions, Abraham, also came out of the valley of the Euphrates and laid the beginnings of the Judaic tradition. Abraham was, according to some, a contemporary of Hammurabi, and a citizen of the great Sumerian city of Ur. He travelled west from Ur, a city of to the land of Canaan, present-day Palestine.

EGYPT

Cities first began to appear in Egypt towards the end of the fourth millenium, BC along the banks of the Nile river. Dominated as it was by the natural forces of the Nile river, Egyptian civilization was steeped in religion and symbolism. As in ancient Sumeria, Egyptian temples were centers of storage of surplus goods. Egyptian religion was complex and varied from place to place, developing different forms in each. It was inherently complex and polytheistic. Egyptian writing, while syllabically based like Sumerian and Babylonian text, tended towards complexity and elaboration as opposed to the simplicity of cuneiform. So even though abstraction in meaning was adoped (words were not represented by pictures of the thing), abstraction in form was rejected.³⁵

As fertile as the Nile Valley was, the economy of Egypt was predominantly agricultural. Aside from Thebes and Memphis, there were few cities in ancient Egypt and life was concentrated in villages along the bank of the river. Egyptian society, consequently, did not develop the same complex breakdown as Sumerian civilization, but was broadly structured along the lines of the priests and the peasants.³⁶ Unlike the Sumerians who lived in the river valley and were vulnerable to invasion from all sides, the Egyptians were borderd by deserts and seas.³⁷ This allowed for the development of a less

³³ (Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*), p. 62

³⁴ Unknown. *Ignorantia juris non excusat*. Unknown. 1 December 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ignorantia_juris_non_excusat>.

³⁵ (Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*), p. 75-78

³⁶ *Ibid* p. 78-83

³⁷ Welles, H.G. *The Outline of History: Volume 1, Prehistory to the Roman Republic*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1929, p. 129

regimented society, more prone to concerns with cultivation of crops than with the establishment of the rule of law or pre-eminence over others.

Pharaoh Amenhetop IV, who ascended in 1329 BC, attempted a religious revolution and replaced the pantheon of Egyptian gods with a monotheistic cult of the sun-god Aton. It is the first evidence we have of monotheism in the ancient Near East. Roughly two centuries later (the dates, as always, are hard to establish), a Semitic tribe, the Hebrews, left Egypt and followed Moses to Sinai.³⁸ There was a monotheistic religion, but, in contrast to the monotheistic religion of Amenhetop IV, the god of the Hebrews was an abstraction. In the scope of Egyptian history, the migration of the Hebrews to Sinai was a fairly minor event and the Hebrew tribes were a comparatively small population, but it was to prove a major event in the history of both the Near East and West.

THE PERSIANS

The next group of peoples to establish a stronghold over the area of the Fertile Crescent were the Persians. Beginning in about 550 BC, King Cyrus of the Persians established control over the area formerly controlled by the Medes. The Persians proved to be effective at bringing together city-states under military rule and the empire expanded rapidly.³⁹ A particular strength of the Persian empire was its ability to maintain centralized rule, but also to allow for the diversity of the people it governed. They also allowed for a variety of scripts and languages and would adopt the political and religious formulae of the locality they were occupying. Thus, for example, Cyrus adopted the rituals of a Babylonian king when he conquered Babylon and Cambyses hired a local official to teach how to behave like an Egyptian king.⁴⁰ The extensive empire was divided into satraps which were then bequeathed to Persian noblemen to administer. A well-constructed system of roads kept the furthest reaches of the Persian empire in contact with each other.⁴¹ While Persian respect for local tradition continued through the end of the Persian empire, Persian customs seeped in among the local peoples, and as the Persian empire was long-lived, the Persian influence served to unify peoples rather than drive them apart.⁴² The Persian model of assimilation of local custom and decentralized rule was later imitated by the Greeks and Romans in their own empire-building.

THE GREEKS

The end of the old civilization and the beginning of the West is often placed at the beginning of the Greek period. The Greeks were a comparatively small population who lived on the outskirts of the Persian empire. The wars between the Persians and the Greeks were barely a footnote in Persian history, but they were phenomenally important for Greek historians. The Greek triumph over the Persians at Marathon was a huge boost to the Greeks sense of

³⁹ (Microp), p. 293

⁴⁰ Ibid p. 295

⁴¹ Ibid), p. 297

⁴² Ibid, p. 299

themselves.⁴³ Greek civilization is often treated as the starting point of the West, yet so much had already been laid in place. The script used by the Greeks was the script of the Semites and Egyptian and Mesopotamian ideas had their impact on nascent Greek civilization. Even while it began with a complex pantheon of gods, it was later to succumb a monotheistic religion which had been born in Sumer via Egypt and Canaan. The break from old civilizations of the Near East to new civilizations was not so great.⁴⁴

What had changed was a sense of identity. The Greeks were aware of themselves as a finite people who spoke a single language and who referred all non-Greek speakers disparagingly as “barbarians”. Only Greeks could attend religious festivals.⁴⁵ This was a difference from the openness of the Sumerians which had unified the diverse river-valley cultures through the common goal of collection and distribution of goods. It was a change from the Babylonians who unified people through a common heritage of agreed-upon laws. It was a change from the Persians who absorbed and respected local customs.

What had also changed, from a historical perspective, was the keeping of history itself. Written records of classical Greece are abundant; records of ancient Babylon are more difficult to find. Hammurabi’s widely dispersed code of law, inscribed in stone, has only left one copy for current historians.

More importantly, perhaps, were the changes to come from the political life of ancient Greece. The Athenians crafted a democratic form of government in which only certain citizens could take part in the election of bills and laws. One had to be a Greek citizen, a male above a certain age, but there were no class restrictions to participation.⁴⁶ Political life took on a human scale, where it had been a divine ordinance in the past.

CONCLUSION

The most interesting question is to speculate on the importance *not* of these early beginnings, which is clear, but on the importance of the general Western failure to recognize this earlier period as the real birthing moment of Western civilization. The emphasis, for centuries, has always been on Greece and Rome, the assumption that the important defining elements of our world sprung from what we have called, tellingly, the Classical Period.

What we would now consider must be defined with that care. It does not abstract away any historical epochs, but merely a mind-set: how would the Americans and West Europeans have acted if they had believed that Hammurabi and the ancient peoples of the Fertile Crescent had been the true well-spring of what we most value in our civilization? In this abstraction, Greece and Rome become incidents along the road, adding some elements, twisting others, much like Renaissance Florence in our current thinking. Would our sense of alienation from the Arab world be different? Would we have been

⁴³ (Bauer), p. 514-554

⁴⁴ (Roberts, *The New Penguin History of the World*), p. 167-168

⁴⁵ *Ibid* p. 173-174

⁴⁶ Unknown. Athenian democracy. Unknown. 1 December 2009
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy>.

so ready to implant Israel in the Middle East? Would a modernizing ruler such as the Shah have seemed a less obvious natural ally? Are we, in effect, paying a high price for an inadequate historical conception? And above all, is the march of history not a single “continuum” in which each portion has been influenced by the past, just as it continues to influence the future.

THE FIRST MILLENNIUM

INTRODUCTION

The political history of the Middle East can only be understood through information about the early relationship between all three major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It helps us to comprehend the interferences between all three faiths as we see them today and enables us to draw a line to the link between politics and religions.

At the onset of the first Millennium, the Middle East was under Roman occupancy. However, it is worth mentioning that prior to that time, Alexander had established a Hellenistic Empire which stretched from Persia to Egypt and lasted about 200 years (323 ~ 146 BC)⁴⁷. This had brought about huge enrichment for the region such as economic prosperity, science, architecture, etc. The main assets were, however, the administrative and political systems formed under the Greek occupants that became later adopted by the Romans. This issue will be illustrated in the later chapters. All in all, the Hellenistic influence remained for about two Millennia⁴⁸.

Following the Hellenistic decline in the Middle East, the Romans settled in the region and controlled it for many centuries. In fact, the great Roman influence occurred especially under the Emperor Augustus who governed between 29 BC~14 AD and integrated the Middle East region from Egypt to Asia Minor into the Roman Empire; with the only exception of Persia and Mesopotamian (Known as Iraq) that were ruled by the Parthian people (250 BC- 225 AD) before being overrun by the Sassanid Persian empire that lasted during 226~646 AD.⁴⁹

For many centuries, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt were under the *Pax Romana*, which basically means that they were ruled according Roman order implying good order and justice. During the time, Romans improved the road and tax system and introduced Latin as an official language, while keeping Greek as the lingua franca. At the same time, Egypt was chosen as an important military siege for the empire; as well as a food supplier for Rome. For, the Romans had destroyed the piracy in the Red Sea, and revived the commercial road to India.

THE SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY

Before talking about the spread of Christianity, we should keep in mind that the first Christians were all Jews, including Jesus himself. In fact, they didn't see themselves as a separate religious group but considered their additional belief in Jesus Christ as a son of God, a complementary pillar to the Hebrew dogma. That's one of the reasons why after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his disciples continued to reach out to their fellow Jews in

⁴⁷ Mansfield, Peter and Pelham Nicolas: *A history of the middle East* Penguin; 2nd edition (2004) (p.7); <http://www.hellenicadventures.com/greece/greeceHistory.html>

⁴⁸ Catherwood, Christopher, *a Brief History of the Middle East*, Philadelphia: Running Press Publishers (2007) (p.22)

⁴⁹ See Mansfield p. 9

Synagogues in Jerusalem where the first Christian church was centered with leaders like James, Peter and John. From there, the Gospel was preached around the region. Up till the second Jewish rebellion in 135 AD, the Christian church was mainly under Jewish leadership (circumcised Jews)⁵⁰. This changed when in context with the rebellion Jews were expelled from Jerusalem which meant that the church leadership was replaced by a gentile one.

Unfortunately, the only sources about the early Christianity are written by disciples themselves. Any attempt to reconstruct the historical facts for the early Christian church leads automatically to the New Testament, specifically Acts, which reveals the apostolic age (30-100 AD). Due to the lack of further sources, there is disapproval about its historical accuracy among historians.

However, it is thanks to great missionary work of the Apostles, including Paul of Tarsus, that Christianity could spread throughout the Hellenistic world, from Alexandria to Rome and even further into Asia.⁵¹ In fact, it was in Antioch (Syria) that the apostles preached the gospel. Also, the city is known to be the first place where Jesus follower obtained their name of “Christians”⁵².

Coming now to the organization of the church, in each city, Christian churches were independent and functioned on the basis of cities. Their structure resembled a democratic system under the board of elder’s presbyters and deacons and local prophet. As the church grew, Ignacio from Antioch implemented that the presbyters be under the umbrella of the bishop (overseer). He emphasized that in order to be with God, the church should be reconciled through a bishop.⁵³

The Persecution of the first Christians by Jews and Romans

To be historical correct, the first persecution of Jesus’s followers occurred during his Lifetime. Indeed, Jesus was the first to be persecuted by Jews and Romans. As it the New Testament states, his crucifixion is the result of a plot between the Sadducees and Judas. Pontius Pilatus, who was the prefect at the time, were under the pressure of the Jewish population to give the order to crucify Jesus although he found no clear evidence of any culpability.⁵⁴

After Jesus’s crucifixion and resurrection, his disciples operated first in Jerusalem as already mentioned, but were later forced to go underground in order to spread the gospel. This referred to the fact that, the more people were distracted from the original teachings of Judaism and became converted to the new movement; the more the Jewish priesthood was coerced to persecute Jesus followers! The best illustration of it is described in the in the Acts of the Apostles from the New Testament (NT), which also includes the public stoning of disciples. In particular, the NT describes the Christian persecution by Saul who later converts to the new faith and whose apostolic work is accounted to

⁵⁰ http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jewish_Christians

⁵¹ http://www.freebase.com/view/en/early_christianity

⁵² Hinn, Benny, *Blood in the Sand*, Florida: Frontline (2009) (p.75)

⁵³ Nardo, Don, *The Rise of Christianity*, United States: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing (p. 94)

⁵⁴ See Bible: John chapter 18 and 19

the Spread of Christianity into the pagan world. As with the growing religious persecution in Jerusalem, the disciples started to reach out to the people outside Jerusalem to Syria, and Samaria etc... For the sake of their security, the twelve disciples did not travel together, but were sent in different regions.

While the first persecution was mainly limited to Jewish rejection of their fellow brethren, the beginning of the Roman's active involvement in the persecution can be set as for 64 AD after the Great Fire of Rome. Then, the Roman Emperor had linked Christians to the event and caused unrest, although the persecutions remained sporadic and were reduced to local level until 250 AD.⁵⁵ The first systematic extermination of Christians launched by a Roman emperor named Decius is dated to the years 250 AD to 313 AD.

THE JEWISH REBELLIONS

The rise and consolidation of the Hebrew nation under King David and his son Solomon led it to infinite prosperity. But after the dissolution of the nation into two parts: northern Israel and southern Judea, the nation continually struggled with keeping internal peace and also external invasion. Inevitably, they became occupied by Babylonians (586 BC) and also by Assyrians (722 BC) and were in both cases sent into Diaspora.⁵⁶

Hence, the longing for the restoration of the once united kingdom arose. And despite that the Jewish aristocrats enjoyed political benefits; the majority dreamed of reconsolidation and independence. This culminated in Jewish rebellion against Rome by the Zealots⁵⁷ in 66~70 AD which ended with the complete destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Despite this significant loss, historical books record that in 135 AD the Zealots organized another rebellion which should turn out to be fatal for the Jewish nation.

THE COUNCIL OF NICAEEA

The Council of Nicaea was a Council of Christian bishops (about 300) convened in Nicaea in Bithynia (Turkey) and initiated by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325. It set a milestone in the history of Christianity. For the first time since its existence, the church had become a political matter because now the Emperor got engaged in the doctrine of the church. Prior to the date, in the edict of Milan of 312 AD, Emperor Constantine had legalized the new religious movement, granting the Christian clergy the same benefits as the pagan priests had enjoyed before, such as judicial authority and financial support.⁵⁸

Indisputably, Constantine's calling up of the Council eased the spread of Christianity by agreeing on main thorny issue between the bishops. To give some examples, one of their consensuses was to agree on the content of the Christian scriptures, or the New Testament. Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his follower had lacked a proper written word about his message, which is not to say that none had existed. In fact, there had been many versions

⁵⁵ <http://patriot.net/~carey/afa/latinclub/persecution.htm>

⁵⁶ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08193a.htm>

⁵⁷ www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaism/revolt.html

⁵⁸ Tomkins, Stephen: A short history of Christianity. Cambridge (2005) p.45

known as *canon* (authoritative list of books) or “*holy scriptures*” that consisted of gospel stories about Jesus, and the letters from apostles.⁵⁹ Secondly, they defined the Christian’s Trinitarian doctrine of the *Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost* for the pagans.⁶⁰ Thirdly, they prohibited the clergy to marry.⁶¹

THE FALL OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

By the time of Constantine the Roman Empire stretched from Britain to Persia so that due to its vast Roman territory, he divided it into new administrative sections with a new capital of Constantinople 330 AD. Nevertheless, this didn’t keep the empire from falling apart. Its decline was initiated through a gradual disintegration of the economy of Rome and the barbarian invasions. Worth noting is that after the death of the emperor Theodosius (347-395 AD), the Roman Empire divided into two empires: the East (Germanic kingdoms) and the West (non-Latin) Greek empire. As a result of this division, an informal split within the Catholic Church took place leading to the formation of an Eastern Church in Constantinople and a Western Church in Rome. Due to barbarians’ invasions, the East collapsed, while the West, with Byzantium as the capital of the Balkans, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine and Egypt survived three more centuries. The greatest threat came from the expansionist Sassanid Persians from the East. Between 534 and 628 AD Syria was repeatedly invaded and seized by the Persians. In 616 AD, they even conquered Egypt and Asia Minor laying siege to Constantinople. When Emperor Heraclius finally restored the old frontiers, both rivals and their capitals were weakened.⁶²

MUHAMMAD AND THE EMERGENCE OF ISLAM

The Islamic movement goes back to the 7th Century when its founder Muhammad got his first divine revelation in 610 AD. Although he first struggled with gaining credibility, by 615 AD he had gained many followers. By 622 AD, he had found refuge in Yathrib (Medina- the city of the prophet) escaping persecution. There, he established himself as the secular, military and religious leader. As he became a growing power to Mecca, the city of worshippers, a conflict between Medina and Mecca arose. However, in 629 AD the leaders of Mecca had resigned, giving him the power over the city⁶³ and reinforcing the Islamic movement that reached an impressive number of about 10,000 men.⁶⁴

What were great Arabic achievements during that time? After the death of Muhammad his followers emerged to great military power challenging both empires: the Byzantium and the Persian ones. His first three successors had defeated the Sassanid Persians, captured their capital Ctesiphon on the Tigris and driven them out of Mesopotamia. This evoked pride and self-

⁵⁹ See Nardo p.87-90

⁶⁰ Hillier, Peter L : *The Church of the ancient councils* , St Vladimir’s Seminary Pr (5, 2000) p. 19

⁶¹ see Hillier Peter L, p. 34

⁶² See Mansfield p.11-12

⁶³ See Catherwood, Christopher p.68-69

⁶⁴ www.indopedia.org/Muhammad.html

confidence among them so that after the victory they focused on the Byzantium regions of Syria and Egypt. BY 711 AD, they had crossed into Spain.⁶⁵

In 656 AD, the successor Caliph was assassinated launching a dispute between the Muslim believers. While his natural Successor was Ali, the prophet's cousin, the governor of Syria, Muawiyah claimed the title. Civil war arose causing the first division among the Muslims: Sunni, which represent the large majority today, are the supporter of Muawiyah, while the Shia are the supporter of Ali. Ali was defeated.

With the triumph of Muawiyah starts the Umayyad dynasty established making Damascus the capital of the new Arab/ Islamic empire. Hereby Christians were used in his army and his administration. But in 750 AD the Abbasids prevailed over the Umayyad and led the Muslim movement to its golden age, shifting the center of power from Damascus to Baghdad.⁶⁶

After the death of Muawiyah, Ali's second son, Hussein, launched an attack on trying to regain his right of Caliphate but in vain; he was soon struck down together with his small army in 680 AD. This marked the beginning of the split. Ever since, the martyrdom of Hussein has been part of the Shiite annual ritual.

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ISLAM

One of the famous Caliphates until these days is Abd al-Malik who ruled from 685-705 and introduced Arabic as an official caliphate language, as well as an Islamic currency. Plus, he reinvented the tax system. The new religious faith continuously spread westward and even invaded Spain under Muslim commander named Tariq in 711 AD. By 730 AD almost all Spanish territory was under Islamic control.

Their hunger for more expansion led them to go eastwards and try to conquer France. During the battle of Tours, between Poitiers and Tour they were stopped by Frankish army under Charles Martel, who stopped their expansionism into the Frankish empire.⁶⁷

Anyhow, it was during the time of expansionism that the Arab renaissance impacted the world. Knowledge was brought off shore. Unfortunately, we tend to forget this great contribution of Arabic scientists to the science and medicine. I.e., Al-Razi's magnum opus wrote the "al-Hawi fi al-tibb (comprehensive book of medicine) extending into a full 23 volumes.

Also Islamic mathematics such as algebra contributed to great transformation in western mathematics. Al-Uqlidisi in 950 AD revolutionized mathematics by his invention of fractions.

In fact, because of the great distance of Islamic territory from Spain to central Asia, the knowledge could be spread all over and be subject to discussions among experts.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ See Catherwood, Christopher p.86

⁶⁶ Ibid p.91-94

⁶⁷ see Cathawood p.85-86

⁶⁸ Ibid p. 89-90

THE IMPACT OF NEW RELIGIOUS FAITHS

The new religious movements, Christianity and Islam, had a great impact on the Middle Eastern population because it brought hope and a new ideology of submission to one God. Plus, through commercial and social interactions of different ethnical groups, the socio-cultural exchanges could take place. However, as in other constellations where change occurs, violence emerged between political and religious group. The consequences were vehement in the region causing mass persecutions and wars.

The Political Framework that allowed the Spread of Christianity

The Spread of Christianity couldn't have taken place without the socio-political impact that foreign occupants had on the Middle Eastern region. One key element is that of the communication. Given different tribes in the region, they were all unified and became a homogenous society under Roman rule with Greek as Lingua franca and Roman as the official language. Communication was eased through the "Pax Romana" which stretched from Egypt to Asia Minor. Indeed, the dissemination of the new faith was in particular reinforced by the shift of the religious capital in 40 AD, from Jerusalem to Antioch (border from Turkey and Syria).⁶⁹

Another relevant factor deals with the concept of inclusiveness, which can also be seen as the concept of superiority. The application had especially been observed by Greeks and Jews that insisted of distinction to other ethnical or religious groups and was defined by the bloodline. Non Greeks were called barbarians, while Jews (the chosen ones) considered all non Jewish as pagans. Yet, the breaking of barriers was allowed. Greeks mainly required the adoption of the language and culture, whereas the Jews demanded the adaption of their belief and laws.

Anyhow, the Greeks had imported the idea of citizenship.⁷⁰ In Greek cities, for instance, the status was limited to original Greek citizens and families while the highest status that Barbarians could acquire was that of resident alien.

The Romans had first adapted this concept of citizenship, but with the growing of the empire, it had extended the rights all over its entire empire. However, the citizenship was not permitted to everyone, but was only restricted to the elite of ethnical groups.

Of course, it would be false to give foreign influence solely credit to the spread of Christianity. The high organization skills among Christians also contributed to the increase of Christians. They built up a substantial proportion of the upper class and organized meetings underground that would coordinate the message of the Gospel. During the time, the apostles would accomplish many miracles and wonders.

Plus, the whole idea of Salvation⁷¹, that you could be cleansed from your sins through the blood of Jesus Christ, became embraced by many followers because Christianity symbolized integrity and acceptance throughout

⁶⁹ Ibid p.54

⁷⁰ All member of a polity with the right in partaken the formation and leading of government

⁷¹ Sinners reconciliation with God through his son Jesus Christ

all social and ethnic strata. Accordingly, from the onset of its existence on, Christianity defined its-self as a very multi racial religious faith. However, due to the deviation from Judaism, the dispute about circumcision remained a conflicting topic among the first Christians and the converted pagans. This issue impeded also the acceptance of the new religion by Jews. Given the difficulties in preaching the message to their brethren Apostle Paul launched the idea of the universality of Christianity which implied the openness to pagans and all social classes and races saying: *“There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus”*⁷². Slaves, single people, divorced, unmarried people etc... all were considered as one in Christ. Subsequently this idea of Universality led to mass conversion from pagans that worshiped many Gods to Christians marking the beginning of the shift from polytheism to monotheism. But why the search for pagans’ world: during the time there was a tendency of men on the search for meaning, for answers through religion.⁷³

The Persecutions

How to explain that despite the persecution against the first Christians, the number of new conversion didn’t diminish but rather continued to increased? There are many theories and assumptions about the answer, but a much plausible one is that of the promise for Salvation. In the Christians belief, Jesus already had prepared his follower that they will be persecuted in his name⁷⁴ but promised them at the same time salvation for their endurance.

As the Prophets and the apostles continued to manifest their power through signs and wonder, the Jewish elite became more and more nervous fearing the loss of their political influence. In contrast, the Romans accused the Christians of atheism since they would refuse the worshipping of the pagan Gods, as well as giving them sacrifices. Christians were often made responsible for natural disasters and defeat in battle, which obviously resulted in arbitrary persecutions. Romans were also astonished by the fact that Christians would refuse conformity or any compromise to the Roman’s rites⁷⁵, but instead they preferred to become a martyr just like Jesus had been.

Despite their emergence out of Judaism, the Romans made a clear distinction between Christians and Jews. Up till the Jewish rebellion, the Jews were allowed the exercise of their unsocial and exclusive faith but this because Jews were a nation whereas the Christians were regarded as a sect. Moreover, the Christians were regarded as apostates from the ancient faith of Moses, and worshipping no visible god, were held to be atheists.

The Jewish Rebellion

The first Jewish rebellion in 66~70 AD was not an arbitrary event but was rather the peak of a series of discontentment of the ordinary Jewish people against both, the Jewish elite and their accomplices, the Romans.

⁷²Bible, New Living Translation (©2007): Galatians 3:28

⁷³ Starr , Chester G. : A History of the ancient world (March 1 1991) (p.603)

⁷⁴ Matthew 10:22-23

⁷⁵ <http://www.earlychurch.org.uk/persecution-russell.html>

The rebellion against the Romans was only a matter of time. Since their acquiring of the Jewish territory in 63 BC, they had been raising taxes that would only benefit Roman and not the Jew. This led to the impoverishment of the Jewish peasantry, forcing more and more people to sell their property in order to meet the demand. And although at the beginning of the first Century, the Jewish elite⁷⁶ was able to control and calm down the peasantry, the situation aggravated overtime caused by corruption among the elite⁷⁷. Since the latter were pressured by Rom, they had to collaborate in order to remain influential.

Unlike the first rebellion, the ambitions of the second one led by Bar Kochba in 132 AD was based on the Roman violation of a promise to the Jewish people and on the unconscionable violation of the Jewish faith.

Given uprisings of single Jewish revolutionary groups while in exile, the Roman emperor named Trajan had promised Jews the restoration for Jerusalem in return for patience and no more unrest. The idea was opposed by pagans that were convinced that the restoration would mean the rebirth of the Jewish sovereignty. However, after the death of Trajan, his successor Hadrian went to the city to make him-self an image and decided to fulfill the promise. To the amazement of the Jews, Hadrian withdrew from the prior agreement and suggested the restoration in favor of the Romans. Jerusalem should be rebuilt as a pagan city with Hadrian as a high priest and the city be renamed as Aelia Capitolina. In the Jewish sight, this was a humiliation. The problem escalated with Hadrian's prohibition on circumcision. There was no way to tolerate this situation. Circumcision was the mark of the Jew and part of the covenant with God. The abolishment would have meant a spiritual death.⁷⁸

The Council of Nicaea

In retrospect, there is clear evidence that the church became increasingly linked to the Roman power since the fourth Century. This was underlined by Constantine's strong desire to have a voice in the internal affairs of the church and bring the whole church to agree on the same doctrine. In this way he convened the Council of Nicaea in 325 AD. "It was secular authorities who now determined Christian doctrine, albeit in approval with the church leaders".⁷⁹ This new link between religion and political power was called Caeseropapism, which implied that the Emperor had authority over the church. It lasted until 1453 AD. Christian groups that opposed the view were persecuted or went underground. The same group was of great importance for the spread of Islam since they openly received the Muslim invaders. Now that they thought it was better to live under their occupation where they could enjoy their freedom (people of the book) than to be persecuted under the Byzantium Empire.

⁷⁶ the Sadducees were in control of the temple and tenured key religious positions and collaborated with either foreign occupants

⁷⁷ http://www.livius.org/ja-jn/jewish_wars/jwar03.html

⁷⁸ <http://www.cyberessays.com/History/95.htm>

⁷⁹ See Catherwood, Christopher p.64

So now going back the event was the Constantine's legalization of the new religion based on his religious conviction or was his incentive rather led by personal political reasons such as effective social control? This question is still debated until today. Anyhow, his decision had both good and bad sides. For the spread of Christianity it had a positive effect since Christians enjoyed political freedom and were no longer persecuted. However, the consensus taken during the Council provoked disagreements among Christians. The question that arose was whether or not religion and politics could go along since Jesus had strictly separated both.

The consequences have been devastating for the human being and are still visible today. Spirituality has been misused for personal and political empowerment. We should only follow the history time table to understand the long-term ramifications such as the crusades, slavery and colonialism.

The Fall of the Roman Empire

By 500 AD the empire was divided into East (Germanic kingdoms) and the West (non-Latin Greek empire). Now, is the emergence of Christianity responsible for the fall of Rome? Did the shift from paganism to Christianity cost Rome its imperialism as often suggested? There is no doubt that this argument has indeed played a role, but there are other facts worth noticing.

The Empire suffered economic recession. By the early 3rd Century after the creation of the Roman Empire, the Roman Government had difficulties stabilizing its coinage money system. This resulted in the rising of tax money. When taxpayers were unable to pay their bills the counselors had to adequate the difference. In this regard "forced exertion became a greater burden than regular taxes"⁸⁰, in particular because taxes became regularized due to continuous external, as well as internal wars.

Furthermore, we should not exclude the fact that due to its large territory, the Roman Empire was divided into Roma and Byzantium. The political split was first formalized by Emperor Diocletian⁸¹, who split the eastern and western halves of the empire into separate administrations. Diocletian's envisaged to implement a new system of succession also known under the term Tetrarchy. His idea implied that either way, two senior colleagues (the Augusti) and two junior ones (the Caesars), who would be related through marriage, were to be appointed at the same time. And once the Augusti would retire, the senior would automatically take over the power. In this way, he intended to create a balance of power. Additionally, he introduced a military strategy of breaking up large cavalries and dividing them into cavalry and infantry.⁸²

Under the Age of Constantine, the administrative splits were institutionalized by moving the capital from Rome to Byzantine in 324 AD. In

⁸⁰ Ermatinger, James W., *The Decline and fall of the Roman Empire*, Greenwood Press; annotated edition edition (2004) (25)

⁸¹ Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus reigned as a Roman Emperor from 284AD to 305AD

⁸² See Ermatinger p. 27

the same period the emperor introduced Christianity as the official religion before christening the city "Nova Roma", or New Rome in 330 AD.⁸³

During his reign, Constantine had to face tribal unrests on the Rhine and in Persia. Due to the growing military expenses, economic recession and the forced taxation, Rome was no longer able to sustain its power and was weakened and became divided. However, we must understand that the eastern part of the Empire did not fall but that it was instead controlled by Constantinople over centuries and served as a strategic point for military and economic base to connect Europe and Asia.

ISLAM AND THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Similar to Christianity, the spreading of Islam was thanks to the political fundament of Persian and Hellenic. The systems were later transformed into the own synthesis.

However, the first and main point for the success of Islamization lies in the message of Islam. Like Christianity, people were fascinated by the new monotheistic faith. It was especially under the Abbasid Caliphate that a great movement of assimilation occurred within the Islamic empire. Arabic was first adopted as a dominant language and became later the Lingua Franca and caused the pure Arab to abandon their claim to aristocracy. Besides, the absorbance of new ethnical groups and the assimilation of the Arabic faith and culture consolidated the Islamic empire. However, while "Arabization" was successful, "Islamization" was less successful due to Muslim tolerance toward Christianity and Judaism as their follower was seen as "people of the book".

The second approach to understanding the Spread of Islam refers to its military dominance and constellation of well skilled forces that also had support from Christian minorities opposed to Byzantium.

Another significant point for the success of Islam lies in the shifting of the capital from Bagdad to Damascus that diminished the Mediterranean interest, but increased the oriental influence highly. The removal of barriers made Bagdad the capital of a free trade zone in which the inhabitants had access to commercial markets. Moreover, Arab ships traveled to China, Sumatra, India and even to East Africa until Madagascar. With the economic progress came the educational interests. While at the beginning it was the foreign knowledge that had been translated into Arabic, later on the Islamic empire brought about its own great achievement in science, literature, and the arts.

Nevertheless, the shifting of capitals had also a negative site. Because effective power could not be exerted over a long distance, the shift weakened the empire. In Egypt and in eastern Persia, for instance, authorities who had been made commanders of the provinces made themselves autonomous, in disinterest of the Caliphs. Therefore, the Caliph decided to import Turkish slave boys named, Mamlukes, from (soviet Turkestan) consisting of Turks,

⁸³ Ibid p. 28-29;

<http://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20090110213226AAR0IM8>

Kurds, Mongols and other Asian groups. They served as excellent mercantilists but soon realized their potential assassinating the caliph in Baghdad in 861 AD and establishing a military dictatorship. This was the beginning of the decline of Islamic empire. In 867 AD a Turk named Ibn Tulun seized power in Egypt and soon acquired Syria. The annexion lasted until the occupancy under the Ottoman Empire in the 16th Century.

This Turkish hegemony was only interrupted for a certain time in 969 AD when it was invaded by a new Arab military power of the Fatimid Dynasty, which came from Syria as Leaders of Shiite Ismaili Movement and which envisaged the overthrow of the Abbasid Caliphate.⁸⁴ They set up a new capital in Cairo and a rival caliphate to that of Baghdad. The territory stretched out westwards across the Maghreb to the Atlantic and into Sicily. The new empire affected the economy of its rivalry. Because it controlled the route to the orient, Cairo prospered at Baghdad's expense.

By the beginning of the 11th Century the Byzantium and Fatimid Empire were both at their stage of decline when they were invaded by the Oghuz Turkish nomads from central Asia, who are known as Seljuks. In 1050 AD they invaded Baghdad and reduced the Abbasid Caliph to a small territory. In 1071 AD they pushed back the Fatimids from Syria and attacked Byzantium, capturing the Byzantine emperor Romanos Diogenes.

CONCLUSION

Foreign influence during the First Millennium facilitated and opened the doors for socio-cultural exchanges. This included the Spread of faith and knowledge. Thanks to the implementation of Greek as Lingua Franca and Latin as an official language, communication was eased and enabled a quick assimilation and integrity. Especially the trade zone, Pax Romana facilitated the free flow of ideas.

While Christianity brought about a new way of universal faith and tolerance that became later adopted by Muslims; Islam reinforced the concept of universality in absorbing new societies (arabization and islamization).

Unfortunately, the era was also marked by a tremendous violence between the different ethnical and religious groups, thus launching a domino effect all over from the Middle East to Europe. Particularly regarding the mixed up of Religion and Politics that was first started by Constantine and later on, became adopted by Islam. However, while the Islamic expansionism could be stopped at Poitiers and the Islamic empire became divided, Europe which managed to accumulate wealth through taxes and invasions and new inventions. The difference may be that while Muslims were motivated by their faith, Europe mainly concentrated on the power on the surface of religious faith. Besides, because of the division between Rome and Byzantium, the latter had long served as a gate or frontier between the Arabs and the western Civilization. This is to suggest, that the more powerful the Byzantine empire became, the more it limited the flow of ideas between both worlds.

⁸⁴ See Catherwood, Christopher p.93

THE SECOND MILLENNIUM

INTRODUCTION

Through the Second Millennium, the Europeans and their descendents became the most powerful people of the world in military and economic terms, creating a tremendous disequilibrium in progress opportunities, and leaving behind a burden of poverty and inequality. The imbalance of power in the world couldn't be worse these days. Paradoxically, the Europeans and their descendants got further apart from their Christian values. This particular evolution, accelerated in the last two centuries by the amazing technological inventions, had an enormous impact in the entire world, more particularly in the Middle East, where oil has simultaneously been a jewel and a tragedy.

The Second Millennium, considered globally, was characterized by a series of events that influenced highly the political, economic and social development of mankind. The purpose of this essay is to review the most important events to study its scope and meaning for the Middle East, so that we better understand its evolution and current situation.

Early in the Second Millennium, the victory of the Turks over the Eastern Romans in Manzikert showed a territorial reduction in Orthodox Christianity, represented by Byzantium. The Muslim world took the leading for a while. The two civilizations, Christianity and Islam, having common roots based on monotheism, were next to each other geographically. Then, there were the Crusades which, beyond its religious façade, show evident signs of a first European imperialism, even though they ended up in a military failure for the West. Up to that point, there is one world in apparent equilibrium, especially taking under consideration China, India and Japan in Asia, the pre-Columbian empires of the Incas and Aztecs in America, and many African peoples. Power seems allocated on Earth without much imbalance. A new Islamic advance occurs in 1453, represented by the Turks, who took Constantinople and opened the doors for a further conquest through the Balkan countries. It seems the power moves following the pendulum law. However, these political and economic outcomes would be less significant than those derived from the Conquest and Colonization of the Americas, especially in economic terms, for a radical change occurred with the development of the first inter oceanic trade, called mercantilism.

It is from that period on, and the gradual development that Europe grows in military, technological and industrial power, as well as in arrogance, building a sense of race superiority. In brief, Europe became a colonizer continent, ready to carry out the exploitation of millions of native people without ethical or moral limits, violating all principles of Christianity itself. Conquest in America was marked by looting, humiliation, destruction and death. The sword and the Gospel were intertwined to seal the purposes of ambition and greed. In short, Europe had come to conquer the world. But at what cost for Mankind? The Holocaust had two targets: the native peoples of

the Americas, which witnessed the destruction of their culture, and also the peoples of Africa, with the scourge of slavery in his back. The supposed superiority of the European race, based on weapons, helps to understand the extremism of human passions.

The centuries to come are a strengthening of this culture of domination, colonization and exploitation. The European expansion continues, making the balance of power course in the world tremendously fragile. The economic mercantilism is transformed to give way, first in England, to industrialization and international commerce under the preaching of free trade. The British example is imitated by other Europeans. Between 1870 and 1910, the European powers are ready for a new looting, allocating the entire African continent with the exception of Ethiopia. This is another period of violence, destruction, humiliation and death whose consequences are still present. Where were the Christian values? Where were the Christian leaders? Silence is the other face of accomplice.

Of course, there were also many contradictions in the Islamic area whose main power was Turkey. There were countless abuses, humiliation, plunder and exploitation for centuries. The constant domain is achieved with weapons. In fact, the Islamic expansionism had conquered North Africa and entered the Iberian Peninsula long before the start of the Second Millennium. It was in Poitiers, France, in 732 that Charles Martel prevented the Arabs from conquering Europe.

But back to the starting point in what has to do with the West, the Ottoman Empire was for centuries a container or wall against the expansionist attempts of Western imperialists. The weakening of the Ottoman Empire, which goes down like a sick person in slow agony, is specified at the end of World War One. Once the Treaty of Versailles was signed, the future of the Middle East, having the oil as the principal spoils of the new powers, it is decided without participation of their peoples. The winners of WWI created a new political map for the Middle East. The European ambition and greed were complemented by the impressive growth of U.S. power in the international arena during the twentieth Century. All this explains many problems and current situations.

Ethnicity aside, and dumped on religious issues, the question is valid: Christianity being so great in values and principles, how the Europeans could generate so much misfortune? There is no doubt, for its economic and political expressions have been well above the preaching of Abraham, Jesus and Muhammad.

JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM BEFORE MANZIKERT

The Jews, like Christians and Muslims, consider Jerusalem as a holy city. For Jews, because once consolidated the conquest of Canaan by King David, it was the epicenter of the state of Israel. The temple of Solomon, which contained the Ark of Covenant, is there. For Christians, Judea is the land where Jesus was born and raised, so Jerusalem is one of their sacred sites. And similarly, the Muslims see it as their third holiest city, after Mecca and Medina. In 638 AD, Jerusalem was conquered by the Caliph Omar. And although under

Muslim domination, Jews and Christians could live in complete peace, since they received the *dhimmis*, which gave them a protected status for being monotheistic.

Peace, however, is a rather precarious value, that may be lost like water through fingers. When ethnic and religious differences develop, the peaceful coexistence of different peoples in one place is possible only when the losers accept the conditions of the victors, less characterized by moderate advantage and tolerance than by horrendous forms of humiliation and exploitation.

Of the three religions, only Judaism does not seek a territorial expansionism based on assignments to convert some neighboring peoples to their faith. Instead, it adopted a stance of ethnic closure, meaning Yahweh's chosen people. In contrast, both Islam and Christianity have spread as transcontinental religions, carrying out the mission to embrace all peoples. Long before the Second Millennium, Christians and Muslims nourished their vision of universal faiths, and expanded them supported by military expeditions, conditioning different peoples and setting the stage for civilizations rivalry and differentiation. Beyond their common principles and values, Christianity and Islam evolved like two opposed religions.

The power, whatever its manifestation, is always in danger of being lost or undermined because of divisions. By the end of the First Millennium, Islam had suffered serious internal conflicts, in particular giving rise to the Sunnis and Shi'ites. And in Christianity, dissenting voices had always been persecuted. So when the Battle of Manzikert occurred in 1071, enough water has flowed under the bridges in the name of religion. Manzikert, a little known battle in the West, is sort of a Poitiers' revenge as it generates a path to the expansion of Islam through the Turkish people.

The pendulum had been moving again. Indeed, led under the sultan Alp-Arslan, the Seljuk Turks defeated the Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes. According to C. Catherwood, *"this event proved to be the failure of Christians in the West to support Islam against Byzantium, and the beginning of the conquest of Anatolia by the Turks"*.⁸⁵ In our opinion, there was little commitment in the West, for only twenty years had passed since the division of Christianity between the Orthodox and the Roman Church. The truth is that the Islamic victory over the Eastern Romans in Manzikert meant a reduction in territorial Orthodox Christianity, represented by Byzantium. The different armies and political entities representing Christianity and Islam, having common roots based on monotheism, and more particularly on Judaism, were ever since rivals living next to each other geographically, sharing long boundaries for centuries.

THE CRUSADES – A LATIN AGGRESSION AGAINST ISLAM

It is true that the Crusades had a religious character motivation, but it is also true that during its evolution, economic and political interests emerged, identifying the first stage of the imperialist culture that would characterize the

⁸⁵ George Catherwood, *'A Brief History of The Middle East'*, p. 91

Europeans and their descendants alike throughout the Second Millennium, especially after the sixteenth Century.

The Crusades were a Christian brutality, an aggression to the Islamic world, and their wounds still remain. This violent attack of the Latin Empire, conspicuously religious and imperialist, took the Muslim world by surprise, and found it in a tremendous political disunity that obstructed the preparation for resistance. The times of the Arab conquests had passed and the Arab military activity was confined to defense, while the Turks were still building up their military supremacy within the Muslim empire before their great onslaught on the Christian world.

It was Pope Urban II, who launched the cry 'God wills it' for thousands of enthusiastic believers with the idea of recovering the holy places, while presenting a distorted picture of the Islamic world. He relied on a key character, charismatic and a great preacher, Peter 'The Hermit'. His fanaticism, which convinced thousands in France, created many misfortunes from the beginning, as hundreds of Jews were massacred in the German villages. It was said that the absolution for sins could be obtained through taking up the Cross. In the spring of 1096, the first Christian contingents from France and Germany left toward the East. Within months, the numbers topped 100,000 men ready to give the final battle to establish the 'Kingdom of God' on earth. The relations between Islam and Christianity have characterized ever since by deep animosity and enduring enmity. The siege of Nicea, and the battle for Antioch, as well as the horrific Jerusalem massacre of 1099 AD when the crusaders, driven on by a religious fanaticism, unleashed an unholy wave of cruelty, slaughtering thousands of Muslims, all in the name of Christianity, are episodes that were never forgotten. Jerusalem was captured and remained Christian for 88 years, until the mighty Sultan Saladin seized upon the crimes of the First Crusaders and recaptured it.⁸⁶

The success of the First Crusade produced other effects. It seemed to confirm the divine support to the notion of 'holy violence'. The Crusades were justified all over in Western Europe. Frank villages established in the East needed consolidation and defense, which gave several popes and kings the excuse to build up new crusades. The practice of war, in ideological and technological terms, was also reshaped. The masses were indoctrinated based on religious fanaticism. Latins were encouraged to believe that Muslims were sub-human savages, natural enemies. Bloodlust and greed were in the spirit of the Crusaders.

The position of extreme intolerance led by the Popes was also felt in Europe, where other crusades were launched against Christian believers who set up variables to the dogmatic faith, such as the Albigensians or the Cathars.

After the recapture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187 AD, Christianity reacted with force and its leaders organized the Third Crusade. Although religious motivation would be maintained, the Fourth Crusade was turned into an absolute embarrassment to Christianity, since it proved the lowest European

⁸⁶ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, pp. 153-319

passions, guided by hatred and destruction, revealing a total lack of spiritual values. In 1204, the Crusaders turned their weapons against Constantinople, the heart of Christian Byzantium and the most sophisticated city of the known world. In their savagery, the Crusaders murdered thousands, plundered treasuries, and put the city on fire. It was not a crusade against the Muslims, neither a crusade to recover Jerusalem, but a crusade against their Orthodox Christians brothers. Up to date, this Western brutality has maintained in the Greek Orthodox Church a deep hostility toward the Catholic Church.⁸⁷

This disgraceful crusade made Pope Innocent organize a new one, which opened diplomatic channels and allowed Frederick II to be crowned as king in Jerusalem. It was by this time that Louis IX of France decided to participate. But this time it was the Mongols who were involved and, given his overwhelming military advance, the purpose of Christianity wouldn't be other than contain the expansion of the Turks.

The Crusades are one of the most important episodes in the history of humanity. As wars, they caused not only destruction and death but sowed hatred and religious fanaticism for centuries to come. From a military viewpoint, they turned to be a failure for the West. But they expressed clear signs of European imperialism. Under this latter perspective, without diminishing the pernicious consequences of the conflict between Christianity and Islam, it is valid to accept other economic and social outcomes, since the contact between East and West opened new routes, generated ethnic mixing, and increased trade.

Medieval Europe, enclosed and obscurantist, would cease to be. And within it, the bourgeoisie would gradually take the lead as an economic category to accelerate its transformation. In the Islamic world, where the aggression of Western Europe had produced awareness and unity of spirit genre, would emerge the Turkish military leadership. Unfortunately for all, that process of economic and social changes would also multiply the seeds of greed and ambition.

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE – AN ISLAMIC SUPER-POWER

The pendulum was again in movement, for a new Islamic advance occurred during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, represented by the Turks, who conquered great portions of the Balkans, and took Constantinople in 1453 AD, opening the doors for further expansion westward.

The new super-power was known as the Ottoman Empire, deriving its name from Osman, an important sultan who ruled from 1290 to 1326, and organized the empire in administrative and military terms. Significant conquests increased considerably the territory of the Empire between 1290 and 1550. Thrace was taken in 1361; Sophia and the Bulgarian State fell in 1380; the major battle of Kosovo took place in 1389 AD; the Hungarian defeat at Nicopolis occurred in 1396 AD. Among all these events, the fall of Constantinople, by the army of Mehmed the Conqueror, must be seen as a turning point in history, for

⁸⁷ Jonathan Phillips, *The Fourth Crusade and the Sack of Constantinople*, pp. 162-280

it meant the end of Byzantium, which was the Orthodox Christian bastion in the East, a real container of Islamic expansion for a long time. The aggression to the Christian world was now coming from the Seljuk Turks, who having Mongol roots, became Muslims around 956 AD. But the cause of all these conquests didn't rely only on religious motivation but also on territorial and political ambitions. It was clearly a wave of Turk imperialism.

The conquests continued during the 16th Century. Sultan Selim I conquered Egypt in 1517 AD, and consolidated the Empire in the Middle East. Another great ruler, Suleiman, 'The Magnificent', who governed from 1520 AD to 1566, launched military expeditions toward Eastern Europe. His army won the battle of Mohacs in 1520 AD, which had devastating consequences for Hungary in the next 170 years. He even attempted to capture Vienna, the capital of the Habsburg Empire.

During the 16th Century, the Ottoman Empire reached its apogee and consolidated itself as an international superpower. "*Whoever assaults the Turk must be prepared to meet his united forces*", wrote Machiavelli in "The Prince". Suleiman ruled directly over much of Southern Russia, over Transylvania, Hungary and the Balkans, Anatolia, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and most of modern Iraq, Kuwait and the western shores of the Gulf, and had a tremendous influence in many other areas of the Muslim world. His European territories were bigger than Spain and France combined. Meanwhile the Christian movements of Reform and Counter-Reform developed fanaticism and divided the European continent, causing destruction and death as never seen before. Europe's situation produced such a confidence to the Turks that their expansion westward continued to be a fundamental point in their foreign policy.

Despite the immense Turkish power and European contradictions, different circumstances gradually pushed the Ottoman Empire toward its decline. As Alan Palmer says, "*once Suleiman's long reign ended in 1566, the Sultanate weakened by palace rivalry and intrigue, became a military less formidable institution, although the latent menace of Ottoman invasion was ever-present in the mind of Central Europeans*"⁸⁸. Contemporaries didn't perceive an empire slipping into decline until 1683 AD, when the Ottoman army was defeated in Vienna. It was then clear that the 'Great Turk' was not invincible.

By the end of the 17th Century the Ottoman Empire lagged behind the European powers in military and technological capacity. Nevertheless, it remained for two more centuries the great barrier of the Islamic world preventing eventual European expeditions toward the Middle East. European advances were evident, especially in Britain, France and the Netherlands, where manufacturers provided a significant impulse. The philosophy of mercantilism multiplied creativity under the leadership of the bourgeoisie. The conquest of America, although characterized by savagery and brutality, generated torrents of wealth for Europe.

⁸⁸ Alan Plamer, *The Decline and Fall of the Ottoman Empire*, p. 9

THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

When Columbus discovers America in 1492 AD, the world was in an apparent political power equilibrium, especially taking under consideration not only the European monarchies and the Ottoman Empire, representing Christianity and Islam, but also China, India and Japan in Asia, the pre-Columbian empires of the Incas and Aztecs in America, and many African peoples. Power seemed to be evenly allocated on the globe without much imbalance.

Few events in the history of mankind have had such a meaning as the conquest and colonization of America, for they changed the world forever. Their political and economic outcomes transformed the European mentality, placed the Christian values completely aside, and opened the path for a constantly growing ambition. Although some theologian voices arose to denounce the crimes against the Indians, the savagery of exploitation continued. The Tordesillas Treaty of 1493 AD divided the New World between the crowns of Portugal and Spain. The fever of gold and silver enslaved millions of indigenous people. As one Conquistador said, “...we came to serve God and the King, and also to get rich”⁸⁹. But the British, Dutch and French monarchies also wanted gold and sponsored piracy to assault the Spanish ships containing precious metals. Looting was a culture, a way of life. Francis Drake, a renowned pirate, was appointed a Lord by Queen Elizabeth I.

There was no respect at all for the Indians. The Gospel and the sword complemented each other. The European conquest resulted above all in a tremendous fall in population for them. Some scholars place the number of the original Indian population at between 75 and 85 million, with 25 million each for the Aztec and Inca Empires. By 1580 AD, there was a total decline of 70 percent. This demographic calamity is largely attributable to diseases such as smallpox and influenza in European history books. The reality was different, for millions died in the wars of resistance which were very intense during the first fifty years. The Indian survivors were forced to give their labor to the Spaniards, first in mining, later in agricultural activities. This horrendous holocaust is barely recalled in Western literature.

The demographic calamity was overcome by importing slaves from Africa. Between 1518 and 1870 AD Spanish America imported more than 1.6 million slaves, and Brazil brought over 3.7 million for its extensive sugar plantations. The numbers for North America and the Caribbean islands are equally impressive. This horrible human traffic was practiced by all Europeans. Queen Elizabeth I “bankrolled the construction of *Jesus*, the first English slave ship”, and “...praised John Hawkins, the slavery leading practitioner, by giving him the Crown’s most prestigious medals”.⁹⁰ The British profited the most, for they got the monopoly of the slave traffic after the Spanish War of Succession. This was another crime caused by European hands.

⁸⁹ Thomas Skidmore and Peter Smith, ‘Modern Latin America’, p. 15

⁹⁰ Jacques Gélinas, ‘Juggernaut Politics, Understanding Predatory Globalization’, p. 5

The inter-oceanic trade established the basis for a new economic order, placing Europe as the center of economy. This mercantilism era lasted three hundred years. Thanks to the influx of precious metals, "...the volume of the European money supply increased tenfold in less than a hundred years, and Europe's economy, became a monetized system".⁹¹ The sack of America built the prosperity of Europe, for it grew in military, technological and industrial power, as well as in arrogance, building a new sense of racial superiority. The Europeans believed the world was theirs. They continued colonization and exploited millions of indigenous people and African slaves without ethical concerns, ignoring Christian principles completely. Happiness seemed to be reached through greed, accumulating possessions. This European behavior has had an enormous cost for mankind.

Regarding the Middle East, this prosperity generated by the incalculable looting of America, set the basis for the European advantage over the Ottoman Empire, then Islam's protector.

The centuries to come reinforced this European culture of domination. Mercantilism was already replaced in the second half of the 18th Century by the capitalist production system, based on industrialization, and on a more sophisticated international commerce, under the attractive creed of free trade. The British led the movement, building an enormous empire, but most Europeans followed their patterns. The common European goal was to take advantage of different peoples on Earth, dominating them militarily in order to control their natural resources. Religious values were denied, for violence and exploitation were the key features of this economic process.

This imbalance of power supported Europe's prosperity. This political and economic evolution left the Muslim world behind. However, the Ottoman Empire was an obstacle for European expansion toward the Middle East until World War One. This is a Turkish contribution to the Islamic world. The first signs of Ottoman decline occurred with the advent to the throne of Sultan Selim II in 1566 AD, and the defeat at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571 AD. After the defeat at the battle of Vienna in 1683 AD, subsequent events accelerated this trend: in 1699 AD, the Turks signed the Treaty of Karlowitz, ceding Hungary to the Habsburg, and the Aegean coast to the Venetians; in 1718 AD, they signed away more of their European lands; in 1774 AD, they lost Crimea; and in 1798 AD, Napoleon occupied Egypt and invaded Palestine.⁹²

That being said, how could the Ottoman Empire become a barrier to European imperialism? The answer is found in the internal European rivalries which benefited the Empire. The great powers of the 19th Century - Czarist Russia, Habsburg Austria, Great Britain and France - developed different Middle East policies, according to their interests. Let's review them.

The tensions between Russia and the Ottoman Empire were frequent and had three main causes: First, Russian expansionism to the south had to do with its geographical conditions. Rivers have been very important for Russian

⁹¹ Eduardo Galeano, 'The Open Veins of Latin America', p. 10-73

⁹² Arthur Goldschmidt Jr., 'A Concise History of the Middle East', p. 148

economy but rivers going north are apt to be ice bound half a year. Therefore, Russia needed the Black Sea as a warm water outlet for trade. Peter the Great launched several wars against the Ottoman Empire in order to ensure Russian access to the Black Sea, and by mid-19th Century the Russians could regard it as mainly theirs. Second, religious differences also established tensions, for the Russians considered Constantinople a “Second Rome”, a jewel of the Orthodox Church. When Constantinople fell to the Turks, Russia became the greatest Orthodox country and declared Moscow as “The Third Rome”. More importantly, mother Russia saw itself as a better protector for the Serbs, Bulgarians, Albanians, Romanians and Greeks seeking freedom from Muslim rule. Third, the Russians developed later the argument of ethnicity, pointing out the commonalities with many of the Sultan’s Balkan subjects, for they were all Slavs.

The Habsburg Empire, one of Russia’s rivals, bordered directly on Ottoman lands in Southern Europe from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. After taking Hungary from the Ottomans in 1699 AD, the Austrians hoped to move down the Danube River toward the Black Sea. They also wanted to control Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. Although trading interests constitute the main motivation, there was also a sentiment derived from the old crusading traditions against the Muslim Turks. Austria supported the independent movements of the Balkan peoples during the nineteenth Century, and took military control of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 AD, regions with significant Muslim population, and geographically close to Serbia. The Habsburg rule in those regions was undermined by Serbian nationalists, leading to the assassination at Sarajevo of the heir to the Austrian throne. This was the spark that set off World War One.

The British interests in the Middle East evolved from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. After consolidating his Asian empire by defeating France in the Seven Years War, it was clear that Britain was a naval, imperial, and Indian power. Safe sea transport to India became a British primary concern. For a long time, since the route went around South Africa, Britain hardly thought of the Ottoman Empire and even backed some Russian expansionist attempts. But after Napoleon was defeated, and the steamship made faster to transport people and goods through Egypt, the British changed their policy toward the Ottoman Empire, seeing it as the best guardian of its routes to India, and soon committed itself to the Empire’s defense, especially from Russia. The best proof is the Crimea War (1853-1856 AD). Under the excuse of securing its routes to India, Britain occupied Cyprus in 1878 AD, invaded Egypt in 1882 AD, and took gradually control of the Suez Canal.

France was for a long time a good friend of the Ottoman Empire. The strong rivalry between France and Austria led to an alliance between the French and the Turks. French merchants were common in Ottoman ports for decades, and when the Turks needed military or naval experts, they usually looked for French ones. But things changed when Napoleon invaded Egypt, producing the British and Ottoman reaction. Following France’s defeat, a military adventurer called Mehmet Ali took power in Egypt, built up a strong army and took Syria

from the Ottomans in 1831 AD. The French supported him and raised the Ottoman anger. Then comes the story of the Suez Canal, whose concession to build it was also given to the French. It was open in 1869 AD, and Britain, which quickly became the main user, acquired the shares from the government. France, however, maintained its influence in the Muslim world, conquering a great portion of Northern Africa.

These contradictions between Austria and Russia, France and Austria, Britain and France, Russia and Britain, and the like, explain why the Ottoman Empire, beyond its gradual weakening, could remain as a barrier for the European expansionism in the Middle East.

THE PARTITION OF AFRICA AND ITS IMPACT

Between 1870 and 1914 AD, the whole of Africa was partitioned between rival European powers, leaving only Liberia and Ethiopia independent of foreign rule. Led by greed, the Europeans enslaved again the Africans. The Christian values were placed aside to sack the continent where the human being originated. A baneful period of violence, plunder and death came like a plague into Africa. Up to date, this enormous European crime has not been compensated.

The main motivations for this invasion were economic, for Africa became vital as a source of raw materials and as a virtually untapped market for finished goods during Europe's second industrial revolution. Minor reasons were the 'prestige' associated with possession of foreign territory and the ambitions of individual statesmen and diplomats. Africa also had an important role as strategic continent in geopolitical concerns.

Whatever the excuses, the looting of Africa was unjustifiable, an action marked by bloodlust and terror. Where were the codes of morality? Where were the European Christian values?

This new imperialist wave still increased the advantage that Europeans already had over the Islamic world, particularly over the Middle East, where the Ottoman Empire couldn't detain its slow agony. European wealth was sustained by the extraction of minerals and the agricultural productivity based on a free African labor force. The process, similar to the one experienced by America during colonization times, was developed with the technological tools of the recent industrial revolutions.

Northern African peoples had embraced the Islamic faith centuries ago. All their land was occupied by European armies, and French, British, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Italian and Belgian colonizers benefited from the political domination and exploited the native people.

The conditions were equally critical for those black African peoples. Subjugation, suffering and resignation seemed to be the new patterns. When resistance flourished, the answer was persecution, massacre, or genocide. Walter Rodney, the Guyanese scholar and activist who was tragically killed by state authorities in 1980 AD, presents an extraordinary summary of this disgraceful period in his book *"How Europe underdeveloped Africa"*. Equally important is Marc Ferro's book entitled *"The Livre Noir of Colonialism"*.

THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

First World War was devastating for all the participant nations. It has been estimated that the per capita losses in the Ottoman Empire and Persia were among the highest of all nations affected by the war. According to James Gelvin, "...while Germany and France lost, respectively, about 9 and 11 percent of their populations, as a result of the war, estimates Ottoman losses run as high as almost 25 percent, approximately five million out of a population of twenty-one million".⁹³ This delivers a clear idea of the suffering and tragic consequences for the inhabitants of the region. In what concerns land holding, we know that before the war the Ottoman Empire controlled not only Anatolia, the Levant, and Mesopotamia, but also Egypt, parts of Arabia, and small sliver of Northern Africa. This huge Empire was totally dismantled to create new fiction states, following European interests.

The president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson, wanted the allies to build a lasting peace, once the war was over. He prepared his fourteen points, denouncing secret societies, urging self-determination for all peoples, including those who had been under Ottoman rule, and proposed the creation of the League of Nations. But France and Britain, allies that put most of the casualties, were determined to dictate peace. The defeated powers, which didn't participate during the discussions, were called just to sign the treaty. The Zionist movement, backed by Britain, was ably represented by Weizmann. It was not easy to reconcile the Middle Eastern interests of Arabs, Zionists, British, and French. Wilson tried to compromise, but the French and British agreed to settle their differences, so Asian and African lands taken from Germany and Turkey were put under a tutelary relationship to a Great Power, called The Mandatory. In brief, Syria and Lebanon were controlled by France, and Iraq and Palestine, including present Jordan, by Britain.

The French had no sympathy at all for Arab nationalism and therefore tried to split Syria into smaller units, such as Lebanon, Alexandretta, and states for the *Alawis* in the north, and the *Druze* in the south, plus Damasco and Aleppo as city-states. The British were ambiguous about Arab nationalism and backed the Hashemite family until the revolt organized by Husayn, who refused to sign the Versailles and Sevres treaties. These actions produced a strong reaction in British policy toward Arabia, so they did nothing when the Saud family took control of the Hijaz in 1924 AD. All these results produced frustration, for the Arabs, in general, regretted foreign rule. In other words, the Arab liberation from their fellow Muslim Ottoman Turks, was replaced with Western rule. French and British power, along with the legitimatization of Zionist wishes for Palestine engendered an Arab-Muslim sense of humiliation and betrayal.

CONCLUSION

The Second Millennium, which began with the relative advantage of Islam over the West, took a radical turn from the conquest of America by the Europeans, since it allowed the latter to cement a mercantilist economic

⁹³ James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 172

development, a precursor of capitalism and free trade. Violating all principles of Christianity, Europe subjugated peoples, dominated the world, and became rich. Material values were progressively arising over spiritual values, so the idea of limitless accumulation became a life dream. The 20th Century, characterized by an impressive technological advance that multiplied production and created constantly new material needs, accelerated this evolution. The cult of consumerism led by the Western civilization seemed the path to happiness. Still some people, like the Chinese, refused to accept the god of 'consumption', even though they produce for others to consume. It is like a revenge for opium wars. The Middle Eastern Islamic nations, although the Islam has an enriching and critical viewpoint on property, did not escape the trend either.

In brief, the West has marginalized the greatness of Christian principles. 'In God we trust', as indicated on the dollar bill, is an expression of the planet's richest economy. But elsewhere in the world, 2.8 billion people, almost half of its population, are forced to live on less than two dollars a day; 1.4 billion do not have yet access to safe drinking water; 1.1 billion do not have decent housing; and 49 of the least advanced countries, where most of the poor live, are in technical bankruptcy due to their national debt. How to end all this misfortune is the great challenge of the Third Millennium.

THE RELIGIOUS MAINSTREAMS

INTRODUCTION

How many wars in God's name will still humanity have to go through? Doesn't it seem already enough to realize the tragedies of the past in the name of religion, in particular, on behalf of Judaism, Christianity and Islam? Neither the conflict among these so-called major religions, nor the tensions and confrontations within them have been resolved by interpreting the message of God, putting spirituality and religious values over the ambitions and weaknesses of human nature. The message of the prophets has been generally marginalized, since the weapons on behalf of God Almighty, have defeated peoples and decided their future.

The history of mankind seems to be marked by violence. Since the earliest days, where survival seemed the case, until the political, economic and military expansionism of more recent times, the war has served to radiography the negative side of human beings, for greed and ambition without limits have dominated and denied any room for reason and brotherhood.

What is absurd, because it is a non sense and a total negation of principles, is that religion has become the motivator of many conflicts in history. The loving God, omnipresent and almighty or, referring to polytheism, the sum of power and wisdom of all Gods, have been banished from the hearts and consciences to open the path, in their name and glory, worshiping cruelty, destruction and death.

The struggle for political power and the undeniable usefulness of religion as a support, the internal divisions within any religion and the role played by their ecclesiastical hierarchies, or the need to assert certain doctrines and interpretations of the divine texts, were the circumstances that, in many cases, instead of overcoming differences based on reason, have degenerated into hatred and led to wars that have ended up with the slaughter of millions. The power of weapons has pronounced the last word, setting the faith to be followed by the conquered peoples.

Divisions are characteristic in the management of political power, as well as between religions, or inside. Suffice it is to mention the division of the twelve tribes of Israel, the infighting of Islam, the eastern schism of Christianity, the Crusades, the medieval Inquisition, the Conquest of America, the Reform and the Counter-Reformation, or the Colonization of Africa. All these conflicts were totally or partially launched in the name of God. How not to recall recent events, such as the Nazi Germany and the Jews extermination, some wars between African tribes, or the religious ingredients of Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Some authors, knowing the meaning of faiths and supported by great part of the media, dare even to consider a clash of civilizations.

The Middle East, cradle of the three important religions just mentioned, whose influence seems crucial in the contemporary world, receives the strongest burden of contradictions, for they are accompanied by large-derived ingredients, including political and economic ones.

This essay seeks to demonstrate that, despite the huge mistakes of the past, and current wrong trends, it is not too late to retrain and find that the three faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are a single and immense Religion, with a rich commonality in principles and values. Going back to their roots, we rediscover their greatness, follow more easily their real north, and understand their demands to human beings. This exercise can be taken as a prior mandatory step to reach peace. Much war has been made in the name of God, now it is time for peace in God's name. This is possible only through this unique Religion, formed by Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Is this another utopian task for Humanity, or a challenge that might become a reality?

WHY RELIGIONS ARISE

Religion is a very important cultural phenomenon in human history. Since the earliest days of mankind, it has played a key role in structuring life and explaining life. Faith has guided, inspired and shaped the way people have lived through beliefs, myths, liturgy, dance, art, temples, and daily practices. Religion has developed great deeds of generosity and also huge deeds of arrogance; it has brought peace and also countless wars.

Where does the word 'religion' come from? It may be derived from the Latin verb *religare*, which means 'to bind', suggesting that the first purpose of religion is to bind the divine and humanity together, as well as to bring us together in community. To those who reject religion, this binding is sort of a prison. Other linguistic approaches conclude that the etymology of the word 'religion' is found in another Latin verb, *relegare*, reflecting 'to tread carefully' both the natural and supernatural worlds, or to provide us with guidance for a better living.

Many scholars, who have thoroughly studied different cultures, have sought to explain the nature of religion and religious beliefs, as well as the reasons why religions arise. There have been as many theories as researchers, and while none fully gives an answer about what religion is, all offer significant approaches on the nature of religion and possible reasons why religions have persisted through mankind history.

What is clear from history is that man created religion in recognition of his weakness and his inability to understand multiple situations. The fear of the unknown and the incomprehensible, the fear of death and beyond, given the immensity of nature and universe, took him to construct the concept of God as ultimate force that could do everything and could understand all. As Karen Farrington says, "...it doesn't take a philosopher's intellect to work out why faith in a god has played such a vital role. Man desires to place order amid chaos and perceives with certainty why particular events happen in life and what occurs beyond the barrier of death. So the prospect of a hidden deity imposing his structured will on earth is an appealing one".⁹⁴ In brief, religion is the belief in spiritual beings, making it systematized animism. This interpretation, however, considers that religion and animism are purely

⁹⁴ Karen Farrington, 'The History of Religion', p. 9

intellectual moves, and doesn't depict the social aspect of religion and its implications. The point is a lot more complex.

At the beginning, the nature eludes man or, in other terms, nature is elusive and barely controlled. Therefore, phenomena such as rainfall, river overflow, drought, thunder, lightning, or earthquake, they all deserve divine interpretations. These are messages from the gods, these are their expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Man also adores the lake, the mountain, the sun, or the moon. All these phenomena are granted a magical-religious force. They cease to be natural forces and become supernatural forces.

The passage of time has enabled man to control nature, though not absolutely. Many limitations persist, for instance, regarding scientific knowledge, diseases and death. Religion, in its primary aspect, is abandoned to make way for more evolved forms, first polytheism, later monotheism. They are cultural constructs of human mind that allow to accept its limitations or, at least, to mitigate them. The concept of faith, which escapes the scientific understanding, is structured as a last resort.

POLYTHEISM AND MONOTHEISM

One of the main differences between religions takes roots on the numbers of deities to worship, opposing the concepts of polytheism and monotheism. In the first case, there are several gods and they are all revered, giving path to a hierarchical structure that establishes the head god-like being, which suggests a form of "God of gods". This was a common case in ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptian, Greek and Roman. In modern times, polytheism is represented by Hinduism and many animistic faiths. Monotheism, instead, is the belief in a single, all powerful God defying classification and division. The word monotheism derives from the Greek words *theos*, which means God, and *mono*, which means one. The greatest contribution of the Middle East to global civilization, and the biggest way it changed our world forever, is monotheism, the worship of just one god.

Common points between Polytheism and Monotheism

In both, polytheism and monotheism, we have a divine being, at least one. And the main commandments for human beings are to worship the single god or the several gods, and to behave correctly, doing good to their neighbor. Almost all religions claim to venerate one ultimate power, even though the names change, such as God, Tao, and Buddha, and even though this power is depicted in many different ways and is accompanied by a wide range of gods and goddesses, as it happens in Hinduism and Taoism. For most people, throughout history and today, whether following monotheistic or polytheistic faiths, religion has made the mundane sacred, giving meaning to what could otherwise be perceived as a meaningless world.

All cultures have differentiated between good and evil, and through actions the former must prevail. The human being has always had the spiritual senses as necessary complement for living, which allow him to differentiate between *"the good and the bad, the just and the unjust, the beautiful and the ugly, the*

convenient and the inconvenient, and the like".⁹⁵ God, as a lawgiver, sends the message and shows generosity and charity, but also establishes particular duties for the believers. The most important rule, besides the worship of God, is to love your neighbor or, at least, not to harm him. In many cultures we find the equivalent phrase for this key rule: "Don't do to others what you don't want done to yourself". The idea is to generate religious harmony and soul peace among people.

From Polytheism to Monotheism

Many secular philosophers and even some theologians argue that monotheism evolved from polytheism saying that polytheistic faiths were more primitive and monotheistic faiths more advanced – culturally, ethically, and philosophically. It is true that research on early man and early civilizations show a trend based on religious polytheism, that is, the belief in many gods. It is also true that long after the Jewish people stated his monotheistic notion. It is known that both Christianity and Islam derive from Judaism and, therefore, continue the monotheistic line. From this vision, it seems evident that polytheism preceded monotheism. However, this chronological approach doesn't allow us to conclude that monotheism is superior. Let's keep in mind that modern polytheistic religions include all religions except four: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism.

Some Jews, Christians and Islamic theologians present a different approach, for they consider monotheism as the first religion. Following their interpretation, the belief in God began with Adam and Eve, though some others consider that the true monotheistic religions began with either Abraham or Moses. In their opinion, religions de-evolved, opening the path to polytheistic conceptions. There is degeneration, for they became polytheists only because they wanted gods that they could control themselves, granting permission to that kind of lifestyle that God would not tolerate. This interpretation also has a subjective and moral sense of superiority.

Judaism was certainly surrounded by polytheistic faiths. Moses was raised a polytheist by the Egyptian pharaoh. But he met God and became a monotheist when he realized that he was actually an Israelite. The Jews were the first monotheistic people in the ancient Middle East, followed by Christians and Muslims. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are the most important monotheistic religions in today's world, being Judaism the real origin. The main objective is to ensure the Oneness of God, even though in Christianity things are more complex due to the Trinity. In Islam, "God is One", and the believers must actualize their belief by worshipping that One God alone.

Some scholars argue that Akhenaten, the young Egyptian pharaoh who governed around 1350 BC, was the first monotheistic, since at some point in his reign the different images of gods were destroyed. Martin Palmer opposing this viewpoint argues that "*...the extraordinary style of art adopted at this time, allied with the poetry and content of the sun hymns, led early Egyptologists to present a false impression of the pharaoh as a true monotheist, and a pacifist. Akhenaten's religious ideas were reactionary, attempting to reinstate the sun cult of the Old Kingdom, with its*

⁹⁵ Maurice Duverger, *Sociology de la Politique*, p 108

emphasis upon the pharaoh as the sole intermediary between the divine and the human realms. The experiment proved unacceptable and following Akhenaten's death the traditional cult was rapidly restored".⁹⁶

This was certainly a faith with no revelation, the god did not speak, and there was no scripture. Some scholars prefer to consider Zoroastrianism, the ancient Persian religion, to explain the origins of monotheism. But its teachings constitute a dualistic faith, with a good God, Ahura Mazda, pitted in a cosmic struggle against a demonic figure, Angra Manyu.

According to those who have no belief in God whatsoever, or firmly deny God because there is not scientific or rational proof of his existence, this opposition between polytheism and monotheism is a senseless discussion.

Monotheism is not inclusive

All monotheistic religions believe that God created all reality and is therefore totally self-sufficient, they deny the existence of gods of all other religions, unlike polytheists who believe that there can be more gods than what they worship. From this perspective, all monotheistic religions are exclusive. This is a remarkable difference of behavior, since it has to do with tolerance.

History teaches that the only time that monotheists have been seen as open-minded and tolerant of other religions is when they are beginning to move from monotheism to polytheism. It is the path toward self convenience. As said before, according to some researchers, this is the kind of de-evolution experienced by different peoples. They begin to see other gods as reincarnations of their god to help explain away their ultimate God.

THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RELIGIONS

What is more important? The essence or all circumstantial phenomena which primarily serve as creators of differences? In many cases, any religion or sect, to ensure autonomy and independence, amplifies the differences through the texts interpretation, procedures and liturgy.

The hierarchies appear to be responsible for conserving the traditions or leading innovation. In both cases, they seem to approach the real truth, allowing them to consolidate their power.

One first point which establishes clear differences is related to the direct contact with God or the need for intermediaries. The other issue is the role played by religious bureaucracies. Anyhow, after some generations, through the ongoing process of religious acculturation, these differences seem to be natural and are perceived by believers as if they had always existed.

The analysis of both, the essence and the main differences among religions let us conclude that in the background they all have a big deal of common points.

This conclusion is even stronger taking account of the three religions emerged in the Middle East, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, whether considering the interpretation of God and his key messages, or the obligations imposed to the followers. They seem to form only one Great Religion.

⁹⁶ Martin Palmer, World Religions, p 27

Direct contact with God or the Need for Intermediaries

In Judaism, there is no need for intermediaries, rabbis or idols before the one God. The Jews pray directly to the Creator of the Universe. Each Jew can be an important priest, bringing down blessings for self and others. People identifying with the New Age should be comfortable with this basic tenet of Judaism: anybody, regardless of stature or religion, can have a personal relationship with God. Judaism states that even non-Jews can be prophets and receive the divine grace.

The early Christian Church was open to everybody. It was ecumenical, welcoming women, slaves and the poor, who were the great majority. It preached direct communication with their God through mysticism and prayer. According to some scholars, this interpretation of Christianity was abandoned and the believers could only reach God through their intermediaries, the priests and the complex hierarchy. In our opinion, this viewpoint is exaggerated, for every Christian can directly pray and worship God. The reality is that from the very beginning, *“...Christians took part in corporate worship, act in uniformity with their fellow worshippers, and experience a sense of unity because everyone was doing the same thing. For this reason, a congregation requires a priest or minister to lead the laity or to act on its behalf”*.⁹⁷

In Islam, a devotee is also required to pray only to God, directly and without intermediation. When you pray or ask, you pray or ask directly to God. When you want to repent from your sins, you directly look for God and ask for forgiveness. There is no need to call anyone whether it be a saint, an angel, an idol made wood and stones, or someone who is believed to be the “son of God”, because clearly all these are created beings like ourselves which can neither give us benefit nor inflict harm: The Qur’an states: *“Do not worship besides Allah that which can’t help or harm you”*.

In brief, Judaism, Christianity and Islam do not establish the need of intermediaries for their followers to pray or worship God, although they have both developed important and solid hierarchies.

The Role and Power of the Religious Bureaucracy

In any society, as it evolves from simplicity to complexity, institutions develop. Just as political and economic activities are organized, and the military apparatus is structured, the religious institutions are provided. This development reflected in the earliest civilizations, such as the Maya or Egyptian, has been projected in continuity, obviously with the special features of each period.

Next to the ruling class who has controlled the political power, has existed a religious elite whose role has been to interpret the will of gods. In Antiquity, wars results and natural phenomena such as the rainfall, or the droughts and river floods, were considered as expressions of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the gods. The power of religious elite has traditionally been very significant. Its representatives have generally formed a privileged social category, linked to political power. Its theological vision has built an

⁹⁷ Nicolas Zernov, *Encyclopaedia of World Religions*, p 84

indispensable liturgy. Between the political and religious elites has woven a sense of mutual convenience. Religion, in many cases, not only supports the political power but seeks to justify it. The Pharaohs in Egypt, like many emperors in Rome, were considered gods. Other rulers proclaimed themselves as intermediaries between God and men, and some as Charlemagne and Napoleon used the papal crowning to reinforce their legitimacy.

In most contemporary states close ties, or a convenient understanding between religious bureaucracy and political power, have developed. There are hundreds of models, like the church in England, or the agreements signed between the Vatican State and the Catholic-majority states; in some states, like Iran, the situation in favor of the religious elite is extreme, for the Constitution protects a real Theocracy; in others, as in the United States of America, the founding fathers stated the religious freedom, guaranteed through a total separation between church and state. The real exception to an understanding between religion and state occurs in the so called 'atheists states', in which the struggle to eradicate the concept of divinity becomes a state objective.

Whatever it is, all religions have developed their institutions, bureaucracy and liturgical procedures. Judaism, Christianity and Islam have never been outside this line of history.

The Differences created by Religious Bureaucracy

The great differences among religions and, more specifically within religions, have been created by the founders, who questioned the traditional line, or by religious elites to secure their power. In some cases, deep theological issues are the focus of discussion. But in others, political interests are added to religious controversy, setting the path toward fanaticism and violence.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam have the same roots. These religions recognize Abraham as a founding prophet. They share a common set of values, believe in the almighty and loving God, and accept the challenges of living in doing good. Jews and Christians share the 'Pentateuch', or "The Old Testament", which is the most fundamental revelation as delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai.

The Hebrew people, by the time of Jesus birth, awaited the Messiah, wishing to have a political leader, not a religious one. Jesus prevented him from adopting a different message before the Jewish religious elite, and called himself "*the son of God*". His message of renewal challenged the social injustice, and enhanced the idea of sacrifice, by giving the other cheek to the aggressor, and talking about equality for all in a highly stratified society, by stating that "... *we are all sons of God*". These profound differences that characterized Jesus speeches lead to his death, reflecting the power of Jewish and Roman elites. As C. Catherwood remarks, "*Jesus' essential method was spiritual rather than political, unlike that of the religious establishment of his time. He made it clear from the beginning that his kingdom was not of this world. His message was one of peace, and particularly peace and reconciliation with God*".⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Christopher Catherwood, A Brief History of the Middle East, p 46

The same could be said of Mohammed. The revelations made to him by the archangel Gabriel in the month of Ramadan served to establish differences, challenging the traditional religious institutions. For centuries, the Meccans claimed descent from Abraham through Ishmael, and their temple, the Kaaba, had been built by Abraham for the worship of the One God. However, the chief objects of worship came to be a number of idols placed inside. The few who felt disgust at this idolatry were known as 'Hunafaa'. Muhammad was one of them, and as his spiritual influence undermined the hegemony of the Quraysh, tensions increased in the city. Muhammad also challenged political and religious elites through his message of social content. The reaction was persecution, and many of his followers took refuge in Abyssinia, where King Negus accepted the Muslims after a great debate, where the Muslims demonstrated that they worshipped the same God as the Christians. The Muslims grew in number and the Quraish were seriously alarmed. They tried to bring the Prophet to a compromise, offering to accept his religion if he would so modify it as to make room for their gods as intercessors with God. In return, they offered to make him their king. Prophet Muhammad's constant refusal frustrated their efforts at negotiation.

The differences stated by Muhammad overcame his own geography. He considered Jesus as a prophet, like many others, in the line begun by Abraham, and called himself "*The last of the prophets*". In other words, he denied Jesus' divine nature, without giving himself any such a characteristic. Bernard Lewis points out a difference regarding the career of Muhammad and those of Moses and Jesus, as portrayed in the writings of their followers: "*Moses didn't enter the Promised Land and died while his people went forward. Jesus was crucified, and Christianity remained a persecuted minority religion for centuries, until Constantine embraced the faith... Muhammad conquered his promised land, and during his lifetime achieved victory and power in this world, exercising political as well as prophetic authority*".⁹⁹

The other facet of the bureaucracies of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, far from its founders, shows the internal struggles, and the emergence of splinter groups or sects.

For a long time the Jews were divided by geography, so those living in a particular country had their own food, liturgy and customs. But in the last two hundred years Jews have been divided by ideology. The three most important sects are the Orthodox, who have adopted a religious extremism; the Conservatives, less rigid than the Orthodox; and the Reform Group, much more liberal. The radical Orthodox has two important groups, Hasidism and Mitnagdim. The former, felt that Judaism was too focused on scholarship and emphasized the presence of God in everything. The latter, criticized the early Hasidim for allow service to run late with enthusiastic singing and dancing. Other variations are the Chabad movement, the Conservadox, and the Messianism.

The two millennia of history of Christianity present multiple heresies and divisions, proving the mixing of theological discussion and power struggle.

⁹⁹ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, p 53

In modern times, we differentiate between Roman Catholic, Orthodox Eastern, and Protestant. But it is important to recall that the first great schism occurred in 1054 AD, between the Eastern and Western churches. Beyond the initial details of animosity between Patriarch Cerulaius of Constantinople, and Cardinal Humbert, the papal representative, there were previous political events which explain the growing rivalry between Rome and Byzantium. The Eastern Emperor interpreted the crown of Charlemagne by the Pope on Christmas Day 800 as an attempt to create a Western rival. Around 850, Rome and Constantinople competed fiercely to control the newly converted Bulgarians. The other great division in Christianity, between Catholics and Protestants, happened along the sixteenth Century. Here also, besides the theological issues developed by Luther and Calvin, there were clear political interests. Spain, as superpower, was Rome's ally, and protector of Catholicism. It was the target of the other European monarchies. Henry VIII, king of England, broke with Rome after the Pope denied his divorce, and organized the Anglican Church. In brief, princes and religious bureaucrats decided the future of Christianity. It is disgraceful how many casualties were caused by this power ambition.¹⁰⁰

The main division within Islam has always been between Sunnis and Shi'ites. There is also the Sufi sect, and numerous splinter groups which are often named after the individual scholars who began them, such as Hanifa, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Zaydi. The Sunnis constitute almost 85% of the believers and are considered to be mainstream traditionalists. The Shi'ites split with the Sunni over the issue of the political successor to Muhammad. This split occurred after the assassination of the fourth caliph in 661 AD. Shi'ites also broke into three main sects: the Twelve Imam (Persia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Pakistan, and Syria), the Zaydis (Yemen), and the Ismailis (India, Iran, Syria, and East Africa). Of course, there are great theological differences between Sunnis and Shi'ites. But more importantly, in essence, Islam is the same for all.

Beyond the differences, created by religious elites, it is worth noting the commonality of values, first in the interior of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and then between the three religions. They form a huge tree, but due to the common set of values, form only One Religion.

JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

What are the real origins of the names of the most important monotheistic faiths?

Judaism is the term for the religion practiced by those of the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel in Genesis 29. Each of the twelve sons' families became a tribe; that is, each family grew so large that they were counted as a complete subset of the nation. When the Exodus happened, there were about 3 million people leaving Egypt, therefore each family would have had about a quarter of a million in its roster. The name *Judah* means praise, so Judaism literally means the people of praise. In the book of first Kings in the Judeo-Christian Bible, the division of Israel

¹⁰⁰ Paul Johnson, A History of Christianity, pp 174-210

into the Southern Kingdom and the Northern Kingdom left the Southern Kingdom comprised of the tribe of Judah and Benjamin and Levi. Since Levi has no land inheritance, Judah and Benjamin were the landholders. When the Assyrian Army carried off the 10 northern tribes, all that was left of ancient Israel was Judah and Benjamin and Levi. Since Judah was the larger tribe, the custom became to call Israel by the larger tribe, which was Judah. The Hebrew word for this grouping is *Yebudim*, from which we anglicize into Jew; hence the name Judaism. The Hebrew word for Israel, which in Hebrew is *Yisrael*, may be broken into two root words: *Yesbar* and *El*, which together mean "straight to God."

Christianity derives from Christ, the Greek term for Jesus, its central figure and most important person. Son of God, born on earth, lived a human life, was crucified, died and rose from the death. His dying and rising are considered the revelation of God's love for the world and the possibility of eternal life. Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promises to the people of Israel, for he would give them a land, Israel, and he would be their God. Christianity has grown into the largest religion in the world today with some 1,700 million followers.

The word *Islam* is derived from the Arabic root word *slm*, which literally means to surrender, to submit or to give oneself up. This word also entails to achieve *peace* – peace within oneself – by surrendering one's will to the will of God. This inner peace can only be realized when a person has submitted his will to the will of God in the way taught by the prophets that He has sent. A Muslim therefore believes in all the prophets starting with Adam and together with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, etc. Prophet Muhammad is *not* the founder of Islam, as many people mistakenly think. He was only a human being commissioned by God to teach. His life serves as an example in which Muslim's life is to be patterned. The real founder of Islam was no less than God Himself, and the date of the founding of Islam goes back at the time of Adam. Then, each prophet and messenger came to exhort their own people to a clear understanding of God's commandments. Absolute *Monotheism* or the "Oneness of God" is the main teaching of Islam.

THE MAIN TEXTS

The Hebrew Bible was completed after the Babylonian exile in the six Century BC. The first section, called "The Torah", meaning 'written law', is a compendium of five books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. They contain over 610 commandments and describe the early history of Israel. The second section, Prophets, includes the settling of the Promised Land and the writings of prophets, like Isaiah and Hosea. The third section contains the Psalms, and wisdom literature, such as Proverbs and Job. In brief, the Torah informs that our lives are tied to God: "*He who attaches himself to YHVH is alive today.*" Each one is more vibrant and alive when he makes a God-connection. God was, is and will be. In Hebrew, God is the only being that can say *I am*. God is ultimately the only true reality.

"The Mishnah" or Repetition, was written around 20 AD, defining the teachings and legal system intrinsic to "The Torah". This work was compiled by

Rabbi Judah The Prince, who organized the oral laws developed during his time. It contents six subject areas: Prayer and Agriculture, Festivals, Women, Civil Law, Rituals and Purity. The 'Mishnah' combines past and future, for it recalls the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD as well as the Messiah's arrival establishing an era of peace and perfection. Once the 'Mishnah' was written, interpreters began to analyze why Judah had preferred some oral laws to others, producing the 'Talmud' around 500 AD, which contents the 'Mishnah' and the 'Gemara', indicating the discussion completion of each topic.

The Christian Holy Book is the Bible. It needed 400 years to reach its final form. Basically, it consists of two 'Testaments', or promises: The Old Testament, written in Hebrew, follows almost entirely the Jewish Scriptures. The New Testament, written in Greek, describes the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The Epistles, from the Greek word 'letter', were the first Christian writings. Paul's are the most renowned ones, which were written within 20 years of Jesus' death. He paid more attention to the meaning of Jesus' life than to its details. The Gospels, which mean 'Good News' and were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John between 30 to 70 years after Jesus' death, present different accounts of his life, death and resurrection.

Islam is the Qur'an, and the Qur'an is Islam. God is the Creator and the Law giver. As Creator, He is fully aware of how we should behave for our individual and collective success. His message is very clear and easy to understand: *The True God is only One, Worship Him alone, and keep His commandments*. The message of God was brought to this world by a succession of prophets in different times of history, but His message stopped coming after He sent down the *last revelation* to the *last prophet*. This last revelation is known as the Qur'an. It is a complete record of the exact words revealed by God to Muhammad through an angel named *Gabriel*. He received the exact wording and passed it on to his followers. The Qur'an is the principal source of every Muslim's faith and practice. It is God and only God speaking in the Qur'an. There are no comments, passages or quotes from humans whatsoever in the Qur'an.

THREE RELIGIONS BUT ONLY ONE GOD

We know that Judaism, Christianity and Islam, provide us with a purpose greater and more profound than simple survival, forging a bridge between the world of human experience and the supposed greater realm of the divine. These three religions lead to a desire to improve this world, bringing the material closer to the divine, and forsaking the temporal pleasures of this life in search of a transcendent reality. The rule is simple, based on worshipping God and acting correctly toward everyone. However, these goals are not always achieved, for sacrifice is highly required.

The Scriptures, understood as God's revelations to the prophets, through the Torah, the Bible and the Qur'an, constitute a precious guide, first to honor God, and then to adopt an ethical behavior toward our neighbors, characterized by respect, solidarity and generosity. The teachings are equivalent in these texts, and the messages are also similar. This is really the essence of the three religions. And through it, we can say that God is the same for everyone.

The majority of prophets, religious leaders who had contact with God and received the revelations, are also the same for the Jews, Christians and Muslims. The set of values transmitted to their followers is exactly the same.

The ethical monotheism is the great discovery of the Jews, for the spirit of the Ten Commandments is still vibrant in the twenty first Century. It is possible that the theological idea of loving God above else, no longer applies, especially considering those atheist theories which regard religion as ‘the opium of people’, or a repressive way to maintain the oppressed quiet before their rulers. But for those who firmly believe in God, in the ‘Oneness’ of God, life demands a great commitment, and the Scriptures, whether the Torah, the Bible or the Qu’ran, present a great opportunity of reconciliation. Almost everyone who follows the Ten Commandments would agree that “...*theft is wrong, murder is abominable, and perjury undermines the entire legal system. Through Christianity and Islam, the law code of the Jews has become effectively universal, at least so far as the basis of morality is concerned. How often countless victims of injustice down the millennia must have wished for judges who could not be bribed, and didn’t favor the rich over the poor*”.¹⁰¹ In regard to economic justice, critics of capitalism and extreme consumption, resort to the *Leviticus*, particularly to chapter twenty-five. In the Christian world, reactions have occurred to denounce this accumulation of wealth, from Francis of Assisi to the theologians of liberation in current Latin America. Similar trends have played a key role in historical and contemporary Judaism and Islam, for in any of these faiths the limitless wealth is accepted.

Only through faith and love of God we can grow as individuals. The life of Abraham and Moses, like the life of Jesus and Mohammad, who respectively inspire Christians and Muslims, serve as the best examples to follow. Equally important are the experiences and teachings of many other believers, who carried out their lives to honor God on the basis of sacrifice, and also to serve their neighbors. The adoption of these patterns let us conclude that more than three different religions, we have only One, inexhaustible in its teachings, and immense in its possibilities.

CONCLUSION

Anyone looking for differences between the three great monotheistic religions of our time probably would develop an interminable list, increasing the distance between them. But if the goal is to build bridges through similarities, the method takes us directly to their roots in order to discover the true essence of God. From this perspective, despite the real existence of the three religions, each one with a long history, we can conclude that there is only one true God, almighty and omnipresent. It is the same God to the Jews, Christians and Muslims.

We know that human nature often opens the route to deviations, and unfortunately on behalf of religions great acts of arrogance have produced wars and fanaticism. But that is human nature, not God. It is never too late to recover the principles of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and the commonality of values they share to reach peace. Much war has been made in the name of

¹⁰¹ Christopher Catherwood, op.cit, p 39

God, now it is time for love and generosity in God's name. This is possible only through this unique God, revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.

The reading and interpretation of the Torah, the Bible or the Qur'an, for those who are still really Jews, Christians and Muslims, constitute the right action to better worship the One God, the common God, and to look at our neighbor as true brother and friend. This is the most precious guide for all, following the prophets' revelations. The successive teachings, which are equivalent in these holy texts, should be taken as patterns to model our lives. All this is extremely necessary, for we live in a world in which faith and spiritual behavior are daily attacked by the impressive scientific advances, and the limitless consumerism that some present as the best path toward happiness; all this is indispensable, since we witness constantly how power, whatever its level, instead of being used to understand the essence of human being and his limited life on earth, is taken as a tool to support vanity and multiply greed and ambition. Tear down those models which are clear idolatry is only possible through God, that One God who, beyond the differing circumstances and liturgies, is deeply the same to Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

ISLAMIC SCIENCES

INTRODUCTION

Because nowadays, the West, and by extension the non-Muslim world, mostly associates Islam with intellectual backwardness, religious fanaticism, suicide bombings, public amputations, gender inequality, and so on, few people appreciate the tremendous scientific contribution that the Islamic civilization has made to humanity. The average American or British does not know, for example, that Ibn Sina (980-1037 AD), a prominent Muslim Arab scholar best known as Avicenna, authored a colossal medical encyclopedia, *Al Qanun fi al-Tibb* or The Law of Medicine, which dominated medical and pharmaceutical circles in Europe for over 700 years. This paper seeks to correct this widespread ignorance of the enormous impact of Islamic science on our daily lives.

Medieval Islamic science, hereafter referred to as Islamic science, denotes the gigantic body of scientific work accomplished by the Islamic world over a period roughly corresponding to the better part of the Middle Ages. According to Sabra¹⁰², Islamic Science refers to the scientific undertakings of Arabic-speaking scholars who lived from the 8th Century AD to the commencement of the modern era in a geographic area extending from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to the Indus valley and from the Southern Arabia to the Caspian Sea. This region was inhabited for most of the Middle Ages by the Islamic civilization and the language used by its people to record their scientific work was Arabic, a *lingua franca*¹⁰³ of this period. Although the scholars and scientists of the medieval Islamic world were Muslims in their majority, some were Jews, Christians, Sabians, Zoroastrians and others were atheists¹⁰⁴. The ethnic makeup of this scientific community included many Persian-speaking Iranians^{105 106}, but also Arabs, Moors, Berbers, and Turks.

Islamic science reached its height during the Islamic Golden Age, a period that historians had originally dated from the 9th to the 13th Centuries AD before recent research extended it from the 7th to the 16th Centuries. During this period of intense intellectual activity, scholars, scientists, engineers and artists of the Islamic civilization made unparalleled contributions to the arts and sciences as well as to technology, navigation, economics, agriculture and industry, to name but a few. They made these contributions by not only gathering, expanding and transmitting the knowledge inherited from previous civilizations but, more importantly, by adding many of their own revolutionary discoveries and inventions. According to Turner, “Muslim artists and scientists,

¹⁰² A.I Sabra (1996), qtd in “Science in Medieval Islam,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia”, 2009, 12 December 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_in_medieval_Islam>.

¹⁰³ A *lingua franca* is a common language that enables speakers with distinct mother tongues to communicate.

¹⁰⁴ Bernard Lewis (2002), qtd in “Science in Medieval Islam”.

¹⁰⁵ Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1994), qtd in “Science in Medieval Islam”.

¹⁰⁶ Laurence S. Moss and Joseph Alois Schumpeter (1996), qtd in “Science in Medieval Islam”.

princes and laborers together made a unique culture that has directly and indirectly influenced societies on every continent¹⁰⁷. In this process, they laid the foundation that enabled modern science and technology to flourish.

This paper is an attempt to capture the multiple dimensions of the Islamic world's contribution to the foundation of science and the fabric of modern society. It comprises two sections, the first of which embraces the rise and the major achievements of Islamic science. In this first section, the paper establishes that Islam formed part of the inspiration behind the intense thirst for knowledge that drove medieval Muslim scholars. Through a review of the unrivaled scientific achievements of Muslim scholars in a variety of fields, notably in geography, astronomy, medicine and mathematics, this essay demonstrates that science as we know it today would never have existed without the decisive contribution of the Islamic world. The first section further highlights such previously unknown concepts as the lending library and the degree-awarding university, which made their first appearance in the Muslim world and went on to become major scientific and educational institutions in modern societies. The important contribution of the Islamic world in the field of humanities is also dealt with in the first section. Then, in a logical progression, the second part of this essay will examine the gradual decline of Islamic Science, which was traditionally believed to have started in the 12th and 13th Centuries, although a more recent school of thought holds that the said decline only began in the 16th Century. This second section will place particular emphasis on the still debated causes of the decline of Islamic science.

THE ISLAMIC GOLDEN AGE

An important trigger of the Islamic Golden Age was the rise of the Abbasid caliphate and the attendant relocation of the capital of the Islamic Empire from Damascus to Baghdad. Historians report that the Abbasid Dynasty was profoundly influenced by the Islamic view about the praiseworthiness of the pursuit of knowledge. Accordingly, the Abbasids dedicated their rule to the patronage of science and knowledge-seeking, turning the Islamic Empire into an unparalleled intellectual hub in which mathematics, medicine, astronomy, geography, philosophy and education held center stage for centuries on end. Under the Abbasids, a House of Wisdom or *Bait al-Hikma* was established in Baghdad to serve as a library and a translation center. The House of Wisdom was founded by caliphs Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun in the early 9th Century AD and operated until the 13th Century. It was a major intellectual institution of the Islamic Golden Age and was at the core of the Translation Movement that sought to make the world's knowledge, particularly from the ancient Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Mesopotamian Chinese, Egyptian, Indian and Persian civilizations, available in Arabic. During the Islamic Golden Age, many classic writings from the antiquity were first translated into Arabic and subsequently into Latin, Persian, Hebrew, Turkish and other languages,

¹⁰⁷ Howard A. Turner (1997, p.270), qtd in "Islamic Golden Age," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 12 December 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_Golden_Age>.

which saved these important works from irreversible loss/oblivion. The Islamic civilization did not only acquire and translate this immense knowledge; it also synthesized, expanded and built upon it, thereby adding its own contribution to the intellectual edifice that it passed along to Europe and the rest of the world. During the Golden Age, in addition to being a superior intellectual center, the Islamic Empire was also a crossroad where various cultures met, interpenetrated and fed each other. Competing with Baghdad, other cities that stood out in the Golden Age through their high intellectual accomplishments included Cairo and Córdoba.¹⁰⁸

The Spread of Papermaking

A turning point in the Islamic Golden Age was the introduction of papermaking in the Islamic Empire. Chinese prisoners taken at the Battle of Talas (751 AD)¹⁰⁹ transmitted the secret of papermaking, which the Chinese had tightly guarded thus far, to their Arab captors, leading to the establishment of paper mills in the Islamic cities of Baghdad and Samarkand as early as 794. Papermaking then spread to Damascus, Egypt, Morocco and *al-Andalus*¹¹⁰, and by the 10th Century, paper established itself as the cheapest and most used writing medium in the Islamic world¹¹¹. Paper manufacturing reached Europe only in the 13th Century, that is, some 500 years after touching the Arab world. As they did with the knowledge they inherited from previous civilizations, the Arabs perfected the Chinese papermaking process and replaced the Chinese writing brushes with pens. This spread of papermaking enabled the establishment in Baghdad by the 10th Century of dozens of shops employing scribes and book-binding workers. Even more importantly, the advent of papermaking heralded the opening of the first libraries, some of which were lending libraries.¹¹²

Trade and the Propagation of Islamic Culture

Trade played a central role in the spread of Islam and its associated values. Historians report that even before Islam was founded, the famous city of Mecca was an important commercial hub in the Arabian Peninsula. With the advent of Islam and the attendant pilgrimage to Mecca, the city further grew in stature and became a vibrant platform where not only goods but also scientific and religious ideas were exchanged. Islamic culture flourished and spread thanks to the Arabs' nomadic lifestyle and their reliance on a merchant economy that involved constant travels and multiple contacts with peoples of diverse origins. Islamic merchants dominated the major trade routes linking the

¹⁰⁸ Vartan Gregorian (2003), qtd. in "Islamic Golden Age".

¹⁰⁹ The Battle of Talas was a major armed confrontation between the Chinese Tang Dynasty (618-907) and the Arab Abbasid Caliphate. The battle was named after the Talas River (in present-day Kyrgyzstan), on whose banks it was fought. The conflict ended in the victory of the Abbasids, putting an end to the Chinese expansion to the West.

¹¹⁰ *Al-Andalus* is the Arabic name for the southern region of Spain that was conquered in the 8th Century by the Moors, a North African people of mixed Arab and Berber descent who converted to Islam.

¹¹¹ Farid Mahdavi (2003), qtd. in "Paper Mill," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 12 December 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paper_mill>.

¹¹² Arnold Pacey (1990), qtd. in "Islamic Golden Age".

Arabian Peninsula to Africa and Asia and, along with their goods, they brought their faith wherever they went, be it to India, China, Southeast Asia, Eastern or Western Africa. These merchants returned from these distant countries with new ideas, inventions and techniques that they applied to the benefit of the Islamic civilization. All of the above factors contributed to making the Abbasid period and surrounding centuries a true golden age for Islamic civilization and science, an era of great scientific and intellectual creativity whose legacy comprises major discoveries and inventions that would forever change the course and the pace of human history. In that sense, the Islamic Golden Age is comparable to a giant step forward in the progress of the sciences and the advancement of humanity.

Groundbreaking Institutions

Several important educational and scientific institutions appeared first in medieval Islamic civilization and went on to become indispensable components of modern societies. These include especially the public library, the lending library, the degree-awarding university, the astronomical observatory and research institute, the public hospital¹¹³ and the psychiatric hospital¹¹⁴. In medieval Islamic civilization, public and lending libraries continued to serve their primary function as manuscript repositories, however they also acquired new features, serving as platforms for teaching and exchanging scientific and philosophical ideas, offering their premises for intellectual gatherings, sometimes doubling as temporary housing for scholars. The library catalogue is an important legacy of medieval Islamic libraries where an effort to improve public access to the collections led to books being classified into distinct genres and categories¹¹⁵.

The Guinness Book of World Records¹¹⁶ designates the University of Al Karaouine in Fez, Morocco as the first known degree-granting university founded in 859 AD Al-Azhar University, established in Cairo in 975 AD, is often cited as the earliest full-blown university for it was the first academic institution ever to offer several distinct degrees, including postgraduate degrees. According to Makdisi¹¹⁷, the origins of the prestigious doctoral degree can also be traced back to the *ijazat attadris wa 'l-ifttd* – literally *license to teach and issue legal opinions* – conferred by medieval *Madrassa Islamiyyah*¹¹⁸.

By the 10th Century, the library of Cairo, with its estimated two million books¹¹⁹, was only second to the library of Tripoli, which is believed to have

¹¹³ Peter Barrett (2004), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹¹⁴ Ibrahim B. Syed (2002), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹¹⁵ Françoise Michaud, qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹¹⁶ The Guinness Book of Records, qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹¹⁷ George Makdisi (1989), qtd. in “Ijazah,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 12 December 2009 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ijazah>>.

¹¹⁸ The term *Madrassa* is generically used in Arabic to designate any type of educational institution. The expression *Madrassa Islamiyyah* therefore refers to institutions dedicated to the study of Islamic theology and law.

¹¹⁹ Patricia Skinner (2001), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

collected around three million books before it was ransacked during the Crusades

The Polymaths

Most great intellectuals in medieval Islamic civilization were *polymaths*, that is, individuals of advanced and varied learning whose work cut across many fields of secular and religious knowledge. Muslim polymaths, also known as *Hakeems*¹²⁰, were far more numerous in the Islamic Empire than scholars who specialized in any one branch of the arts or sciences. Alavi¹²¹ compared the *Hakeems* to famous Renaissance figures such as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo and postulated that the philosophical and scientific achievements of the Muslim polymaths have laid the groundwork without which the European Renaissance would not have taken place. Alavi¹²² indicated furthermore that Muslim polymaths were expected to have engaged in ‘intellectual’ journeys as part of their effort to gain knowledge and awareness. Ibn Sina’s many intellectual pursuits well exemplify the versatility of the polymath; he was a man of multiple talents who impacted the world in a variety of fields including as a physician, chemist, psychologist, astronomer, mathematician, physicist, poet, and teacher.¹²³

MUSLIM SCHOLARS AND THE FOUNDATION OF MODERN SCIENCE

Islam’s Encouragement of Knowledge Seeking

The major scientific contributions made by medieval Islamic polymaths are largely the result of Islam’s injunction to Muslims that they must learn and pursue knowledge. Islam’s strong encouragement of learning is evident in the Qur’an itself as well as in statements attributed to the Islamic prophet Muhammad. In his book *The Sayings of Muhammad*, Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy¹²⁴ (1882-1935 AD) quoted Muhammad as stating, “*The ink of the scholar is more holy than the blood of the martyr,*” which connotes that in Islam scholarly pursuits are more important than any other act of devotion to God, even the supreme choice of death over renunciation of Islam. This powerful statement demonstrates the paramount importance that Islam attaches to the search of knowledge, particularly advanced knowledge. In this perspective, scientific, philosophical and religious endeavors are all central to a Muslim’s life and should be treated as essential acts of worship. Muhammad is also quoted in a *Hadith*¹²⁵ as stating “Any person who goes along a course seeking knowledge, Allah will make for him the path to Paradise easy because of it,” another injunction to Muslims that they must seek knowledge to be accepted into Heaven. Another *Hadith* attributes the following self-explanatory

¹²⁰ The term *Hakeem* derives from the Arabic word for wisdom, *Hikmah* (Karima Alavi, qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”).

¹²¹ Alavi, qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ D. Gutas, qtd. in “Avicenna,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 20 November 2009 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avicenna>>.

¹²⁴ Abdullah Al-Mamun Al-Suhrawardy, *The Sayings of Muhammad* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2004).

¹²⁵ *Hadith* are narratives highlighting the words and deeds of the Islamic prophet Muhammad.

statement to Muhammad, “Seeking *ilm* (knowledge) is incumbent on every Muslim.” Along the same line, the following Qur’anic verse stresses the mandatory nature of learning in Islam, “Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and have been granted Knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all you do” (Qur’an 58:11). Together, these important sources of Islamic faith, along with other verses and *Hadith* of lesser relevance, show that Muslims are strongly encouraged to pursue religious, scientific and philosophical knowledge. Furthermore, it has been said that in Islam science and religion are inseparable, not only because they both form part of Knowledge, but also because of the assumption that by studying the sciences, Muslims become further convinced of the greatness of God’s creation, which ultimately strengthens their faith. There is therefore enough evidence to conclude that Islam must have played a key motivational role in the great scientific achievements of medieval Islamic scholars.

Islamic Achievements in Astronomy

From the early stages of Islam, Muslims were strongly attracted to astronomy and this interest relates directly to their religion. The observation of the sun and the moon is central to Islamic practices, especially to the *Salat*, the obligation to pray five times a day at fixed times, which is the second most important duty in Islam; Observing lunar cycles help Muslims determine months in their lunar calendar, while the observation of the sun enables them to calculate prayer and fasting times. Furthermore, it is through astronomical calculations that Muslims strive to determine the *Qiblah*, that is, the direction they should face while praying and also the direction the bodies of deceased Muslims should face in their tombs¹²⁶. The following is a direct reference to astronomy in the Qur’an:

These references to the celestial bodies, coupled with the duty incumbent upon Muslims to seek knowledge prompted the medieval Muslim polymaths to study the secrets of the universe.¹²⁷ During the Abbasid Caliphate, the intellectual center of the Islamic Empire was Baghdad. It was towards the beginning of the Abbasid Caliphate that astronomy took off in the Islamic world and most of the early astronomical achievements were made in Baghdad. The first Islamic astronomers were profoundly influenced by *Sidhanta*, a work in Sanskrit brought from India and translated into Arabic, first by Ibn Ibrahim al-Fazari and subsequently by Abu Musa Khwarizmi. Pahlavi astronomical tables - known as *Zij* in Persian - compiled during the Sassanid period (224-651 AD) and Greek astronomical works translated during the Abbasid period also formed the basis for medieval Islamic astronomy.

Al-Khwarizmi (780 -850 AD) wrote a seminal treatise on astronomy and compiled his own tables which, after two centuries were improved upon by a Spanish astronomer Al-Majriti and were later on translated into Latin by

¹²⁶ The *Qiblah* symbolizes the direction of the Ka’bah, a cuboidal building representing the most sacred site in Islam and located in the Islamic holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

¹²⁷ Islamic Affairs Department, the Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, “Introduction to Islam,” 3 December 2009 <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/16308430/Introduction-to-Islam>>.

Adelard of Bath. Al-Khwarizmi's work laid the groundwork for subsequent astronomical endeavors both in the East and the West. Furthermore, his tables superseded all the Greek and Indian tables that had preceded them.¹²⁸

During the reign of Abbasid Caliph Ma'mun, several observatories equipped with the latest astronomical instruments were set up throughout the caliphate. Important observations made during the reign of Ma'mun and pertaining to eclipses, equinoxes, comets and other heavenly bodies had a significant impact in medieval astronomical literature.

The *Banu Musa*, the three children of Musa bin Shakir, a renowned Persian engineer and astronomer¹²⁹, studied the movements of the sun and other heavenly bodies and calculated the size of the earth, the obliquity of the ecliptic, the variations of lunar latitudes and the precession of the equinoxes. Their work was built upon by Al-Naziri and Muhammad bin Isa Abu Abdulla.

Ibrahim al-Fazari, an 8th Century mathematician and astronomer is credited with the construction of the first astrolabe in the Islamic world. He studied the use of the armillary sphere and prepared tables based on the Arabic years.

Al-Farghani, also known as Alfraganus, a 9th Century astronomer composed a famous compendium of astronomy that was translated into Latin in 1135 AD by John of Seville and Gerard of Cremona, and also into Hebrew.

Furthermore, Draper¹³⁰ reported that the discovery of atmospheric refraction by Ibn al-Haytham – also known as Alhacen¹³¹ (965-1039 AD) afforded increased accuracy to the correction of astronomical observations. In an extolment of the major scientific contributions of medieval Islamic scholars whom he referred to as Mohammedans, Draper added: *Among the astronomers, some composed tables; some wrote on the measure of time; some on the improvement of clocks, for which purpose they were the first to apply the pendulum; some on instruments, as the astrolabe. The introduction of astronomy into Christian Europe has been attributed to the translation of the works of Mohammed Fargani. In Europe, also, the Arabs were the first to build observatories; the Giralda, or tower of Seville, was erected under the superintendence of Geber, the mathematician, A.D. 1196, for that purpose. Its fate was not a little characteristic. After the expulsion of the Moors it was turned into a belfry, the Spaniards not knowing what else to do with it.*¹³²

Al-Zarqali, Latinized as Arzachel (1029-1087 AD), was the most prominent astronomical observer of Muslim Spain. He is credited with designing an improved astrolabe called *sa'ilzqa* on which he wrote a treatise. Moreover, Al-Zarqali was the first astronomer to demonstrate the motion of the solar apogee with reference to stars. His scientific contributions were

¹²⁸ A. Sattar Khan, "Muslim Spain and Western Europe," Renaissance, 12 December 2009 <<http://www.renaissance.com.pk/novletf194.html>>.

¹²⁹ Musa bin Shakir lived during the reign of Caliph Harun-al-Rashid (786-809 A.D.).

¹³⁰ John William Draper (1863), "History of the Intellectual Development of Europe," Book Excerpts, September 2001, 12 December 2009 <<http://bahai-library.com/excerpts/europe.draper.html>>.

¹³¹ Alternatively spelt "Alhazen".

¹³² Draper.

analyzed and acclaimed in Europe and Copernicus quoted him in his well known work *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*.

“Finally it was through Spanish channels that the Latin West found its oriental inspiration in astronomy and astrology. The leading Muslim astronomical works were translated in Spain into Latin, and the Alfonsine tables compiled under the aegis of Alfonso X in the 13th Century were but a development of Arab astronomy”.¹³³ The following citation is a befitting end to this section as it goes a long way in emphasizing the monumental contribution of medieval Arab astronomers to world science, “Arab astronomy did not forestall Copernicus or Newton, though without it there would have been no Copernicus and no Newton.”¹³⁴

Islamic Achievements in Medicine and Pharmacology

Medieval Islamic medicine was largely shaped by the advances made by ancient Greek and Roman physicians such as Hippocrates, Celsus, Dioscorides and Soranus.^{135 136} Islamic contributions were significant in many branches of medicine, particularly surgery, physiology, pathology, anatomy, ophthalmology, experimental medicine, etc.

As previously indicated in this paper, Islamic physicians were also the ones who established the earliest known public hospitals and psychiatric hospitals^{137 138}, along with medical schools¹³⁹.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was one of the greatest contributors to medicine of all times. His important work *Al Qanun fi al-Tibb* or The Law of Medicine helped lay the groundwork for modern medicine with important contributions in systematic experimentation and quantification applied to physiology¹⁴⁰, the discovery of contagious diseases and the introduction of quarantine to contain them, experimental and evidence-based medicine, clinical trials¹⁴¹, randomized controlled trials^{142 143}, and clinical pharmacology¹⁴⁴.

¹³³ Philip K. Hitti, qtd. in. “Muslim Spain and Western Europe”.

¹³⁴ Robert Briffault, qtd. in “Muslim Contribution to Astronomy,” Al-Islaah Publications, 12 December 2009, <<http://worldupdates.tripod.com/newupdates10/id141.htm>>.

¹³⁵ Robert Bloch, qtd. in “Science, Technology and Medicine in the Roman Empire,” Lecture 11, 2004, 14 December 2009
<<http://www.es.flinders.edu.au/~mattom/science+society/lectures/lecture11.html>>.

¹³⁶ Bashar Saad, Hassan Azaizeh and Omar Said, “Tradition and Perspectives of Arab Herbal Medicine: A Review,” Oxford Journals, 2005, 12 December 2009
<<http://ecam.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/2/4/475>>.

¹³⁷ Peter Barrett (2004), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹³⁸ Syed (2002), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹³⁹ Sir John Bagot Glubb (1969), qtd. in “Quotations on Islamic Civilization,” Books and eBooks on Muslim History and Civilization, 1999, 12 December 2009
<<http://www.cyberistan.org/islamic/quote2.html#glubb>>.

¹⁴⁰ Katharine Park (1990), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹⁴¹ David W. Tschanz (August 2003), qtd. in “History of Medicine,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 15 December 2009, 20 December 2009
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_medicine>.

¹⁴² Jonathan D. Eldredge (2003), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹⁴³ Bernard S. Bloom, Aurelia Retbi, Sandrine Dahan and Egon Jonsson (2000), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

¹⁴⁴ D. Craig Brater and Walter J. Daly (2000), qtd. in “Islamic Golden Age”.

Ibn Sina is also credited with the first descriptions of bacteria and viruses¹⁴⁵; discovering the contagious nature of tuberculosis, the propagation of diseases by soil and water, nervous ailments and sexually transmitted diseases¹⁴⁶; and introducing the separation of pharmacology from medicine.

Abu al-Qasim, also known as Abulcasis, was instrumental in the advent of modern surgery with his *Kitab al-Tasrif* (translated *The Method of Medicine*), a seminal 30-volume encyclopedia on medicine and surgery that contained chapters on surgery, nutrition, ophthalmology, pharmacology, orthopedics, anatomical descriptions, and classifications of diseases¹⁴⁷. In this encyclopedia, al-Qasim described several surgical instruments as well as the surgical use of catgut and forceps, the ligature, the surgical needle, curette, scalpel, surgical spoon, surgical hook, surgical rod, speculum¹⁴⁸, and bone saw¹⁴⁹.

Ibn Zuhr, also known as Avenzoar, is credited with pioneering experimental surgery in the 12th Century. He was the first physician to test surgical interventions on animals before performing them on humans.¹⁵⁰ Ibn Zuhr was also the first to conduct dissections and postmortem autopsies on both animals and humans. His work also encompassed descriptions of tracheotomy and procedures for removing cataracts and kidney stones¹⁵¹.

Ibn al-Haytham's explanation of the process of visual perception in his *Book of Optics* also constituted a major contribution in the fields of optics, ophthalmology, and eye surgery¹⁵².

In pharmacology in the 9th Century, al-Kindi's book *De Gradibus*, in which he introduced the application of mathematics and quantification in pharmacology, for example the use of a mathematical scale to determine the strength of a medication, won him a lot of praise and established him as a prominent polymath of his time.

Ibn al-Nafis also made a mark in the constellation of talented medieval Muslim scientists by laying the foundations of circulatory physiology¹⁵³. He is also remembered for his early attempt to describe the metabolism¹⁵⁴ and for pioneering new systems of physiology and psychology replacing those of Ibn Sina and Galen. He also refuted many erroneous medical theories formulated by his predecessors; these included theories on humorism, muscles, bones, intestines, pulsation,¹⁵⁵ and sensory organs.¹⁵⁶

¹⁴⁵ The American Institute of Unani Medicine (2003), qtd. in "Islamic Golden Age".

¹⁴⁶ George Sarton, qtd. in A. Zahoor and Z. Haq.

¹⁴⁷ Monzur Ahmed (1990), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 12 December 2009, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_medicine>.

¹⁴⁸ Khaled al-Hadidi (1978), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁴⁹ Paul Valley (2006), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵⁰ Rabie E. Abdel-Halim (2005), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵¹ Hutchinson Encyclopedia, qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵² Bashar Saad, Hassan Azaizeh and Omar Said, in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵³ Chairman's Reflections, qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵⁴ Abu Shadi al-Roubi (1982), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵⁵ Nahyan A. G. Fancy (2006), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵⁶ Sulaiman Oataya (1982), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

Other important medical contributions made by Islamic physicians were the invention of the syringe by al-Mawsili in the 9th Century, the discovery of the immune system (Saad et al., 2005), the opening of the earliest drugstores in Baghdad in 754 AD, and the discovery of upward of 2,000 medicinal and chemical substances.¹⁵⁷

Islamic Achievements in Geography and Cartography

Medieval Islamic geography *per se* is reported to have started in the 8th Century under the patronage of the Abbasid dynasty. Al-Khwarizmi, Abu Zayd al-Balkhi, Al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, Muhammad al-Idrisi, and Ibn Hadji Mehmed - better known as Piri Reis - were among the most illustrious Muslim geographers of the Middle Ages.¹⁵⁸

Oceanic navigation was crucial for the Arab explorers due to the scarcity of navigable rivers in the regions covered by the Islamic empire, except for the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates. Navigation was remarkably developed in medieval Islamic civilization, especially in comparison to the rest of the world; it involved the use of such instruments as the magnetic compass and a basic tool named *Kamal* and used for measuring angles and determining latitude in celestial navigation. These and other instruments enabled the Arab explorers to cross the oceans with their ships instead of being reduced to sailing along the coastline to avoid getting lost in the high seas. The origins of the caravel ship, which Spanish and Portuguese seafarers adopted in the 15th Century for long distance travel, can be traced back to the *qarib* used by Andalusian explorers by the start of the 13th Century.

Closely related to the progress registered in geography were the important advances made by the Islamic civilization in cartography, particularly under the Abbasid caliph al-Ma'mun. Al-Mamun's patronage enabled Arab geographers and cartographers to produce a more refined calculation of the *mil*, the unit used by Arabs to measure distances as opposed to the *stadion*, used by the Greeks, to calculate the circumference of the earth, and to build the first terrestrial globe representing the Old World¹⁵⁹. Al-Mamun's most illustrious geographer was al-Khwarizmi, author in 833 of *Kitab surat al-Ard* translated *Book on the Appearance of the Earth*, which revised and augmented Ptolemy's influential treatise on cartography, *Geographia*, and included a list of 2402 coordinates of cities and other geographical features.¹⁶⁰

In the early 10th Century, Baghdad saw the founding by Abu Zayd al-Balkhi of the "Balkhi School" of terrestrial mapping, which brought together many renowned geographers and is credited with producing world atlases featuring world maps and regional maps.¹⁶¹

Lastly, Ibn Battuta (1304-1369 AD), a Berber scholar and traveler, is remembered for his *Rihla*, an account of his long-distance journeys that took

¹⁵⁷ S. Hadzovic (1997), qtd. in "Medicine in Medieval Islam".

¹⁵⁸ "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam," Wikipedia, 12 December 2009

¹⁵⁹ Mark Silverberg, qtd. in "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam".

¹⁶⁰ John J. O'Connor and Edmund F. Robertson, qtd. in "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam".

¹⁶¹ Edward S. Kennedy, qtd. in "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam".

him to North and Western Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Indian subcontinent, Central and Southeast Asia, and China. Ibn Battuta's travels embraced most of the 'known world' at that time and amounted to a distance well exceeding that covered by Marco Polo, the much better-known Venetian traveler.¹⁶²

Islamic Achievements in Chemistry

First, it is worth noting that the English word *alchemy*, which designates an occult, pseudo-scientific precursor of chemistry, is a mistranslation, perhaps deliberate, of the Arabic word for chemistry, *Kimia*, preceded by the article *al* (the). In another words, *al-Kimia* should never have been translated as *alchemy* as some Western scholars elected to do since the Middle Ages, but literally as *the-Chemistry*. From an Arab perspective, *al-Kimia* has only one meaning: it means *chemistry*; and there is no separate field from chemistry called *alchemy*. What Western scholarship belittled as *alchemy* was in fact the early stages of *chemistry*, in which the Muslim world played a far greater role than Christian Europe. It follows that the unfounded distinction that Europe made between *chemistry* and *alchemy* could have been an attempt to deny the tremendous Arab Islamic contribution to the foundation and methodology of modern chemistry.¹⁶³

Furthermore, contrary to what most science historians report, experimentation played a great role in medieval Muslim science, including in chemistry. It is precisely the role played by experiment that placed Muslim science well above the pseudoscientific speculations that were common in Ancient Greece. In fact, experimental science started with medieval Muslim scholars, centuries before the time of Robert Grosseteste, the 12th Century English scholastic philosopher to whom it is usually attributed.¹⁶⁴ Holmyard¹⁶⁵ noted that Jabir Ibn Hayyan (722-815 AD), one the earliest Muslim scientists, was the first known promoter of chemistry in the Arab world. Ibn Hayyan's accomplishments included: (i) his refining of such chemical processes as solution, sublimation, liquefaction, purification, reduction, amalgamation, oxidation, calcination, crystallization, distillation, evaporation, and filtration; (ii) his discovery of many previously unknown substances such as acids, alkalis, salts, paints, and greases; and (iii) his preparation of caustic soda, nitro-hydrochloric acid, sulphuric acid, sulphates, nitrates, potassium and sodium carbonates. Ibn Hayyan further described the steps for preparing steel, refining metals, dyeing fabric and leather, preparing hair dyes, and so on. He also shared formulas for producing illuminating ink for manuscripts and knew how to use manganese dioxide to make glass.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam".

¹⁶³ Foundation for Science, Technology and Civilisation (FSTC, 2001), qtd. in "The Advent of Experimental Chemistry," Muslim Heritage, 2009, 12 December 2009 <<http://muslimheritage.com/topics/default.cfm?ArticleID=225>>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Eric John Holmyard (1931), qtd. in "The Advent of Experimental Chemistry".

¹⁶⁶ FSTC (2001), qtd. in "The Advent of Experimental Chemistry".

Al-Razi followed in Ibn Hayyan's footsteps and, like his predecessor, he made major contributions to chemistry that survived till today. Al-Razi classified natural substances into earthly, vegetable and animal categories and added other man-made substances such as caustic soda and various alloys. Al-Razi also systematically documented his chemical experiments and set up the first laboratory that bore similarity to modern laboratories. Above all, it is al-Razi's methodical documentation of facts, substances, chemical reactions, and the instruments he used that gave him exceptional prominence in the historical evolution of chemistry.¹⁶⁷

Lastly, al-Majriti, born in Muslim Spain in the second half of the 10th Century, is remembered for his work *Rutbat al-Hakim* or *The Rank of the Wise*, which contained recipes and instructions for purifying precious metals.¹⁶⁸

Many of the substances, processes, and discoveries described in this section have worked their way into the current universe of chemistry via their introduction into Europe in the late Middle Ages. This fact demonstrates the unique importance of medieval Islamic civilization in the genesis and development of chemistry.

Islamic Achievements in Mathematics

The most important contributions of the Islamic world in mathematics were made in Irak, Persia and Egypt.¹⁶⁹ As was the case with other scientific branches such as geography and astronomy, Islamic practices played an important part in the keen interest medieval Muslim scholars took in studying the mathematics. For example, the Islamic law of inheritance was instrumental in the development of algebra (*al-Jabr* in Arabic) by al-Khwarizmi and other *Hakeems*. Evidence of this is found in al-Khwarizmi's *Hisab al-jabr w'al muqabala*, which applied algebra, particularly linear equations, to the implementation of the law on inheritance¹⁷⁰. Furthermore, it was the Islamic injunction that Muslims should pray five times a day, at fixed times, facing the direction of Mecca that led medieval Muslim scholars to develop spherical geometry^{171 172}. To underline the significance of the Islamic contributions to the development of mathematics, O'Connor and Robertson wrote, *Recent research paints a new picture of the debt that we owe to Islamic mathematics. Certainly many of the ideas which were previously thought to have been brilliant new conceptions due to European mathematicians of the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries are now known to have been developed by Arabic/Islamic mathematicians around four centuries earlier. In many respects, the mathematics studied today is far closer in style to that of Islamic mathematics than to that of Greek mathematics.*¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ John J. O'Connor (1999), qtd. in "Geography and Cartography in Medieval Islam".

¹⁷⁰ Solomon Gandz (1938), qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam," Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 2009, 12 December 2009
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics_in_medieval_Islam>.

¹⁷¹ Owen Gingerich (1986), qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷² Hussain Tabatabai, qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷³ John J. O'Connor and Edmund F. Robertson, qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

Going a step further in reviewing specific Islamic contributions, Rashed stated, *Al-Khwarizmi's successors undertook a systematic application of arithmetic to algebra, algebra to arithmetic, both to trigonometry, algebra to the Euclidean theory of numbers, algebra to geometry, and geometry to algebra. This was how the creation of polynomial algebra, combinatorial analysis, numerical analysis, the numerical solution of equations, the new elementary theory of numbers, and the geometric construction of equations arose.*¹⁷⁴

Omar Khayyam (1050-1123 AD) made a notable contribution to geometric algebra by authoring a book that improved upon al-Khwarizmi's work by dealing with equations of the third degree and offering arithmetic and geometric solutions to quadratic equations.¹⁷⁵

In the 12th Century, Sharaf al-Din al-Tusi made a mark in the development of the mathematics by discovering the derivative of cubic polynomials and offering algebraic and numerical solutions to cubic equations¹⁷⁶. Also in the 12th Century, a North African mathematician named al-Hassar designed the modern symbolic notation for fractions, with the numerator placed on top of a horizontal bar above the denominator.¹⁷⁷

In the 15th Century, Abu al-Hasan ibn Ali al-Qalasadi made one of the last major Islamic contributions to mathematics by introducing the representation of mathematical symbols with characters from the Arabic alphabet.¹⁷⁸

The now widespread use of the symbol x to designate an unknown variable in algebra has its origin in the Arabic word for *thing*, which was used in al-Khwarizmi's *al-Jabr* and other major Islamic writings on mathematics.

In addition to the foregoing, medieval Muslim scholars made many other great contributions to the mathematics, notably in integral calculus, differential calculus, trigonometry, analytic geometry, mathematical astronomy, mathematical geography, and mathematical physics, to name but a few. All of the above clearly demonstrates how central the Muslim world was to the development and expansion of the mathematics starting in the later half of the 8th Century.

Anyone who studies the great and, in many ways, unparalleled scientific contributions made by medieval Islamic scholars is puzzled at how Islamic science took a nosedive towards the end of the Middle Ages and continued its downfall to become quasi-nonexistent nowadays.

This matter will be at the center of the next section, which deals with the causes and circumstances of the decline of Islamic science.

THE DECLINE OF ISLAMIC SCIENCE

The factors behind the decline of Islamic science, starting in the 16th

¹⁷⁴ Roshdi Rashed, qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷⁵ Carl B. Boyer (1991), qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷⁶ J. Lennart Berggren (1990), qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷⁷ Ahmed Djebbar (2008), qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

¹⁷⁸ O'Connor and Robertson, qtd. in "Mathematics in medieval Islam".

Century, are thoroughly discussed by al-Hassan.¹⁷⁹ His paper attempted to explain the origin of the huge scientific and technological gap that exists today between the Arab world and the West.

First and foremost, al-Hassan debunked what he referred to as ‘wrong diagnoses,’ that is, some erroneous theories that certain writers used to explain the decline of Islamic science. Among these wrong diagnoses, al-Hassan cited the thesis whereby the hostility of Muslim theologians towards scientific activities was a key factor in the decline of Islamic science. A proponent of this theory, George Sarton¹⁸⁰ argued that while the West continued its scientific growth after the 16th Century, the Islamic world did not because the former managed to overcome scholasticism and the latter did not. Along the same line, Sachau and Browne¹⁸¹ contended that scientific progress in the Muslim world was greatly inhibited by the influence of al-Ash`ari (874-936 AD) and al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD), whose views Sarton considers scholastic¹⁸². Browne even drew a parallel between the ‘destructive’ influence of al-Ash`ari and that of Genghis Khan and Hulagu Khan. Al-Hassan invalidated this thesis by arguing that the opposition of theologians to science cannot be held responsible for the decline of Islamic science. Rather, he pointed to political and economic causes put forward by Ibn-Khaldun to explain this decline, while emphasizing the lack of evidence of a linkage between the Islamic people’s dwindling interest in the sciences as of the 16th Century and their continued involvement in the study of Islam. Furthermore, al-Hassan argued that the dialectical debate that existed between theologians and philosophers in the Islamic empire did not affect in any way the study of the rational sciences, which was encouraged by philosophers and theologians alike.

Al-Hassan further criticized another theory that points to the *Madrassa* system¹⁸³ as a major cause of scientific decline in the Islamic world. This theory rests on the postulate that the *Madrassa* system encouraged the people to study theology and law at the expense of the rational sciences, therefore a growing interest in religious studies automatically induced a decline in scientific achievements. In his criticism of this theory, al-Hassan argued that in medieval Islamic civilization, science was studied completely independently from religion. Scientists and theologians were usually not the same individuals and the two professions were unrelated. Also, science and religion did not coexist in the same institutions: scientific activities were undertaken in observatories,

¹⁷⁹ Ahmad Y. al-Hassan, “Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century,” *History of Science and Technology in Islam*, 2001, 12 December 2009 <<http://www.history-science-technology.com/Articles/articles/%208.htm>>.

¹⁸⁰ George Sarton, qtd. in “Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century”.

¹⁸¹ Sachau and Browne, qtd. in “Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century”.

¹⁸² Al-Ash`ari and al-Ghazali were eminent Islamic theologians and philosophers.

¹⁸³ The *Madrassa* system quickly gained importance after the establishment of the *Madrassa al-Nizamiyya* in Baghdad around 1065 A.D. (Al-Hassan, “Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century”).

hospitals, libraries, and academies, etc. whereas *Madrasas* were dedicated to the study of theology and law. Al-Hassan further elaborated that because most *Madrasas* were supported by religious endowments or *awqaf* (singular *waqf*), they continued to thrive even as the scientific institutions, which depended on state patronage and affluence, were declining. He added that the Islamic empire could have experienced a scientific revolution similar to that which occurred in Europe if there had been effective lines of communication between the scientific communities in both regions. Because such communication did not exist, Western science quickly got ahead of its Islamic counterpart after the Scientific Revolution; and the gap between Western and Eastern science continued to grow throughout the following centuries.

Having refuted the two theories above, al-Hassan went on to highlight the factors put forth by Ibn-Khaldun to explain the scientific decline experienced by the Islamic world starting in the 16th Century.

The first of these factors is the well-known law of supply and demand. In this particular context, this law signifies that sciences thrive when and where there is a demand for them and the level of scientific activity rises and falls with the demand for scientific outputs. In this context, the decline of Islamic science was in part the result of a decreasing interest in the scientific professions, itself caused by the diminishing demand for science and scientists in the Islamic empire. This explanation is covered in the chapter titled *That the Professions are Perfected and Become Plenty when the Demand for them Increases*, in Ibn-Khaldun's book *al-Muqaddimah* or *The Introduction*.¹⁸⁴

In the same book, Ibn-Khaldun observed that the state is the most important patron of science and the largest marketplace for scientific professions¹⁸⁵. In plain words, the state is the largest employer of scientists, the greatest investor in scientific research, and the most important client for scientific discoveries and inventions. Consequently, as the state declines, either in wealth, size, or influence, or in all three areas at once, scientific activities shrink and can ultimately disappear altogether. In view of the centrality of state patronage to scientific research, one can conclude on reasonable grounds that a key factor in the extinction of Islamic science was the decline of the medieval Islamic states.

In another chapter of his *Introduction*, Ibn-Khaldun explained that scientific professions usually thrive in wealthy societies¹⁸⁶. Therefore whenever a state or region gradually loses its affluence and its population decreases, scientific professions usually begin to disappear because the sustenance of scientific activities becomes too costly for that state or region. To put it differently, scientific endeavors are a luxury only afforded by strong and affluent societies which have an economic surplus to invest in non-immediately lucrative activities such as research. This theory implies that sciences thrived for many centuries in the Islamic empire because the latter could then afford them.

¹⁸⁴ Ibn-Khaldun, qtd. "Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century".

¹⁸⁵ Ibid

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

Consequently, when the Islamic empire commenced its decline, particularly economic, scientific activities went down with it until they ultimately disappeared.

In yet another chapter of *The Introduction*, titled *That the Sciences Increase with the Increase in Prosperity and with the Greatness of Civilization in a Region*, Ibn-Khaldun stated the following, *Let us consider what we have known about conditions in Baghdad, Cordoba, al-Qairawan, al-Basra, and al-Kufa. When these cities became populous and prosperous in the first centuries of Islam and civilization became established in them, the seas of science rose and overflowed and scientists marveled in the terminology and the technicalities of learning and of the various sciences, and in devising various problems and theories until they excelled over the ancients and surpassed those who came after. But when the prosperity of these cities and their civilization decreased and when their population was dispersed, that carpet, with all that was on it, was completely folded and science and learning were lost in them and moved to other regions of Islam.*¹⁸⁷

Ibn-Khaldun further pointed out that during his lifetime (1332-1406 AD) Islamic science was receding in the Maghreb and *al-Andalus* because these regions were then losing their prosperity. On the other hand, the Eastern Islamic territories, particularly Persia, were experiencing scientific growth during the same period because they enjoyed greater affluence and stability¹⁸⁸. This observation further underlines the linkage between science and prosperity, but it goes beyond to highlight that due to economic disparities between various parts of the same state, scientific achievements can abound in certain geographic or administrative regions when other regions are experiencing little to no scientific activity. Echoing Ibn-Khaldun's views, Bernal wrote the following: *Science's flourishing periods are found to coincide with economic activity and technical advance. The track science had followed – from Egypt and Mesopotamia to Greece, from Islamic Spain to Renaissance Italy, thence to the Low Countries and France, and then to Scotland and England of the Industrial Revolution – is the same as that of commerce and industry. Between the bursts of activity there have been quiet times, sometimes periods of degeneration. These coincide with periods when the organization of society was stagnant or decadent.*¹⁸⁹

In summary, three fundamental conditions are required for science to flourish in any given society: the first condition is the existence of a strong demand for scientific professions and advances; the second factor is the patronage of the state, especially in terms of employing scientists and financing scientific research; and the third requirement is affluence. According to Ibn-Khaldun, seconded by Bernal and al-Hassan, the decline of Islamic science can largely be attributed to the combined absence of these three requirements in the Islamic states, starting in the 16th Century, which signaled the end of the Islamic Golden Age.

Other factors that contributed to the decline of Islamic civilization

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibn-Khaldun, qtd. "Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century".

¹⁸⁹ J. D. Bernal (1969, p.47), qtd. in "Factors behind the Decline of Islamic Science after the Sixteenth Century".

and science include the Crusades in the 11th to 13th Centuries, which had a devastating impact on knowledge management and scientific progress in the Islamic world, and the Mongol invasions in the 13th Century.

CONCLUSION

During the Islamic Golden Age, from the 7th to 16th centuries according to recent scholarship, Islamic scientists, philosophers and artists made unrivaled contributions to the arts and sciences. They achieved this not only by gathering, structuring and translating the vast body of knowledge inherited from the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Chinese and other ancient civilizations but, more importantly, by making original and revolutionary discoveries of their own, and even by demonstrating the fallacy of many theories popularized by their Greek and Roman predecessors. The list of Islamic contributions to science is so long and so diversified that it took historians of science many centuries to document them all. Almost single-handedly, medieval Muslim scientists laid the foundations of many scientific branches, some of which Renaissance Europe received undue credit for, until recent scholarship reestablished the truth. An instance of Renaissance Europe's unfounded claims over the development of sciences is found in chemistry, a field in which most of the challenging foundational work done by Muslim scientists was discredited and reduced to a pseudoscience called alchemy by ignorant and chauvinistic European scholars.

Islamic contributions and advances were made in a variety of fields including knowledge management, astronomy, geography, navigation, medicine, pharmacopeia, biology, chemistry, algebra, geometry, architecture, and physics. Among other achievements, the first degree-awarding universities and public libraries, as well as the earliest known observatories serving as research institutes, were established in the Islamic world and were introduced in Christian Europe many centuries afterwards. Much of the drive that made these important scientific advances possible came from the Qur'an and from the words and deeds of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, which encouraged Muslims to seek knowledge and understanding of God's creation. Sarton paid tribute to the Muslim scientists of the Middle Ages in his *Introduction to the History of Science*, in which he wrote, *It will suffice here to evoke a few glorious names without contemporary equivalents in the West: Jabir ibn Haiyan, al-Kindi, al-Khwarizmi, al-Fargani, al-Razi, Thabit ibn Qurra, al-Battani, Hunain ibn Ishaq, al-Farabi, Ibrahim ibn Sinan, al-Masudi, al-Tabari, Abul Wafa, 'Ali ibn Abbas, Abul Qasim, Ibn al-Jazjar, al-Biruni, Ibn Sina, Ibn Yunus, al-Kashi, Ibn al-Haitham, 'Ali Ibn 'Isa al-Ghazali, al-zarqab, Omar Khayyam. A magnificent array of names which it would not be difficult to extend. If anyone tells you that the Middle Ages were scientifically sterile, just quote these men to him, all of whom flourished within a short period, 750 to 1100 AD.*¹⁹⁰

Briffault articulated a similarly high opinion of not only Islamic science but of the Islamic civilization as a whole. He affirmed that it was the Islamic world that lifted medieval Europe from the abyss of primitivism and ignorance in which it had sunk during the Middle Ages, at a time when the

¹⁹⁰ George Sarton (1927), qtd. in Zahoor and Haq.

Arab Muslim civilization was illuminating the world, *It was under the influence of the Arabs and Moorish revival of culture and not in the 15th Century, that a real renaissance took place. Spain, not Italy, was the cradle of the rebirth of Europe. After steadily sinking lower and lower into barbarism, it had reached the darkest depths of ignorance and degradation when cities of the Saracenic world, Baghdad, Cairo, Cordova, and Toledo, were growing centers of civilization and intellectual activity. It was there that the new life arose which was to grow into new phase of human evolution. From the time when the influence of their culture made itself felt, began the stirring of new life.*¹⁹¹

The extent of the Islamic contribution to science can hardly be overrated and there is wide consensus in scientific circles today that the whole world is greatly indebted to al-Khwarizmi, Ibn Sina, al-Biruni, and their likes. After many centuries of unsurpassed excellence and accomplishments, Islamic science began to decline in the 16th Century due to various factors triggered by the decay of the once powerful Islamic empire. These factors, which combined to deal a fatal blow to the scientific production of the Islamic world, included the gradual impoverishment of the Islamic empire, which in turn caused the shrinking of state patronage of science and slashed the demand for scientific professions and outputs in the empire. This scientific decline was exacerbated during the following centuries by other factors such as European imperialism, and ultimately the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the early 20th Century. These factors go a long way in explaining the huge gap observed nowadays between the scientific production of the Western world and that of the regions previously included in the Islamic empire.

¹⁹¹ Robert Briffault (1938), qtd. in Zahoor and Haq.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF AFRICA

“The accident of the predominance of white men in modern times should not give us supercilious ideas about color or persuade us to listen to superficial theories about the innate superiority of the white-skinned man. Four thousand years ago, when civilization was already one or two thousand years old, white men were just a bunch of semi-savages on the outskirts of the civilized world. If there had been anthropologists in Crete, Egypt, and Babylonia, they would have pronounced the white race obviously inferior, and might have discoursed learnedly on the superior germ-plasm or glands of colored folk.”

Joseph McCabe.

INTRODUCTION

Africa's contribution to the civilization of the Middle East has been intentionally or unintentionally ignored by Western and Arab scholars. Contemporary historical literature on African history, largely written and narrated by non-Africans, reflects in the majority of cases the history of Arabs and Europeans in Africa, and not the history of the people of Africa.

Central to the genesis of Africa's contribution to the Middle East is the period of great black civilization that lasted for almost 4000 years BC. The conquest of Lower Egypt by the Ethiopian leader, Menes, in 3100 BC to the end of the Sixth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom in 2181 BC, has been regarded by black historians as the Golden Age of black history. It was an age in which the blacks reached the pinnacle of remarkable achievements in terms of architecture, sciences and arts.

It is worth noting that the establishment of the modern Egypt state can be arguably be attributed to King Menes who conquered it in 3100 BC. Before that there was no Egypt.¹⁹²

The main objectives of this paper are twofold. Firstly to argue that the people of Africa and the Middle East, historically share the same geographical, cultural and social identities, and therefore the contributions by Africa towards the civilization of the Middle East is a natural phenomenon. Secondly, for the future of these two regions of the world, Africa & the Middle East, co-operation and co-ordination in the political, social and economical spheres is vital.

The history of ancient Egypt, which is undoubtedly African in form and context, has been the igniting factor in understanding Africa's contribution to the Middle East. Therefore, it is imperatively vital from the outset to settle the historical misconception that tends to separate Egypt from Africa.

¹⁹² Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization*, by, Third World Press 1974, 1987, P. 37

The geographical space of the ancient times is quite different from the contemporary one, in terms of peoples, their classification, and the concept of modern territorial sovereignty of states. The continents of Africa and Asia were classified as one entity, not only in geographic terms but its people were referred to as Ethiopians. This historical fact is well illustrated and captured in precise and clear manner by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, when he stated *"that classical historians and geographers called the whole region from India to Egypt, both countries inclusive, by the name of Ethiopia, and in consequence they regarded all the dark-skinned and black peoples who inhabited it as Ethiopians. Mention is made of Eastern and Western Ethiopia and it is probable that Easterners were Asiatics and the Westerners African"*.¹⁹³

Pertinent points can be deduced from the ongoing discussion. First, it is clear that it is very difficult and a fruitless exercise to try to separate the people of Africa from their brothers in Asia. These people (Africans and Asians) are arguably belonging to the same race. This assertion was supported by Herodotus in his celebrated History in which he articulated that both the Western Ethiopians, who lived in Africa, and the Eastern Ethiopians who dwelled in India, were black in complexion, but that the Africans had curly hair, while the Indians were straight-haired.¹⁹⁴

Equally the ancient civilization of Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) which is regarded by some historian as the cradle of civilization, is undoubtedly African in nature. Before, the Chaldeans ruled Mesopotamia, the area was ruled by Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. It is historical accepted that the earliest civilization of Mesopotamia was that of the Sumerians. These Sumerians were described by the later Assyrians and the Babylonians as black heads or black faced people, and they are shown on monuments as beardless and with shaven head.¹⁹⁵

The scientific contribution of modern Africa to the Middle East is of importance in understanding the development of scientific advancement of the modern Middle East. A book on astrology attributed to Lucian declares that: *"the Ethiopian were the first who invented the science of stars, and gave names to the planets, not at random and without meaning, but descriptive of the qualities which they conceived them to possess; and it was from them that this art passed, still in an imperfect state to the Egyptian"*.

The notion that ancient Ethiopian (Africans) contributed enormously to scientific achievements especially in the field of astronomy, is further captured by Volney in the following statement that *"should it be asked at what epoch this system (Galaxy) took its birth, we shall answer on the testimony of the monuments of astronomy itself, that its principles appear with certainty to have been established about seventeen thousand years ago, and if it be asked to what people it is to be attributed, we shall answer the first tribes of Egypt. It was, on the borders of the Upper Nile, among a black race of men, that was organized the complicated system of the worship of the stars"*.

¹⁹³ History of Ethiopia, Vol.I., Preface, by Sir E.A. Wallis Budge

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p.2.

¹⁹⁵ Volney's Ruins of Empires, pp.120,122 New York, 1926

Furthermore, it has also been articulated by some historians that the language of the primitive Babylonians is undoubtedly Cushite or Ethiopian, belonging to the group of tongues which are more or less confounded with the Semitic languages, but of which we have probably the purest modern specimens in the Mahra of southern Arabia and the Galla of Abyssinia. Emphatically, the relationship that existed between Africa and the Middle East can be categorized as of exchange of knowledge, culture and art. The similarities that exist between the people of Africa and Middle East are not a coincidental but rather based on a common culture of the same people.

Although the relationship between Africa and the Middle East during BC period was based on the exchange and sharing of knowledge in different fields, this relationship changed drastically due to religious wars and the savagery of slavery. An Africa that was once respected and admired now became a subject of oppression and ridicule.

The relations between Africa and the Middle East during the AD period were thus influenced by these two factors of religion and slavery. It was easy for the invaders to manipulate the Africans by using religion, as Africans are by nature a religious people.

The first historical contact that existed between Africa and the Muslim Arabs was that of peaceful co-existence. This peaceful co-existence was due to the fact that the Africans did not embark on religious imperialism. Thousands of years before Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the ancient Africans believed in Osiris and Horus as their gods. These gods of ancient Egypt were born of a virgin, and their births are heralded by a star; they are born either in a cave or stable; they are slain, commonly by crucifixion.¹⁹⁶ In a nutshell, the Jewish and Christian faiths are heavily influenced by the ancient African religion of Osiris and Horus.

It is generally accepted by historical scholars that the Islamic period, or the first contact around the coast of East Africa, occurred during the hijrah or refugee migration by the followers of the Prophet Mohamed to Ethiopia (Habasha) where An-Najashi (the Negus) was ruling. The king of Ethiopia was impressed by the message carried by the Muslim refugees and decided to accommodate them. It is also believed that when King An-Najashi died, the Prophet Mohammad performed funeral prayers for him in Madinah.

However, after the death of the Prophet the peaceful relations that existed between Africa and Arab Muslim world turned into that of violence and exploitation. The exploitation of Africa by Arabs and Europeans, on a religious basis seems to be the most remembered one, not because of any "civilization" that it brought, but because of the destruction and evil that followed.

First came the crescent flag of the Muslim armies invading North Africa in particular Egypt in 640 AD. This Islamic invasion of Africa centered on three destructive parameters: First, the claim of brotherhood; second, widespread intermarriages of concubinage with African women (genetic genocide); and third forceful conversions at sword point. While the European

¹⁹⁶ John G. Jackson, *Christianity Before Christ*, New York 1938.

targeted West Africa, the Arabs targeted East Africa, primarily African women to serve as domestic slaves. This destructive trade is believed to have taken 10 million Africans via the Eastern route to India, Arabia, and Turkey, and also via the trans-Saharan route to North Africa and the Mediterranean, where in slave markets such as Ceuta in Morocco, Africans were purchased to work as servants in Spain, Portugal and other European countries. Equally, the Cross of Jesus Christ followed the Muslim Crescent. The slave traders of Christianity used the Bible to disguise their evil intentions. Indeed within a short period after their arrival the whole continent was for sale, and its resources became the target of systematic exploitation by Europeans in what became known as colonization and colonialism.

The colonization of Africa by the Europeans can confidently be described as the darkest period in black history, and for humanity as a whole. Although the Europeans succeeded in converting large parts of Africa to the Christian faith, and hence should have been regarded by them as brothers in Christ, the exact opposite occurred. Prior to the 19th Century, little was known to the Europeans about Africa, and they just regarded it as the Dark Continent. European explorers began to explore the interior of Africa in the 17th Century, called by God to minister to the pagan African tribes. These missionaries asserted that their main objective of coming to African was to spread Christianity and to eradicate slavery. But in 1885 AD the Berlin Conference of European powers clearly showed the real intentions of the Europeans behind their coming to Africa. The Berlin Conference divided Africa between the major three European powers, Britain, France and Portugal. The main intention of colonization of Africa was based on the economic needs of the growing European industries. Hence slavery became part and parcel of the lucrative European economy, sanctioned systematically by their governments.

The relations between Africa and the Middle East during the colonial period were almost non-existent. This was because both were all being subjected to the new imperialism. While Africa was mostly under European exploitation, the Middle East was being ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The Ottoman state was born on the frontier between the Muslim world and the Byzantine Empire. Turkish tribes, driven from their homeland in the steppes of Central Asia by the Mongols, had embraced Islam and settled in Anatolia, where they formed the Ottoman confederation. They were called ghazis, warriors for the faith, and their highest ambition was to die in battle for their adopted religion. During their golden days of imperialism most of the Middle East especially the Arab territories were under firm hold of the Turks and hence they exploited the Arabs, just as the Europeans exploited the Africans.

The defeat of the Ottoman Empire by the European powers at the end of the First World War brought the entire Arab territories under European sphere of influence and hence the Africans and the Arabs became the subjects of these greedy powers. It is during the liberation wars by the Africans and the Arabs that most African and Arab countries came together in solidarity under the banner of independence and self-determination. Yet the average citizen of

Africa and the Arab world failed to utilize this new found relationship against the oppressor to advance their common economic and social interests.

CONCLUSION

The relations between Africa and the Middle East can be described as having been built originally on respect and understanding in the early period of their relationship. However this happy relationship was destroyed largely by the greed of some Arabs who misused religion for their own interests. However, in today's world and faced with the challenge to survive, Africa is re-thinking its relations with the Middle East based on mutual respect and economical interest. These relations can be further crystallized politically through joint market ventures and the free movement of peoples. As that happens, some of the sad history of the past will be erased, and replaced by a true atmosphere of brotherhood and friendship based on the commonalities of their origins.

THE EXTERNAL PLAYERS

INTRODUCTION

Middle East, known as the center of the world major civilizations, has a deep-rooted history which dates back to ancient times. The region throughout its history has been a major centre of world affairs. In the geographic context, it lies at the juncture of Eurasia and Africa and of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean. Due to such significant geo-strategic and geo-political positioning, the region has and will always remain a culturally, religiously, economically, and politically sensitive quarter of the world.

Middle East has particularly been a crucial center for the world superpowers that have competed for political and economic leverage for decades. During the Cold War, for instance, the region was a battlefield of ideological and political contentions between the two superpowers; the U.S and the U.S.S.R.

It is, however, no longer the case. The world we know now is faced with a new 21st Century reality which dictates that the United States and Soviet Union are no longer the sole competing rivals in the region. It is also those of the emerging world such as China and Europe that are aimed at playing major roles in the future economic and political stability of the region. We are perhaps on the verge of a more intensified political and economic rivalry among the world leading powers that are aimed at containing the bigger, or perhaps the biggest, piece of the pie.

Since the struggle for influence is likely to grow, particularly among the United States, Europe and China, it is crucial to know the most important areas of contention among these players in the region. Two basic motives are identified that will spark the future competition on the ground. The first is the desire to gain competitive political and strategic advantage in the region. The second is, however, to contain the future flow of oil from the region's significant stocks of crude oil at significantly lower cost where oil is becoming increasingly vital for the economic prosperity of these competing powers.

This paper is, therefore, designed to examine the contemporary causes of involvement of the three major powers in the Middle East, namely the U.S., Europe and China. The paper will take one step further to furnish an overall analysis on the future role of these competing powers and how their engagement will impact the political and economic transformation of the region on the long run.

THE U.S ROLE

As early as 1911, while the world was on the verge of World War I the United States had positioned itself as a rising power on the global stage. Its policy approach towards the Middle Eastern region was perceived to be even-handed and harmonious. Western educational and philanthropic services continued to flow across regional boundaries. What even further added to its credibility and reputation was that it posed no imperial ambitions towards the region. Such an impression left most regional states with a sense of gratitude

and optimism towards its presence. It also served as the building block in the formation of strategic alliances and partnerships between the United States and key regional states throughout the first half of the Century.

As the Century wore on, however, the U.S and the region shared a fragile relationship. Washington started to encounter a series of confrontations with a number of regional states. During the cold war rivalries, these states even allied themselves with the U.S cold war rival, the Soviet Union. At the dawn of the 21st Century, however, the United States became an unquestioned target of those regional elements who believed the time had come for the west to pay for its perceived offenses long committed against Islam and the Muslim world.

It has to be, however, underscored that the 9/11 incident brought about even a more intensified western engagement in the region on a much broader scale. The United States now seems to be digging deeper, through enhanced military and political involvement, in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and even Iran all of which can have direct transformational impact on the overall stability of the region. In order to understand the complex nature of this turbulent relationship, it is therefore imperative to examine the causes of transformation, over a 90 year span, and how they contribute to the rising role of the United States in the region on the long run.

The Origins of U. S. Involvement

Historically, the first sustained relationship between the United States and the Middle East resulted from American missionary efforts in various parts of the region, starting in 1819 and growing in importance throughout the 19th Century. In 1919, the League of Nations was formed based on an effort led by President Woodrow Wilson. The League soon handed down a series of mandates laying out the colonial boundaries of the Middle East in the territories of the now-defunct Ottoman Empire. These boundaries continue to shape many of the region's political realities today. On the civilian front, American missionaries were focused on creating educational institutions, primarily in Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. An important example is the Syrian Protestant College established in 1866 (called the American University of Beirut after 1920). This had a major impact on the region because it educated members of local elites.

By the end of World War I, decades of work by American missionaries and educators in most countries had created an almost uniformly favorable view of the United States. Those regional states that were resisting the encroachment of European powers therefore found the United States as a patron with the ability to counterbalance against the European imperialism. Plus, the western presence comparing to that of the mandatory Europeans dominance posed no imperial ambitions towards the region. "This view was reinforced during World War I by President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points as well as the America's initiative in formulating the principle of self-determination at the Versailles peace conference".¹⁹⁷ A desire for an American mandate, in preference to a mandatory British or French presence, that

¹⁹⁷ "Middle East-U.S Relations" Source: Middle East Issues

supported the concept of self-determination therefore made a positive impression on the people of these countries. Aside from the significant discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938 by American oil companies, this was the last major American initiative in the Middle East until after World War II.

Although Britain had the upper hand in regional affairs, the United States was soon involved in either backing or competing with Britain on issues related to the Northern Tier of Middle East, namely Turkey and Iran. After World War II, a financially constrained Britain was forced to cease its support for Greece and Turkey. This, as a result, created a potential power vacuum on the southern edge of the Soviet Union that the U.S. rushed to fill in keeping with the cold war atmosphere and its new role as a world power. The result was the “Truman Doctrine”,¹⁹⁸ that proclaimed it a zone of particular American interest.

A consistent pattern in American involvement and relations with the Middle East soon emerged. The U.S. championed the cause of Israel while replacing Britain as a western benefactor of conservative Arab regimes. The stress of accommodating both an increasingly close relationship with Israel and ties with Arab states that were at war with Israel marked American relations with Arab world ever since.

The Cold War Tensions

The American anxiety with the growth of Soviet influence in the region became another consistent pattern during the next three decades. The Soviet Union perceived exploitation of the situation during the 1956 Suez Crisis became the primary cause of concern for the U.S, perhaps more worrisome than that of the Arab-Israeli conflict. As a result of the growing polarization of the Middle East along cold war lines in 1950s and 1960s, several Arab states aligned themselves more closely with the Soviet Union. Others including Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Morocco, grew closer to the U.S. In this highly polarized situation, the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War broke out, creating a set of problems for U.S. policy, most of which have persisted to the present day. The most important of them all has been the task of reconciling American sympathy and support for Israel with a desire to maintain a strong footing in Arab countries resentful of Israel's unwillingness to evacuate territories occupied during the 1967 war.

On the other part, renewed importance was given to another American ally in the Middle East, the Iranian regime of Shah in early 1970s.¹⁹⁹ Iran became the focus of the Nixon Doctrine of 1972 as Shah embarked on a massive program to upgrade the Iranian military and turn his country into a regional superpower with the support of the U.S. This process both exacerbated tensions with Iran's neighbors, notably Iraq, and alienated elements among the Iranian public who were already critical of their nation's subordination to the U.S. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution brought down the

¹⁹⁸ “*The Truman Doctrine, 1947*” Source: U.S Department of State; *Diplomacy in Action*

¹⁹⁹ “*The Middle East and the United States*” A Historical and Political Reassessment, Edited by; David W. Lesch

shah, throwing American policy in the Gulf region into panic. The strong anti-American sentiment of the new regime was reflected in the hostage crisis that angered the United States while provoking its concerns about the Middle East.

During 1980s, besides the containment of Soviet expansion into the central Asia, namely its 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, the American relations with the Middle East continued to be dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of oil. Israel and the Gulf thus became the major preoccupations of American Mid-East policymakers. In the Gulf, the U.S aligned itself with Iraq, an indication of western resentment against the revolutionary regime of Iran.²⁰⁰ President Bush, however, turned against Iraq after its invasion, occupation, and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990, going to war with it in January 1991. The U.S. emerged victorious after the Gulf War, with more firm dominance over the region. Iraq was destroyed and kept weak, and the coalition allowed the U.S. to cement stronger ties with many Arab states.

In sum, strategic interests including a longstanding competition with the Soviet Union provoked a variety of U.S. interventions ranging from diplomatic overtures of friendship to full-blown war. American economic interests, particularly in assuring access to Middle Eastern oil, as well as ensuring the protection of the region's sole democracy, the state of Israel continued to be on the top of the United States foreign policy throughout the end of the 20th Century.

The U.S War on Terror

The dawn of the 21st Century, however, brought a new phase of the U.S involvement in the region. Its interests and engagement in the region was not just confined to oil, supporting Israel or competing with the Soviet Union. Washington faced a new regional challenge after its national security was compromised on the 11th day of September 2001. In October 2001, the U.S and Great Britain invaded Afghanistan in the wake of the September 11, attacks on the U.S., marking the beginning of the *War on Terrorism* campaign. Today, after eight years of the U.S war against Al-Qaeda and Taliban who constantly threaten the security of the west and its European allies, the U.S see a vital national security interest in dealing with the current and potential security threats posed by these groups who seek to reestablish firm footing in the region, namely Afghanistan and Pakistan. Therefore, to defeat al Qaeda and its capability from undermining the regional and global peace and security as well as the western interest in the region, the U.S aimed to exerting more political and military influence in Afghanistan in order to contain the security challenges that could potentially extend not only in Afghanistan but also beyond the region.

U.S. – Iran Nuclear Tensions

Iran's nuclear program started in 1950s and continued until the 1979 Islamic revolution with the support and encouragement of the U.S and Western

²⁰⁰ "A History Lesson: U.S Intervention in the Middle East...." Source: CommonDreams.org

European governments.²⁰¹ The seed of the U.S-Iranian nuclear tension was, however, planted during Bush administration in 2002. President Bush while describing Iran as an “axis of evil” accused it for helping terrorists and building weapons of mass destruction. Since then, the Iran nuclear program has become an inevitable cause of concern for the U.S and its Europeans allies, albeit Iran’s claims that its nuclear program exclusively aimed at generating power.

Therefore, much of the debate and tension over Iran’s nuclear treat is driven by concern that Iran’s act of civilian nuclear technology could provide the means and technical capability for the Iranian regime to develop nuclear weapons should Iran intend to do so in the future.²⁰² This, in turn, raises another concern that if Iran transforms into a nuclear regional power, it would challenge the western supremacy in the Persian Gulf, where the United States sees significant strategic and economic interest. In either case, the U.S cannot afford to accommodate a nuclear Iran on the regional power play. Therefore, for the U.S to circumvent the rising role of Iran on the regional arena, it has to closely watch and control Iran both geographically and geopolitically from within the region. In practical terms, the United States has to build a firm footing in the neighboring region which it already has, for instance, in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whether the western deep-seated engagement and presence in Afghanistan and Iraq help the United States fulfill its objectives over Iran remains an open question which deserves a careful analysis and scrutiny.

U.S. Interests in the Region

The United States has historically maintained stable interests in the Middle Eastern region as a whole. These interests were markedly exposed during the cold war era which included: 1) the continuous flow of oil from the region in reasonably affordable price; 2) to protect the security of the sole regional democracy, the new state of Israel, and 3) to keep the Soviets out insofar as possible, for this mandate would make the two preceding interests a lot more feasible. The United States now, however, sees another potential interest in the region in addition to the three core ones of the cold war era. This new interest is now solely focused at reducing the threats posed by the rogue states, particularly those attempting to put their hands on weapons of mass destruction, and supporting the acts of extremism and intolerance. This, in turn, raises the question as to whether the United States interests in the region have to be redefined.

The default assumption of interest continuity, however, suggests that little in essence has changed²⁰³. Oil, similar to that of the Cold War era, remains the most vital U.S interest in the region, particularly in the face of an increased global demand and competition (namely posed by China and Europe) over the control of the region’s vast natural resources. Second, the security and stability of Israel is still a predominant American interest. Among others, the western support for Israel remains vital for the fulfillment of the American objective

²⁰¹ “Nuclear Program of Iran / Iran-United States Relation” Source: Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia

²⁰² “Iran’s Nuclear Program” Source: Council on Foreign Relations

²⁰³ “Redefining the U.S Interests in the Middle East” Source: Foreign Policy Research Institute

that is to allow no other state achieve regional hegemony, particularly to observe that for the United States the contemporary threat is no longer posed by the Cold war Soviet Union but Iran. Therefore, the debate over the rogue states that pose potential threat to the U.S interest in the region remains substantially relevant.

In practice, the United States now pursues three major interests in the region. The first is to ensure the adequate flow of oil at the cheapest cost. The second interest, however, focuses on a combination of two inter-related matters; 1) the security of Israel and; 2) the containment of the so-called WMD-minded rouge states that wish to achieve regional hegemony. The third is to make sure that those groups and networks that perpetuate intolerance and extremism in the region do not build the capability of attacking the United States. To better understand how these strategic and economic interests contribute to the rising role of the United States in the region, the study of each subject matter remains indispensable.

The Importance of Oil

Ever since the American oil companies' discovery of massive oil deposits in Saudi Arabia in 1936 and the American embrace of the automobile industry after World War II, the U.S has maintained an unyielding interest in the region's petroleum resource²⁰⁴. Given the vast energy resources that form the backbone of western economies, influence and involvement in the Middle East has been of paramount importance to the United States, as it has equally been to other imperial and super powers.

"To maintain control and influence over the region's vast natural resources, the West has historically supported a number of Arab states including Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, Oman and in times Egypt, Iraq and Iran into positions of power."²⁰⁵ The underlying motive for supporting these states has often been to maintain control and access to regional natural resources. In addition to supporting certain regional states, the United States historical exertion of political and military role in the region has predominantly targeted at securing the region's oil deposits. For instance, "after the 1991 Gulf War, the increased American presence gave the United States a unique advantage over Europe and Japan in trade with the Gulf States."²⁰⁶ This view was justified as Washington used its political leverage to help American businesses win contracts in the region.²⁰⁷ The same argument has often been made by commentators in the case of the U.S invasion of Iraq under the pretext of overthrowing Saddam Hussein from power.

On the other hand, although the United States and its regional allies have greatly benefited from the Middle Eastern oil during the past half a Century, this economic leverage is likely to be challenged by an intimidating state, Iran, should it acquire nuclear capabilities in the future. With Iran currently holding 10% of the world's proven oil reserves and 15% of its gas, it

²⁰⁴ "Middle East" Source: Global Issues-Social, Political and Economic Issues that Affects Us All

²⁰⁵ "The United States and the Middle East Petroleum" Source: Middle East at Global Issues

²⁰⁶ "The Persian Gulf" Source: Understanding the American Oil Strategy

remains OPEC's second largest exporter and the world's fourth oil producer. This data, in turn, insinuates that the current escalating tensions between the United States and Iran could be attributable to the evolving state of energy geopolitics, and the future of energy security for much of the Western world.

Although about 10% of oil used in the United States is imported from the region, the United States is strongly committed to protecting Gulf oil. The United States therefore maintains military and naval installations in the mini-states of the Gulf region including Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain. The presence of these forces remains central to the U.S in order to secure the flow and to prevent any threat to oil in the international waterways. In other terms, since securing the flow of affordable oil from the region is a cornerstone of U.S. Middle East policy, the U.S. will always ensure that no regional actor is capable of influencing neighboring Gulf countries, particularly those supporting the United States oil policy in the region. Oil is, therefore, going to be central to the United States for the foreseeable future.

The Strategic Alliance with Israel

The United States holds a variety of interests in supporting Israel. For instance, the U.S can use Israel as an apparatus to circumvent the potential emergence of certain regional states and/or regimes into power, particularly those hostile to the western presence in the region.

This has been seen in the U.S support of Israel against Iran and destroying furtive nuclear facilities in places like Syria. Since the United States support for Israel is based on its strategic value in the oil-rich Middle East, the security of Israel that ensures the western multi-folded interests in the region therefore remains crucial to the United States.

On the other hand, however, while the balance of power may favor the United States over Iran, the balance of interests favors Iran.²⁰⁷ It is hard to keep Iran out of the region because it is, by a nature defined historically, culturally and geographically, already in the region. Its relative power is less, but its level of determination to prevail is greater.

Although the Soviet Union, as a global hegemonic power of the time, was capable of physically dominating the Middle East during the cold war, Iran even as an impending regional power does not hold a comparable potential ability for the following reasons.

For the most part, Iran cannot seize and hold territory in the Sunni world. It cannot convert the Sunni world to Shia Islam either. Most importantly, due to its hostile relationship with most Arab and regional states it cannot amass enough allies to deny the U.S access to the region.

Moreover, Iran is a multiethnic and a vulnerable society, with a second-rate economy and a third-rate scientific-technical infrastructure. These after all do not give Iran enough credibility and strength to undermine the U.S interests in the region. Therefore, containing the potential influence of Iran over the region comparing to that of the former Soviet Union is rather a much easier task for the United States.

²⁰⁷ "The U.S Interests in the Middle East" Source: Foreign Policy Research Institute

The War on Terrorism

The early 21st Century has brought about a new regional challenge for the United States. It has proved that dealing with international terrorism and extremism is now a priority U.S. interest in the Middle East. As much as the wider Middle East is important within U.S. global strategy, it is so not because of the region's ability to challenge the global power balance through positive power or the ability to innovate in science and technology. Its only significance is the ability of its radical bloc to be a wrecker, to pull the tent down on others as it pulls it down on itself. The explicit rise of Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups has indeed posed grave menace to the security of the region and the world at least in the past decade. From Bali to the United Kingdom and the United States, the terrorist attacks have substantiated the fact that no one at any part of the world is immune. To safeguard against these negative forces, the U.S. has to maintain aggressive political and military influence in the region.²⁰⁸ Only physical presence in certain geographical regions, for example like Afghanistan and Pakistan, can give the U.S and Europe the ability to deal with the problem. Therefore, containing the acts of intolerance and extremism in the region will be on the main focus of the United States foreign policy interest towards the region on the foreseeable future.

Future Regional Stability

There is no doubt that the Middle East crises, namely the Arab-Israeli conflict is of capacity to affect the U.S interests in the region. Those moderate Arab states that have long been allied themselves with the U.S have become overwhelmingly resentful of Israel as well as those that support its occupation of Palestine. Since the lack of a resolution to this problem provides an excuse for anti-American militants to perpetuate more acts of violence and extremism against the United States, only finding a solution to this problem would ensure the future stability as well as that of the United States' interests in the region.

Within this mix, ironically, Iran seems to have been empowered by the policies of the Bush years. With America having generously neutralized its neighborhood rivals (the Baathists in Iraq and the Taliban in Afghanistan), Iran has been able to increase its regional focus and influence. With the potential rise of Iran to power, the U.S smells an existential threat emanating from Iran that is aimed at challenging the U.S supremacy in the region. In such a critical moment of confrontation, the U.S is likely to remain an indispensable player that will very much be needed at the table in order to achieve a new equilibrium, advance the peace process and stabilize the region as a whole.

It is widely consented that during the George Bush administration, the U.S was fairly marginalized and isolated from the Middle Eastern region. President Bush waged two wars (in Iraq and Afghanistan) and did not do much to consolidate the Arab-Israeli peace process. Even a number of moderate regional states that had long supported the American cause in the region felt disenchanted. Against this gloomy backdrop, a new opportunity has emerged

²⁰⁸ "Defusing Terrorism at Ground Zero: Why a New U.S. Policy is Needed for Afghanistan" Source: The Heritage Foundation

for both the U.S and the Middle East to reengage in a new phase of cooperation and integration. Here are some suggestions for a new approach:²⁰⁹

A New Framework for the Resolution of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Almost the entire Middle Eastern countries regard the Arab-Israeli conflict as a leading source of discontent and unrest in the region. They argue that an increased U.S. effort to resolve this conflict could decrease internal threats to Arab regimes and make them more willing to cooperate with other U.S. regional endeavors. Therefore, in order to regain its credibility and re-establish a firm footing in the Middle East, the United States has to manifest a good political will by taking tangible actions on this conflict. An American effort, for instance, to urge for an immediate halt to the development of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian land would make a significant first step towards this crisis. The United States could still support Israeli as it ally. But it should try to find a way of doing so while at the same time formulating genuine strategies to addressing and resolving the Palestinian suffering.

Before embarking on a new policy to solve the Arab-Israeli tensions, the United States should conduct open discussions with its allies in the region and beyond. Regional allies have to be assured that America is now in the business of calming and resolving, rather than exacerbating, regional tensions. The U.S should encourage significant Arab support in advancing peace with Israel and should seek to build on the Arab peace initiative. A similar approach should be undertaken with Israel. The U.S should make it clear that this time it is interested in a peace outcome more than a peace process. At least, the US should articulate this new approach to the Quartet, particularly its European partners, and expect strong European support in moving the process forward towards an attainable outcome.

The U.S should attempt to re-engage with those states it has abandoned over the course of past decades. It has, for instance, not had an ambassador in Syria since February 2005. The U.S should rebuild its own relationship with Syria, and directly involve itself with Israeli-Syrian talks, something it has avoided since Turkey has taken over. In addition to Syria, direct U.S engagement with Iran is now almost inevitable. Considering the long years of hostilities and confrontation over a range of bilateral matters, the U.S should commit itself to engage further in diplomatic dialogue and discussion with Iran. Some, however, might contend that this will not work, and one might have to return to the exclusive path of sanctions and containment. But the regional dynamic will always be crucial, and there seems little reason to continue to empower Iran regionally through a policy of non-engagement.

Conclusion regarding U.S.

United States cooperation with selected countries of the Middle East is of long standing, and it is likely that a fund of good will toward the U.S still exists within various Arab and Muslim circles in the region if the United States pursues some of the remedies suggested above. Historical cooperation and

²⁰⁹ "President Obama, the U.S and the Mid-East" Source: The Century Foundation

residual good will may provide a basis for more positive relationships in the years ahead.

THE ROLE OF EUROPE

The greatest and most significant of all European expansion to the Middle East was by the French and English. These European powers historically influenced the region for material gain, human labor, natural resources, and strategic advantage. The search for lucrative and secure overseas investment played a very great part in the European urge to acquire colonies throughout the Middle East at the end of the nineteenth and early 20th Century. As the World War ended, Britain and France secretly set about the partitioning of the Arab territories ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 predicted the fall of the Ottoman Empire and divided much of the Arab World into British and French zones of influence.²¹⁰ Besides the France and Britain's secret 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement to partition the Middle East between them, the British had also promised to the Zionist movement their support in creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine based on the 1917 Balfour Declaration. When the Ottomans collapsed, the Arabs proclaimed an independent state in Damascus, but were too weak, militarily and economically, to resist the European powers. Britain and France re-established control and re-arranged the Middle East for their own leverage. As a result, the Levant (the Eastern Mediterranean) colonialism came into being after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.²¹¹ The Ottoman Arab provinces were assigned to Britain and France as mandates from the newly created League of Nations. Britain took responsibility for Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan, while France took over Lebanon and Syria. Most of the Arabian Peninsula fell to another British ally, Ibn-i-Saud, who created the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in 1922. The guiding principle of the mandate system was that the states concerned should remain under the influence of the mandatory power until ready for independence, a period that was viewed as an unspecified period of time.

Perhaps the most important turning point in the history of the Middle East came when oil was discovered, first in Persia in 1908, then in Saudi Arabia in 1938, and later in Libya, Algeria and other Persian Gulf states. The Middle East, it turned out, possessed the world's largest easily accessible reserves of crude oil. Western and European oil companies pumped and exported nearly all of the oil to fuel the rapidly expanding automobile industry and other industrial developments. This enabled them to consolidate their hold on power and giving them a stake in preserving Western hegemony over the region. Oil wealth also had the effect of creating new movements towards economic, political or social reform in the Arab world under the influence of the *Kamalist Revolution*, which had created the modern state of Turkey in 1923 out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

²¹⁰ "The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916" Source: Mid-East Web Historical Documents and Britannica Encyclopedia

²¹¹ "Colonialism in Africa and Middle East" Source: History of the Middle East Database

Although the British and French did not formally depart the region until after World War II, a number of countries such as Syria, Egypt and Iraq moved towards independence throughout 1920s and 1930s. But Zionist colonization of Palestine and the Arab nationalism created a situation which the British could neither resolve nor disentangle itself from. Although the Zionist movement was given a hope of a new Jewish home in 1917 Balfour Declaration, the rise of Nazis created a new urgency in the quest to create a Jewish state in Palestine, and the evident intentions of the Zionists provoked increasingly fierce Arab resistance, with the Great Uprising in 1936-1939. This struggle terminated in the 1947 UN Partition Plan in favor of a Two-State solution. Israel was therefore proclaimed as a State in 1948 which led to the first Arab-Israeli War and to the creation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. About 800,000 Palestinians fled from areas annexed by Israel, thus creating the "Palestinian problem" which has put the region in a state of unrest ever since. Following that was the June 1967 Six Day War which led to the occupation of various territories in Palestine. In November 1967, the United Nations Resolution 242 called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict, something which has become a permanent criticism and condemnation of the *Fatah* and of the *Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)* founded in 1964 by the Arab League.

The outcome of the Arab resistance caused the creation of Pan-Arabism, a popular anti-imperialist ideology in the 1960s. *Nasserism* that was also a Pan-Arab ideology promoted the merging of Egypt and Syria into the *United Arab Republic*; a union that existed during 1958-1961. In addition, the short term Arab Federation of Iraq and Jordan in 1958 also attempted to circumvent the 1920s borders set by the European colonial powers. Despite such anti-imperialist efforts, Pan-Arabism was defeated and ceased to exist with the *1967 Six-Day War*. From 1960s until late 1980s, the Middle East saw less European involvement as the United State took over a major role in regional affairs. The region became more of a theatre of the Cold War between the U.S and Soviet rivalry which in essence fairly marginalized the European military and political role in the region.

Since the *Middle East Madrid Peace Conference* began in 1991, Europeans gradually stepped up their political involvement in the Middle East.²¹² They moved to assert their political interests, in parallel with the Middle East peace process and the development of European Union (EU) foreign policy. These policies have largely been motivated by geographic proximity and geopolitical considerations; namely the fear of security threats emanating from Europe's neighborhood (a spillover of conflict in the form of terrorism, migration, organized crime and proliferation of WMDs), Israel's security, and access to energy resources.

In practice, today's Europe has realized that these vital European interests can best be reconciled in an environment where there is peace

²¹² "Conference for Peace in the Middle East" Source: European Institute for Research on Mediterranean and Euro-Arab Cooperation

between Israel and its neighbors and where the people of the Mediterranean and the Middle East find decent living conditions in their countries. As a consequence, Europeans have *first* focused their efforts on the realization of a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which they consider to be the core of the region’s instability. They have, *second*, aimed at supporting comprehensive peace between Israel and its neighbors. And they have, *third*, sought to provide an environment conducive to peace in the region as well as to deflect what were and still are perceived as security risks emanating from the region.

Current Motives

Throughout the second half of the 20th Century, although the EU and its member states mostly preferred to leave the field of conflict management and resolution as well as hard security issues largely to the United States.

This trend has now, however, changed. The EU and its member states are now engaged in efforts targeted at Middle East conflict resolution as part of the Middle East Quartet (composed of U.S., EU, Russian, and UN representatives). In fact, the road map adopted in 2003 was the result of a European initiative. Europeans have realized that it is time to rethink their policy approaches, refocus their activities, and seek more effective sets of principles to contribute to lasting peace and stability in the Middle East. In addition, the EU now seems prepared for assisting the U.S in developing alternative solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict that seriously undermines the strategic interests Europe hold in the region.

The EU’s preference of promoting soft security, in terms of economic development, cooperation, and interdependence, is considered to be a useful contribution to the process of building regional security and stability. The Europe’s concept of soft security over hard approach suggests that the major differences in perceptions, maps, and history that are the impediments to Arab-Israeli reconciliation require frequent in-depth contacts at all levels of society, including low-level people-to-people contacts in the region in order to develop networks and contacts that go beyond the limited official spheres.

European Interests

Europe, both in terms of the individual states and collectively through the Union, has a profound interest in the Middle Eastern region as a whole.²¹³ Primarily, Europe has major economic interests in the region, both as a consumer of Middle Eastern petroleum and gas, and as a producer of industrial goods, weapons, and related military technology for which the Middle East constitutes a lucrative market. At the same time, the Southern European states (France, Spain, Italy, and Portugal) are concerned about the impact of instability in the area and the possibility that political unrest and economic failure could lead to massive emigration across the Mediterranean. In addition, some members of the European Union, France for example, have an ambition of playing a major role on the international stage, supporting, balancing, or, in some cases, challenging what is often seen as American hegemony in the post-

²¹³ “The European Union and the Middle East Peace Process” Source: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

Cold War era. Events in the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli peace process are central factors in the international arena, and a major role in this activity would symbolize or reflect the arrival of Europe as a major power broker.

The European-Mediterranean Partnership

The above-stated European interests were reflected in the *European-Mediterranean Partnership*, initiated in Barcelona in 1995 with Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, and the Palestinian Authority as its participants. The EU invested a great deal of resources in the Euro-Med project, in the hope of fulfilling its new objectives in the region. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, formerly known as the Barcelona Process, was re-launched in 2008 as the *Union for the Mediterranean* at the Paris Summit of the Mediterranean. The Partnership now includes all 27 member states of the European Union, along with 16 partners across the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. This re-launching aimed to infuse a new vitality into the Partnership and to raise the political level of the strategic relationship between the EU and its southern neighbors. Some of the most important innovations of the Union for the Mediterranean include the a rotating co-presidency with one EU president and one president representing the Mediterranean partners, and a Secretariat based in Barcelona that is responsible for identifying and promoting projects of regional, sub-regional and transnational value across different sectors. In practice, the Euro-Med program attempts to address the Mediterranean as a single region in terms of economics and security since it pose different and yet significant political challenges for Europe.²¹⁴

The role of the EU in the region is likely to increase as the individual European states now seem to share a common set of interests and priorities. Immigration, illegal labor, drug trafficking, and potential security threats emanating from regional extremism are all common problems that Europeans have to deal with. In addition, all European states are dependent on global trade and the flow of Middle Eastern oil imports. The Balkans are certainly part of Europe, but cannot be separated from the issue of Islam, and related problems in the Middle East. Looking towards the future, if Russia and the states of Southeastern Europe are fully recognized as parts of Europe, the already blurred lines between the Middle East and Central Asia will become more of an issue, and other priorities will be added to those of today's Europe.

Therefore, institutions like NATO and the EU should be able to take common action to these common concerns and interests in the region. The need for common capabilities and unified power projection is what the Europe needs to fulfill its long term objectives in the region. Given this background, the primary answer to the question of what role Europe should play in the Middle East is that; it should play a pragmatic role in which different mixes of European states bring different mixes of capabilities to an issue and actively work towards viable solutions in the Middle East. The time has perhaps now

²¹⁴ "The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Ten Years On: Reassessing Readiness and Prospect" Source: International Monetary Fund

come where actions over regional matters can take place on a NATO and European Union basis; rather than that of individual nation states.

Prospective European Actions

For Europe to regain its momentum in the Middle East, it has to have a solid action plan not only for ensuring its long-term interests and objectives, but also to ensuring stability and development in the region.²¹⁵

For instance, building strategic partnerships with key regional players is crucial for Europe. If Europe is to play the right role in the Middle East, it will have to do so with the support of twenty or more regional players on the European side.

A firm footing cannot, after all, be established without the backup of those who might potentially emerge as key regional players on the political arena. This is a reality that ultimate triumph is only bequeathed to the players in the game, not those who sit on the sidelines.

Below are, therefore, some of the potential actions the European Union can consider for the future of the region:²¹⁶

Looking beyond the Military Dimension

This means that Europe must play a critical role in terms of trade policy, development aid, and energy investment. Therefore, the non-military role of Europe must extend into several critical areas of diplomacy, investment, trade, and aid to the region.

Promoting diplomacy and dialogue

When it comes to certain regional matters, Europe can play a diplomatic role that the US cannot. This means that if the US must play the role of "bad cop," Europe can play the role of "good cop." The European dialog with Iran and its willingness to invest in Iran in spite of US sanctions law could be a case in point.

Investing in Development and Nation-building

A dedicated European role in the economic and infrastructural development of war torn countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine is exceedingly crucial. These states could become great source of instability and insecurity if a concerted approach is not developed on time.

Conclusion regarding Europe

The most useful role Europe can play in the Middle East is to; not seek an impossible European or Transatlantic consensus, and to not attempt to create European military capabilities that are broad copies of American forces.

Far too much of the dialog on Europe's role in the Middle East is likely to rather focus on how to refine European policies and capabilities to ensure not only the stability of the region, but also the ability of Europe to take over its role as a rising power in the region on the long run.

²¹⁵ "Europe's Middle East Challenges" Source: The Washington Quarterly

²¹⁶ "The Role of Europe in the Middle East-An American Perspective" Source: The IISS/CEPS European Security Forum

THE ROLE OF CHINA

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, its foreign policy toward the Middle Eastern region is classified into four distinct eras which demonstrate rather different types of involvement.²¹⁷

The first phase of engagement occurred during 1949 to 1955. This era was marked by an ambition to keep pace with the Soviet Union and to maintain an ideologically consistent set of policies. Consistency was simplified by Beijing not setting up diplomatic relations with any Middle East countries. For this reason the Chinese leadership generally had a critical attitude towards rulers of independent nations in Middle East. None of the eleven independent countries in the region, with the exception of Israel, recognized the PRC. Not only that, the Political Committee of the Arab League voted to recognize Taiwan rather than the PRC as the legitimate representative of the Chinese people in 1950. The PRC, however, supported anti-colonial efforts as it favored the 1951 anti-British campaign in Egypt, the nationalization of Iran's oil industry in 1952, and the anti-French struggle in Algeria. The Chinese leadership adopted a neutral stance in territorial disputes such as Turkey and Syria, the Arab-Israeli conflict and Iran-Iraqi war.

During the second era, 1956-1966, the Chinese leadership came to see the anti-Western Arab movements and, therefore, sought to strengthen relations with them. As the radical pan-Arab nationalist leaders, such as Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, entered into conflicts with the West, they turned for support to the Soviet Union and China. In return, Beijing established diplomatic relations with Egypt, Syria and Yemen in 1956. During the Suez Canal crisis of 1956, China became the second strongest supporter of Egypt after the USSR. In the summer of 1958, the Chinese government strongly denounced the American intervention in Lebanon and the British intervention in Jordan, while establishing diplomatic ties with the newborn republic of Iraq. In 1959, the newly-independent Morocco, Sudan, and Somalia established diplomatic ties with China. This warming up of relations with the Arabs meant that Sino-Israeli relationship cooled down. After the Suez Canal crisis, Beijing denounced Israel as "*the tool of imperialist policies*," and all contact between the two countries came to an end. From then on until the mid-1980s, China stood entirely on the Arab side in its conflict with Israel.

1966-1976 marked the third era of PRC's engagement with the region. For several years, the Cultural Revolution paralyzed China's relations with everyone including the Middle East. Once diplomacy resumed in the early 1970s, China's Middle East policies marked an anti-Soviet feature. The Soviet military force posed the biggest threat to China. In response, Mao and Zhou Enlai proposed the uniting of all forces to fight Soviet hegemony. As an active Middle East diplomacy developed on the basis of anti-Soviet goals, Beijing established diplomatic ties with three pro-Western countries in 1971; Turkey, Iran, and Lebanon. With the accession of Deng Xiaoping in 1977, China started to adopt a less ideological and more practical diplomacy, with the aim of

²¹⁷ "*China's Success in the Middle East*" Source: The Middle East Quarterly

creating a favorable international environment for China's modernization program. This approach led to relations with all the regional countries and a substantial increase in Chinese influence. Beijing no longer made a state's relations with Washington or Moscow the criterion for distinguishing between enemy and friend; instead, benefits to China itself became the basis of decisions.

Between 1977 and 1990, China set up diplomatic relations with a great number of Middle Eastern states: Jordan, Oman, Libya, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, as well as the Palestine. In 1992, China resumed its diplomatic relations with Israel. The Kuwait war further enhanced China's influence in the region, as it supported the moderate forces (ex. Egypt and the Gulf states) while also maintaining normal relations with the hard-liners of the Arab world as the Russian role continued to diminish. China now maintains good relations with all Middle East countries, ranging from America's close allies (Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) to intensely anti-American states (Libya, Iran, and even Iraq). Since 1990s, China has moved fast ahead in building economic, trade, scientific, technological, and military ties. Chinese arms have also entered Middle East with major buyers including Egypt, Iraq, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Most importantly, China has become the largest oil importer from the region; a drift that will continue.

China's Three-Fold Interests

Since late 1980s, China's Middle East policy primarily revolves around its desire to maximize its economic interests without becoming entangled in political controversies. With the end of the Cold War and China's emergence as a net oil importer in 1993, China's primary interest in the Middle East has been to gain access to the region's vast oil and gas supplies. Besides, there is the lucrative market for arms sales that China intends to dominate. Lastly, the problem of Chinese Muslims is a major cause of concern that Beijing wants to contain through the exploitation of positive relations with the Middle Eastern region.

Trade and Energy

The Middle East has become China's fourth largest trading partner. Being so late in entering the region, and having less to offer in economic or technology terms than the United States, Russia, Japan, and Europe, China has gone after marginal markets where others cannot or will not go to supply customers or service them with goods. Besides trading goods, China in 1993 became a net oil importer with 30 percent of its oil needs imported from the Middle East. More than ever, China now needs Middle Eastern oil as the competition over the control of regional natural resources is intensifying on a daily basis.

As the overall Chinese demand for fuel resources is rising, declining domestic petroleum production and growing domestic automobile sales exacerbates China's thirst to the point that the PRC has accounted for 40 percent of global oil demand growth since 2000.²¹⁸ Thus, it is highly likely that

²¹⁸ "Energy First: China and the Middle East" Source: The Middle East Quarterly

China will further increase its dependence on Middle Eastern oil in the coming years. The Middle East currently provides over 45 percent of China's total oil imports whereas by 2015, 70 percent of China's oil imports are expected to come from the region. Beijing's extensive interest in Middle Eastern energy resources is evidenced by the considerable number of major long-term oil and gas deals that it has signed with Arab countries. Recent Chinese energy investments in major oil and gas suppliers, including Iran and Saudi Arabia, with lengthy contract durations are aimed not only at locking up a continuous, secure stream of energy supplies, but also at taking control of the exploration and development of oil fields.

Arms Sales

Chinese policy in the Middle East has grown more active over the past decade. As part of its modernization processes in 1978, China commercialized its arms supplies and looked to the Middle East as a prime customer.²¹⁹ The prolonged Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s and the U.S-Soviet arms embargo upon the martial nations proved advantageous to China. As Iran and Iraq looked to Beijing for arms supplies, Chinese weapons were in action on both sides of the Shatt al-Arab waterway.

During 1980, China actively promoted proliferation of nonconventional weapons and helped countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria to acquire missile capabilities. The principal area of Chinese profit has been arms sales and Iran is the number-one customer that has acquired missile, nuclear, and chemical warfare capability from Beijing. Growing Chinese oil purchases from Iran would also increase Beijing's incentives for balancing trade through weapons' supplies.

Since 2000, however, the Chinese leadership has supposedly tried to put an end to unbalanced armament which poses a threat to Middle East security. To that end, the Chinese government has adjusted its policy toward arms control and disarmament from one of detachment to active participation. Even though Beijing's pledge to adhere to U.S. counter-proliferation policy, its willingness to cultivate relations with Middle Eastern states indicates that its promises are insincere. Therefore, conflict over the sales of weapons capabilities to the Middle East is likely to continue between China and the U.S. in the future.

Xinjiang

A third factor that drives China's interest in the region is over the unrest in its mineral-rich western province of Xinjiang which inhibits 10 million Muslims. Separatists have sparked riots, assassinations, and bombings since 1996. Nationalist, religious restrictions and economic discontent are sparked and aided by other members of these communities in neighboring Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, as well as by sympathizers in Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia or even Afghanistan. This instability is discouraging Western investors from developing the oil reserves in that province.

²¹⁹ "Providing Arms: China and the Middle East" Source: Middle East Quarterly

Since Middle East is the ideological center of the Islamic world, China attempts to maintain good relations with the Arab world in order to get their support on the Uighur insurgency in Xinjiang Province and maintain amicable relations with the 55 million Muslims residing in China. Moreover, china's rhetorical if not substantive support for the U.S. war on terrorism in the immediate aftermath of September 11, 2001, was in large part an effort to seize a strategic opportunity to defeat separatist forces in China by furthering the oppression of the 10 million Muslims in Xinjiang province. Whether this problem poses a serious challenge to the Chinese interests in the Middle East on the long run remains an open question.

The Future Role of China

China's foreign policy is undergoing a unique transformation. Its diplomacy is transforming from "responsive diplomacy" to "proactive diplomacy" as the world has noticed this potential makeover. The age of Chinese passivity in the Middle East is over. Beijing is now determined to play an increasingly active role in the region with the goal of ensuring long-term energy security. Although China has boosted its own domestic production over the years, demand is outpacing domestic supply.

The Int'l Energy Agency predicts that within a quarter-Century, China will import 10 million barrels a day.²²⁰ As China's thirst for oil is growing on an accelerated pace, energy security poses a critical challenge for its Middle East policy.

Because the Chinese government views the United States as a strategic rival, it remains concerned about becoming reliant for its oil imports upon sea lanes secured by the U.S. Navy. It has therefore embarked on a two-sided approach.

In the medium-term, perhaps for decades to come, China will have no alternative to the Middle East for the bulk of its energy supply. The core of China's energy strategy is thus to buy equity stakes in Middle Eastern development projects and to improve ties with two of its main suppliers, Iran and Saudi Arabia. In the longer-term, the Chinese government could develop capabilities that will allow China to strengthen and rely on its own domestic production.

Conclusions regarding China

China lacks the enormous strategic interests that the U.S has in the Middle East and does not seek to play a leading military role there. This premise shows the logic of China's policies of non-military engagement, which in the long run help China expand its influence in the region. However, China's involvement in the Arab-Israeli Peace process reflects a very practical concern: peace can bring the stability needed to ensure a steady flow of oil. Therefore, China as a possible future mediator is likely to provide key efforts in order to support the finding of a lasting solution to the Arab-Israeli long-pursued conflict.

²²⁰ "China in the Middle East" Source: Perspectives from the Arab World; United Arab Emirates University

CONCLUSION

Despite the rising and competing roles in the region, the preservation of a firm cooperative system between the United States, the European countries and China to find common positions is extraordinarily important. The United States, considering its contemporary regional challenges, will be unable to implement a solution by itself. China, whose strategic interests are increasingly being asserted in the area, and of course the European Union whose security is largely threatened by an unstable Middle East, must all contribute to the search for solutions to the Middle East's crises in order to ensure the sustainability of their individual as well as long-term common interests. Advancing sustainable and meaningful political and economic reform in the Middle East will require the efforts of governments on both sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific. American, European and Chinese policymakers should build upon their shared strategic framework and should focus on their points of relative similarity as a foundation from which transatlantic cooperation in the Middle East can be effectively nurtured.

THE IMPACT OF OIL

INTRODUCTION

The discovery of oil in the Middle East was a turning point in its history. First it was discovered in Iran in 1908 and later in the other Gulf States and in North Africa. The Middle East turned out to possess the world's largest easily accessible reserves of crude oil, the most important commodity in the 20th Century industrial world.²²¹ According to the point of view of an American official in 1944 "The oil in this region is the greatest single prize in all history."²²²

By the end of 2005, the countries of the Arab world held 667 billion barrels of oil reserves and 53 trillion cubic meters (1,870 tcf) of gas reserves, or 56% and 30% of the world's total oil and gas reserves, respectively.²²³

Of the 22 Arab League member states²²⁴, 14 are producers of oil and gas. The six countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) together with Iraq, Algeria and Libya account for 98% of total Arab oil reserves, 95% of gas reserves and 90% of all Arab oil and gas production. In 2004, the oil sector (oil and gas production, processing and refining) contributed between 30 to 60% of the respective gross domestic product (GDP) of those economies.²²⁵

Oil wealth had the effect of moving oil producing countries in the Middle East towards achieving economic, political and social development. As oil prices rose to new highs over the past four decades, most states in the Middle East benefited from heightened revenues in building their infrastructures, strengthening and diversifying their economies, raising levels of education, health and social services, and creating more job opportunities for locals and for expatriates from all over the world.

Large oil producers such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar utilized the high export earnings in expanding their foreign investments in the region and abroad and contributing effectively to the international emergency relief programs aimed at assisting countries affected by natural disasters and internal conflicts. Oil was also used a strategic weapon during the 1970s, when oil prices rose up after the cutoff of Arab petroleum during the Arab-Israeli war. The economic impact was extensive and led the world to be more conservative and explore new energy sources.

²²¹ History of Middle East. www.absoluteastronomy.com/topic/history-of-middle-east.

²²² The individual quoted was a member of a delegation led by Everette Lee DeGolyer, a deputy to Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes in the Petroleum Administration for War. Yergin, *The Prize*, p. 393. Saudi Arabia and United States, 1031-2002, journal MERIA" Middle East Review of International Affairs, Volume 6, No. 3-September 2002, by Josh Pollack .

²²³ The Contribution of the Oil Sector to Arab Economic Development, paper presented by Dr. Majid Al-Moneef at the High-level Roundtable *Partnership for Arab Development: A Window of Opportunity* held at OFID on May 5, 2006, OFID PAMPHLET SERIES 34, Vienna, Austria, September 2006, http://www.ofid.org/publications/PDF/ofid_pan34.pdf. page13

²²⁴ Arab League, informal name of the League of Arab States, 22 countries.

²²⁵ The Contribution of the Oil Sector to Arab Economic Development, by Dr. Majid Al-Moneef, Page 13

This paper highlights the positive impact of oil on some countries in the Middle East, particularly at the political, social and economic levels, and discusses the impact of oil and gas industry on environment, its future in the Middle East and the strategies of some countries finding alternative energy sources.

HISTORY OF OIL

Petroleum has become steadily more useful and valuable since it was drilled by Edwin Drake (1819-1880) in 1859. The first major oil fields were discovered in Pennsylvania and Ohio, with major strikes in Texas and Oklahoma to follow in 1901. Shortly after, the first oil concessions in Persia (now Iran) were granted, and the race for Middle East oil was on. In the following years, oil was discovered in many places in the Middle East, including the Arabian Peninsula, beneath the Caspian Sea, beneath what would become the nations of Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and others. In 1944, a prominent petroleum geologist named Everette DeGolyer reported to the U.S. government that he was certain that the Middle East nations were sitting atop at least 25 billion barrels of crude oil, at least 5 billion of which were in Saudi Arabia. Not reported at that time were his unofficial estimates of up to 300 billion barrels of oil—a third of which he thought underlay Saudi Arabia. In a report to the State Department, DeGolyer's team commented that "The oil in this region is the greatest single prize in all history." Since that time, the discovery and exploitation of oil in the Middle East has had a profound influence on modern society and politics. Oil created vast fortunes and industrial empires, and caused at least one war. The widespread use of petroleum gave birth to OPEC, realigned twentieth-Century politics, and much more. It's safe to say that the huge reserves found in the Middle East played a tremendously important role in shaping the world we live in.²²⁶

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a permanent, intergovernmental Organization, created at the Baghdad Conference on September 10–14, 1960, by Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. OPEC's objective is to co-ordinate and unify petroleum policies among Member Countries, in order to secure fair and stable prices for petroleum producers; ensure an efficient, economic and regular supply of petroleum to consuming nations; and a fair return on capital to those investing in the industry.

According to current estimates, more than three-quarters of the world's proven oil reserves are located in OPEC Member Countries, with the bulk of OPEC oil reserves in the Middle East, amounting to 72% of the OPEC total.

The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC):

The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) is a regional inter-governmental organization established in 1968 in Kuwait by

²²⁶ Oil is discovered in the Middle East. www.bookrages.com/research.

an agreement amongst the Arab countries which rely on the export of petroleum. The organization aims at developing petroleum industry in the region and promoting cooperation among its members in areas of effective use of oil resources and in sponsoring joint ventures. The Organization believes that building an integrated petroleum industry in the region is the cornerstone for future economic integration amongst Arab countries. On 2006, 56.4% percentage of Oil comes from the Middle Eastern members of OAPEC.²²⁷

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OIL

For the Middle East: Oil has changed the face of life in the Middle East. Before the discovery of oil, people in countries such as United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were living on fishing, diving for pearls, shipbuilding, handicrafts, goldsmith and grazing. However, a big leap forward was achieved in these countries after oil was discovered where the huge oil revenues were used in achieving unprecedented levels of economic, social and industrial development, placing those countries among the high-income countries in the world in terms of per capita income, health care, social services and economic development.

For the World: As the Middle East embraces 77.9% of oil reserves in the world according to the above-mentioned statistical information, the steady flow of oil from the Middle East has gained strategic importance to developed and industrial countries which largely depend on oil supplies coming from this region for meeting their energy requirements and advancing their industries. The protection of oil sources in the Middle East required in some cases the intervention of international forces to resolve disputes and conflicts arising among oil producing countries in order to ensure the stability of these countries and the steady flow of oil (Gulf war).

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF OIL

Advancing National Development Plans

Oil revenues enabled producing countries in the Middle East to move ahead with their development plans where billions of dollars were invested in building strong infrastructure, advancing national development plans in areas of education, health and social welfare, establishing industries, and developing the human capital.

Diversification of the Economy and Reduction of the Role of the State:

The economies of Arab oil exporters are now more diversified and resilient, with larger non-oil exports than during earlier boom periods. Economic reform programs, including price reforms, privatization and subsidy reduction or phasing out, have reduced the burden on the government, either as the spender or the employer of last resort. In most of the countries, the financial market is now deeper and better integrated in the world system. Inter-regional trade and investment flows – especially among GCC countries – are

²²⁷ (UAE 8.42% , Bahrain 0.01% , Tunisia 0.03% , Algeria 1.05% , KSA 22.76% , Syria 0.26% , Iraq 9.91% , Qatar 1.31% , Kuwait 8.74% , Libya 3.57% , Egypt 0.32%) Oil Reserves in OAPEC Member and World 2006 Billion barrels . www.oapec.org .

larger, while the degree of economic integration is greater and the institutions governing them are more mature. Historically, oil revenues have helped consolidate the role of the state in the economies of Arab oil exporting countries.

The past 15 years, however, have seen the role of the state declining vis-à-vis the private sector as a result of the decreasing importance of government expenditure, and the increasing importance of the private sector in employment creation and capital formation. During the period when low oil revenues persisted, which lasted at least until 2000, Arab governments initiated reform programs that included trade liberalization, price and investment reforms, and the restructuring or privatization of public enterprises and activities, strategies that have been instrumental in reducing the role of the state.²²⁸

Gaining Economic and Political Powers:

The economies of oil producing countries in the Middle East have gained enormous strength over the past four decades and became more able to withstand global fluctuations especially with the financial measures taken by governments, which included establishment of sovereign wealth funds and diversification of economy.

Large oil producers in the Middle East such as Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Qatar also gained political power enabling them to play an important role in promoting stability in the region and achieving peaceful settlement for disputes. For example, Saudi Arabia has played an effective role in the achievement of Al Taif Agreement, which helped in putting an end to civil war in Lebanon.²²⁹ Qatar has also played an important part in bringing the Lebanese parties into reconciliation.

According to Mr. Robert Serry, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General "*There have been a number of important political developments in the Middle East this month. In Lebanon, an Arab League initiative led by Qatar has produced agreement to unblock an 18-month political impasse.*"²³⁰ Qatar is presently engaged as a mediator in resolving the Darfur problem in Sudan.

Playing an important role in international investments:

The sovereign wealth funds established in some oil producing countries in the Middle East have not only helped these countries to maintain their financial positions and increase their cash reserves, but also enabled them to make huge investments in the most strategic projects and organizations in the world such as Citigroup, UBS, Credit Suisse.²³¹

²²⁸ The Contribution of the Oil Sector to Arab Economic Development, By Dr. Majid Al-Moneef, page 32,36

²²⁹ Taif is a Saudi town located in the mountains of Saudi Arabia.

²³⁰ Security Council , 5899th meeting , The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question on, Wednesday, 28 May 2008, 10 a.m. , New York .

²³¹ Dr. Daniel W. Drezner, professor of international politics at Tafts University, at the national interest magazine, Dec. 2008 article: dependence on oil as virtue)

A major partner in international emergency relief programs:

Oil producing countries have made considerable contributions towards international efforts aimed at assisting countries affected by conflicts and natural disasters. United Arab Emirates, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar have been at the forefront of states helping affected countries. The UAE foreign assistance covered many parts of the world suffering from floods, draughts, earthquakes and civil conflicts especially in Asia and Africa. The UAE efforts in the regard included its continued humanitarian and financial assistance to the Palestinian people which totaled US\$ 4 billion over the past decades, as well as the decision of the UAE President to write off the Iraqi debt worth of US\$4billion as a genuine expression of brotherhood and solidarity between Iraq and the UAE and in order to assist the Iraqi Government to proceed with its national plans for reconstruction and rehabilitation²³². Also, Noor Dubai is an ambitious initiative from Dubai Government aiming at delivering preventive eye care to over 1 million people as part of its drive to realize its vision of a world free from curable forms of blindness²³³. The half-billion dollar contribution puts the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at the forefront of the large-scale, high-level, multilateral UN action by the global community, focused on emergency and longer-term solutions to the high food and fuel price crisis which is sweeping the globe. Rising food costs have left in their wake increased levels of hunger and poverty – and in some cases - provoking riots and destabilising governments.²³⁴

OIL AS A STRATEGIC WEAPON

The Arab countries used oil as a strategic weapon in October 1973 for pressuring the West to stop its support to Israel during the Arab Israeli war in 1973. The crude oil-rich Middle-Eastern countries had cut off exports of petroleum to Western nations (first oil crisis). Although the oil embargo would not ordinarily have made a tremendous impact on the US, panicking investors and oil companies caused a gigantic surge in oil prices. The situation turned out to be one of the most memorable of the 1970s.²³⁵

CASE STUDY - SAUDI ARABIA

Economy: According to the Ministry of Economy and Planning of Saudi Arabia, the value of the GDP has increased (at constant prices) nearly five-fold during the period 1970–2008. The steady growth has been accompanied by expanded use of advanced production technologies in many of the activities of the national economy, as well as by diversification of the economic structure and maximization of the role of private sector. According to the Doing Business 2008 report, issued by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) of the World Bank Group, the Kingdom was the sixteenth, among 181 countries.

²³² Emirates News Agency, WAM

²³³ www.noor-dubai.com

²³⁴ The World Food Programme Published on 23 May 2008 .www.wfp.org.

²³⁵ Energy Matters: <http://library.thinkquest.org/20331/history/mideast.html>

Education: Education was given special importance in Saudi Arabia. During the period 1970–2008, 13479 elementary schools were opened, at a rate of one school a day; 7692 intermediate schools were opened, at a rate of one school every two days; and 4731 secondary schools were opened, at a rate of one every 3 days. Similarly, higher education has achieved remarkable quantitative and qualitative progress. By the end of 2008, the number of universities reached 21, and the number of community colleges 35, while the number of students enrolled in higher education increased more than 94 times during the period 1970–2008. Saudi Arabia was also keen to transfer knowledge and advanced technology to its people through foreign trade and foreign direct investments, and with help of experts and specialists from various advanced countries. Numbers of people sent on scholarships abroad to acquire modern knowledge and expertise were also increased.

Social development and healthcare: The government provided various types of benefits to the citizens and special attention was accorded to the needy families, the disabled and those with special needs. By the end of 2008, the Real-estate Development Fund had provided about 151.6 billion Riyals of soft financing for the construction of housing. As for health, primary healthcare centers and supportive healthcare services were expanded significantly, resulting in availability of preventive and curative health services throughout the country. sector.²³⁶

CASE STUDY - UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

Economy: The UAE is one of the most developed countries in the world, based on various socioeconomic indicators such as GDP per capita, energy consumption per capita, and the HDI. At \$270 billion in 2008, the GDP of the UAE ranks second in the CCASG (after Saudi Arabia), third in the Middle East—North Africa (MENA) region (after Saudi Arabia and Iran), and 38th in the world).²³⁷ There are various deviating estimates regarding the actual growth rate of the nation's GDP, however all available statistics indicate that the UAE currently has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. The UAE controls roughly 10 percent of the world's oil supply and nearly 5 percent of the world's proven natural gas reserves. Oil and gas production provides about one-third of the GDP (\$57.7 billion - 2003 est.). The United Arab Emirates is becoming less dependent on natural resources as a source of revenue. A massive construction boom, an expanding manufacturing base, and a thriving services sector are helping the UAE diversify its economy. Nationwide, there is currently \$350 billion worth of active construction projects. The new industries which have been created as part of the diversification plan include: Construction, Information Technology, Finance, Manufacture of consumer goods, Tourism, establishment of re-export centers and Free Trade Zones.²³⁸

²³⁶ Ministry of Economy and Planning of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Development March, www.mep.gov.sa/inetforms/article/Download.

²³⁷ World Economic Outlook , Spillovers and Cycles in the Global Economy ,April 2007.

²³⁸ Economy of the UAE.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/economy_of_the_United_Arab_Emirates.

Social Development: The UAE is a tolerant and open society that cherishes its traditional roots. The UAE population enjoys high standard of living and is now reaping the benefits of considerable investments in education, health and social services. The country's social security policy illustrates this effort – in 2008 the Government allocated over DH2.2 billion (US\$ 600 million) in financial assistance to 16 vulnerable sections of society numbering nearly 38,000 people with the elderly, physically challenged, orphans, widows and divorced women topping the list of beneficiaries. In addition, world-class private healthcare services are being built throughout the country as the Government redefines its role from provider to regulator.

Education: more than 648,000 students were enrolled in 1259 public and private schools in 2007/2008 and the Government's policy of guaranteeing free education up to university level for all citizens has resulted in a 93 per cent literacy rate. Today, the UAE has over 60 public and private universities and its drive to improve education across the board, hand-in-hand with the private sector, is a key component of Government Strategy.²³⁹ Investments in developing higher education in the UAE included establishment of international universities in the UAE such as Paris Sorbonne University and New York University. In May 2006, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) and Paris Sorbonne University opened a new university in the city of Abu Dhabi, UAE – the University's first overseas campus.²⁴⁰ NYU Abu Dhabi, the first comprehensive liberal arts campus established by a major U.S. research university, officially opened the doors to its Downtown Campus on 7 December, 2009. The school's first class of students will arrive in August 2010.²⁴¹

THE NEGATIVE IMPACT OF OIL

Disputes and Conflicts

Oil was not only a source of wealth and prosperity in the Middle East, but was also a cause for conflicts between countries as in Iraq and Kuwait war in the 1990's, and a motive for separatism for regions rich in oil such as southern Sudan and northern Iraq:

Iraq-Kuwait war (The Second Gulf war – 1990) In 1989, Iraq accused Kuwait of using "advanced drilling techniques" to exploit oil from its share of the Rumaila field. Iraq estimated that US\$2.4 billion worth of Iraqi oil was stolen by Kuwait and demanded compensation.²⁴² ²⁴³ Kuwait dismissed the accusations as a false Iraqi ploy to justify military action against it. but some Iraqi sources indicate Saddam Hussein's decision to attack Kuwait was made

²³⁹ UAE at Glance 2009 pg 67,69,68 .

²⁴⁰ <http://www.sorbonne.ac>

²⁴¹ <http://www.prnewswire.com>

²⁴² The Colonial present, Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq By Derek Gregory , p156. Iraq.

²⁴³ Short History Lest We Forget, Part I.

only a few months before the actual invasion²⁴⁴. The invasion started on August 2, 1990. The state of Kuwait was abolished, Saddam announced in a few days that it was the 19th province of Iraq.

Conflict in Sudan: The real driving force behind the North-South conflict in Sudan became clear after Chevron discovered oil in southern Sudan in 1978. The traditional competition for water at the fringes of the Sahara was transformed into quite a different struggle. The Arab-dominated government in Khartoum redrew Sudan's jurisdictional boundaries to exclude the oil reserves from southern jurisdiction. Thus began Sudan's 21-year-old North-South civil war. The conflict then moved south, deep into Sudan, into wetter lands that form the headwaters of the Nile and lie far from the historical competition for water. Oil pipelines, pumping stations, well-heads, and other key infrastructure became targets for the rebels from the South, who wanted a share in the country's new mineral wealth, much of which was on lands they had long occupied. John Garang, leader of the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), declared these to be legitimate targets of war.²⁴⁵

Conflict over Kirkuk in Iraq: The oil-rich Kirkuk region may contain as much as 20 percent of Iraq's oil reserves, reported finding Dulcinea in 2007. Under the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish people were intentionally displaced from Kirkuk and the city underwent an "Arabization." A reversal of this policy could lead to even more conflict for the people living in the area. And while Iraq's refineries and oil pipelines were intentionally kept away from Kurdistan during Hussein's reign, the area opened its first refinery on June 18 of 2009, and has entered into production agreements directly with foreign oil companies. These moves could help Kurdistan become economically independent, but were made without the permission of Iraqi leaders in Baghdad.²⁴⁶

Attempts of the West to Dominate Oil in the Middle East

In the 18th and 19th centuries, major European nations competed to establish and maintain colonies around the world. Superior military power and economic leverage allowed them to create new markets for their manufactured goods, and to exploit the natural resources of the African, American, and Asian continents. Since the early part of the 19th Century, Europeans tried to control the Middle East. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 divided the Ottoman lands between the British and the French, giving those nations control over any natural resources, most importantly oil. Modern armies were thirsty for oil. The British navy was the first to switch from coal to oil in 1912, and other new technologies, like automobiles and airplanes, quickly and drastically increased the demand for fuel. The United States was becoming an important player in

²⁴⁴ Gause, F. Gregory, III (2005). "The International Politics of the Gulf" in Louise Fawcett (ed.), "International Relations of the Middle East". Oxford: The University Press. pp. 263–274.

²⁴⁵ War of the Future. Oil drives the Genocide in Darfur. By David Morse, Published on Friday, August 19, 2005 by TomDispatch.com, www.commondreams.org.

²⁴⁶ Oil Refinery Could Spark Start of Kurd/Arab Civil War in Iraq, July 22, 2009 05:32 PM by Haley A. Lovett.

world affairs during the early 20th Century, and soon Americans found they, too, had a vested interest in developing and controlling oil reserves in the Middle East to supply their growing needs. Because the Middle East has the world's largest deposits of oil in an easily extracted form, Middle Eastern oil continues to be necessary to the United States. American dependence on foreign oil has grown steadily over the years; currently about 55 percent of the oil consumed in the U.S. is imported. This reliance on foreign oil leaves the country vulnerable to unilateral political and economic acts by oil producing countries. For example, 9 percent of the oil used by Americans after the war still came from Iraq, shipped through other countries.²⁴⁷ There is substantial evidence that America's interest in Iraq was motivated by oil, not just national security.²⁴⁸

Impact of Oil Industry on the Environment

Offshore exploration and extraction of oil disturbs the surrounding marine environment. Extraction may involve dredging, which stirs up the seabed, killing the sea plants, sea birds, mammals, shellfish and other organisms it coats. Control of oil spills is difficult, requires ad hoc methods, and often a large amount of manpower.²⁴⁹

The assault on the environment was further escalated when the Iraqi forces deliberately set explosives around the well heads. Evidence shows that most well heads were either damaged or blown up. The systematic destruction of oil wells is alleged to have commenced on 21 February 1991. This tactic resulted in a large number of Kuwait oil wells being set on fire: the final number was in the region of 650. Smoke from the 650 oil fires caused an increase in respiratory illnesses in Kuwait population, especially in the young, sick and the elderly. Ultimately, it can also cause harm to plant-life and soil viability as well as increasing risk of cancer and mortality in both humans and animals.²⁵⁰

Impact of Low Oil Prices on the Economic and Social Development

The economies of oil producing countries in the Middle East were deeply affected by international fluctuations in oil prices and the recent economic recession. The present economic and financial crises, which took place last year and continues to this moment, has affected medium and long term plans for economic and social development in oil producing countries. Other affected sectors included workers' remittances, tourism, investments and employment opportunities.

THE FUTURE OF OIL

The oil sector, which has contributed to growth and development in the Arab world for the past thirty years, is expected to maintain its role, but

²⁴⁷ What role have natural resources played in the politics and economy of the Middle East Global Connections in the Middle East, www.pbs.org.

²⁴⁸ "Official: US oil at the heart of Iraq crisis", Sunday Herald newspaper (UK), 6 October 2002.

²⁴⁹ waste discharge during the offshore oil and gas activity by Stanislav Patin, translation by Elena Cascio, based on "Environment impact of the offshore Oil and Gas Industry.

²⁵⁰ International Humanitarian Law Series, War Torn Environment: Interpreting the legal threshold by Karen Holms.

through different channels and relationships. For example, the results from the latest OPEC World Energy Model (OWEM) base case scenario indicate that world oil consumption is projected to increase by 30 million barrels a day (mbd) through 2025, or at an annual average of 1.5 mbd. Based on the results of the above model, if Arab OPEC member countries continue to supply 72% of total oil production (today totaling 24 mbd), then Arab countries would be expected to supply 39 mbd, or 15 mbd of incremental world oil supply by 2025.

Total cumulative investments by 2010 in the oil and gas chains in Arab countries – through national oil companies, FDI, or both – are estimated at \$183 billion. These investments are expected to be carried out in an environment of relatively higher oil prices, improved prospects for increased oil and gas exports, and a favorable business climate in the countries concerned.²⁵¹

Because reserves in non-Middle East countries are being depleted more rapidly than those of Middle East producers, their overall reserves-to-production ratio -- an indicator of how long proven reserves would last at current production rates -- is much lower (about 15 years for non-Middle East and 80 years for Middle East producers). If production continues at today's rate, many of the largest producers in 2002, such as Russia, Mexico, U.S., Norway, China and Brazil will cease to be relevant players in the oil market in less than two decades. At that point, the Middle East will be the only major reservoir of abundant crude oil. In fact, Middle Eastern producers will have a much bigger piece of the pie than ever before. Projecting 2001 production levels, by 2020 83% of global oil reserves will be controlled by Middle Eastern regimes.²⁵²

The national strategies of governments have focused on three areas:

- Finding alternate sources of energy.
- Encouraging and financing technology researches.
- Creating sovereign wealth funds for investment and development projects.

Finding Alternate Sources of Energy

The need to accelerate the development of alternative sources of energy, including clean and renewable energy, is now greater than ever. Efforts aimed at safeguarding the environment and decreasing pollution in the Middle East include development of alternate sources of energy and introduction of energy-efficient production techniques.

Alternative low-carbon energy sources, such as solar, wind and hydrocarbon power are becoming increasingly attractive in the UAE, especially since the US\$ 15 billion Masdar initiative was launched in 2006, marking Abu Dhabi as the first Major hydrocarbon- producing nation to embrace renewable and sustainable energy. Masdar city is powered entirely by renewable energy.²⁵³

²⁵¹ The Contribution of the Oil Sector to the Arab Economic Development, by Dr. Majid Al-Moneef, Page 27,40.

²⁵² The Future Oil , Institute for the Analysis of Global Security , www.igas.org .

²⁵³ UAE at Glance 2009.

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, has been selected to house the secretariat of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), marking the first time an international organization has chosen a Middle East city for its headquarters. IRENA will be located in Abu Dhabi's Masdar City, the world's first carbon-neutral, zero-waste city powered entirely by renewable energy.²⁵⁴ Irena aspires to become the main driving force for promoting a rapid transition towards the widespread and sustainable use of renewable energy on a global scale. Acting as the global voice for renewable energies, IRENA envisages providing practical advice and support for both industrialized and developing countries, thereby helping to improve frameworks and build capacity. Moreover, the Agency intends to facilitate access to all relevant information, including reliable data on the potentials for renewable energy, best practices, effective financial mechanisms, and state-of-the-art technological expertise.²⁵⁵

Peaceful nuclear programs: In 2008, the UAE set up the Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation (ENEC) to assess and develop a peaceful nuclear energy program with a view to meeting future energy needs. The move followed consultations with the International Atomic Energy Agency and a number of western countries.²⁵⁶

Encouraging and Financing Technology Research

In September 2009, the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology (MIST) will open its new facilities at Masdar City with the intake of the first class of 100 students. Developed in cooperation with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), MIST will emulate MIT's high standards and offer Master's and Doctorate-level degree programmes focused on the science and engineering of advanced energy and sustainability technologies.²⁵⁷

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in Saudi Arabia has identified four primary strategic research thrusts and several interdisciplinary Research Centers that will apply science and technology to problems of human need, social advancement, and economic development. The 9 research centers established by KAUST include research centers for Clean Combustion and Solar and Alternative Energy Science and Engineering and Water Desalination Research Center.²⁵⁸

Creating Sovereign Wealth Funds

To address the fiscal imbalances associated with oil price volatility and the unpredictability of oil revenues, some oil exporting countries (Algeria, Oman and Qatar in the Arab world) have resorted to the establishment of special funds that are designed to stabilize budgetary revenue and thus, budgetary expenditure. When oil revenues are high, some part is channeled to the "stabilization fund," whose resources can be used later to finance the

²⁵⁴ Abu Dhabi Future Energy Co., www.masdar.ae .

²⁵⁵ Irena Preparatory Committee- About Irena - <http://www.irena.org>.

²⁵⁶ UAE at Glance 2009.

²⁵⁷ UAE at Glance 2009

²⁵⁸ (www.kaust.edu.sa/research/research.html).

shortfall.²⁵⁹ A Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF) is a state-owned investment fund composed of financial assets such as stocks, bonds, real estate, or other financial instruments funded by foreign exchange assets. These assets can include: balance of payments surpluses, official foreign currency operations, the proceeds of privatizations, fiscal surpluses, and/or receipts resulting from commodity exports. Sovereign Wealth Funds can be structured as a fund, pool, or corporation.

CONCLUSION

The discovery of oil in the Middle East had the effect of moving the region towards achieving economic, political and social development, where the new highs in oil prices over the past four decades enabled these countries to build their infrastructures, strengthen and diversify their economies, raise levels of education, health and social services, and create more job opportunities for locals and for expatriates from all over the world. The contribution of oil to development has not been confined to the economies of Arab oil exporters, but has spilled over to other Arab economies as well. Oil revenues also enhanced the regional and international standing of oil producing countries in the Middle East enabling them to play an effective part in assisting countries affected by natural disasters and internal conflicts in the region and other parts of the world.

The oil sector, which has contributed to growth and development in the Arab world for the past three decades, is projected to continue its role, but through different channels and relations.²⁶⁰

The opportunity still available to further improve the strategies of oil producing countries towards more effective and efficient use of oil revenues so that they can be better positioned to meet the present challenges. Diversifying and strengthening their national economies through investment in national development projects, promotion of the private sector, protection of the environment and biodiversity, combating desertification, and application of the latest technology will be an important step on the road.

We believe that oil had a very positive impact on every aspect of life in the Middle East over the past three decades and we expect the Middle East to continue to advance and make further achievements learning from its past experience.

²⁵⁹ The Contribution of the Oil Sector to Arab Economic Development, By Dr. Majid Al-Moneef, page 32

²⁶⁰ Ibid page 39.

WOMEN AND TERRORISM

*"It was always my wish to turn my body into deadly shrapnel against the Zionists
and to knock on the doors of heaven with the skulls of Zionists"*

Reem al-Reyashi, Palestinian Female Suicide Bomber

TERRORISM AND SUICIDE TERRORISM

On January 27, 2002, Wafa Idris, a member of al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, entered a shopping district on Jaffa Road in Jerusalem, Israel. Her intended role was to carry a knapsack with explosives across a checkpoint where her brother, who was in the Fatah, planned to blow himself up in a suicide mission. Armed with more than 10 kilos of explosives, Idris detonated the explosives killing 2 people and injuring more than 150 people. Her body laid in the middle of Jaffa Road haphazardly covered with a rubber sheet. Her right arm was torn off, lying several inches from her body. Idris's attack made the al-Aqsa the first Palestinian insurgent group to use a female suicide bomber in the Palestinian -Israeli conflict. She was originally recruited in connection with one of her brother's suicide attack mission in which she was supposed to just carry the explosives across a checkpoint, and her brother would later use them. Some reports indicate it was not certain whether the explosion was intended, or if the bomb exploded too soon.²⁶¹ However, what is certain is the desire and intent Wafa Idris had to leave her mark on a society. Her violent act of desperation is indicative of why the role of women in terrorist activity will continue to increase in the Middle East.

Terrorism is defined as the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.²⁶² From a terrorist's point of view, terror tactics are logical, valid activities to achieve a particular goal. Terrorism is rooted in specific economic, social and political grievances. More specifically, suicide terrorism is an essential role in female terrorism. Generally, suicide bombing is found in the second stage of conflicts and used mainly in countries where the society is receptive to terrorists targeting civilians.²⁶³ The International Policy Institute Counter Terrorism (ICT) defines suicide terrorism as "the operational method in which the very act of the attack is dependent upon the death of the perpetrator. [It is aimed at] striking a blow to public moral[e]."²⁶⁴ Suicide bombing provides an additional focus to terrorism. Its emphasis is not only on the victims but also on the perpetrators.

Currently, the involvement of women in terrorist activity is increasing in the Middle East. As of June 2004, Debra D. Zedalis of the U.S. Army War College identified eight organizations known to enlist female suicide bombers. These organizations are: Hezbollah, Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party,

²⁶¹ Skaine Rosemarie, Female Suicide Bombers

²⁶² [http:// www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/terrorism](http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/terrorism)

²⁶³ Bloom Mia, Dying to Kill, The Allure of Suicide Terrorism

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Kurdistan Workers Party, Chechen rebels, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Al-Qaeda Network and Iraqi insurgents.¹ The women who take part in terrorist activities are inspired by a sense of nationalism, revenge for suffering and oppression, financial and social rewards in becoming a suicide bomber, and the role of gender equality. The use of women as suicide bombers has proven to be more effective than that of male suicide bombers because it contradicts most gender stereotypes, such as the common stereotype that women are gentle, submissive and nonviolent. “What previously seemed highly unlikely because of the existing notions of woman as *victims of war* rather than as perpetrators, women are now taking a leading role in conflicts by becoming suicide bombers - using their bodies as human detonators for the explosive material strapped around their waists.”³

Terrorism is a manifestation of a complex explanation. The factors responsible for the woman’s role in terrorism are comprised of social, political and religious beliefs. A shared commonality that inspires a female suicide bomber is her environment. It does not provide her with an outlet to express her rage and frustration stemmed from her current situation. For them, suicide bombing is an outlet to express what they have kept silent due to restrictions within her society and the role of a “woman” they must uphold. Within this context, the importance of understanding the “why” behind terrorism highlights the woman’s participation in terrorism.

BRIEF HISTORY OF FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBING

History reveals that suicide terrorism existed as early as the 11th Century in the Middle East. Back then, “the Assassins (Ismalis-Nizari), Muslim fighters, adopted suicide terrorism as a strategy to advance the cause of Islam. These perpetrators perceived their deaths as acts of martyrdom for the glory of God.”²⁶⁴ Modern suicide bombing continues to utilize religious motives for its cause along with secular reasons. However, a difference between then and now is that the Assassins then, murdered specific individuals rather than random targets as done by today’s suicide bombers. It seems that the effectiveness of these tactics has led to its increased utilization by insurgent organizations. From 1980 to 2001, suicide bombings accounted for 3 percent of terrorist incidents, but caused half of the total deaths, even when the fatalities from 9/11 are excluded. Based on these results, the average suicide attack is 12 times more deadly than any other form of terrorism, even with the exclusion of the casualties of 9/11. Accordingly, suicide attacks have climbed from an average of less than five per year during the 1980s to 180 per year between 2000 and 2005, and from 81 suicide attacks in 2001 to 460 attacks in 2005.²⁶⁵

Specifically, women are not new to insurgent activities. Female terrorists have engaged in anti-colonial and revolutionary struggles in the Third World and elsewhere. Women have also played a role in modern terrorism since the 1960s. Some prominent examples include: the female participants in the

²⁶⁴ Zedalis D. Debra, Female Suicide Bomber

²⁶⁵ Atran Scott, The Moral Logic and Growth of Suicide Terrorism

campaign waged by the FLN during the Battle of Algiers in the late 1950s and early 1960s; the terror campaign of the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany; and the Palestinian hijackings at the end of the 1960s to the mid-1970s.

Female participation in suicide bombings is not a new phenomenon as women have participated in these acts in the Middle East since the 1980s. In 1985, the first known female suicide bomber, a 17 year old Lebanese girl named Sana'a Mehaydali, was sent by the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP/PPS), a secular pro- Syrian Lebanese organization, to blow herself up near an Israeli convoy in Lebanon, killing five soldiers. Out of 12 suicide attacks committed by the SSNP, women took part in five of them. Since then, women have driven bomb vehicles, carried bomber "bags," and strapped massive explosives and mental implements on their bodies in Lebanon, Sri Lanka, Israel, Turkey, and Iraq. Between 1985 and 2006, there have been in excess of 220 women suicide bombers, representing nearly 15 percent of suicide attacks worldwide.²⁶⁶ The upsurge in the number of female bombers has come from both secular and religious organizations. The recent increase in female suicide bombers within different venues, different countries, and in different organizations forces us to further investigate the role of the female suicide bomber.

FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS WITHIN THE MIDDLE EAST

Although in Asia, the LTTE became the world's foremost suicide bombers and provided the tactic to be so unnerving and effective that their methods and killing innovations were studied and copied, most notably in the Middle East. The Liberation of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a secular non- Muslim group engaged in suicide bombing in Sri Lanka, is the most notorious group of female insurgents. Also known as the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the LTTE is estimated to have 8,000 to 10,000 armed combatants in Sri Lanka, with a core of 3,000 to 6,000 trained fighters and 4,000 women. The LTTE has committed the most suicide attacks, approximately 200, using female bombers in 30-40 percent. Members of the LTTE suicide unit, which include men and women, are known as the "The Black Tigers"; the female suicide bomber unit is known as the Black Tigresses. The most infamous LTTE female bomber is Thenmuli Rajaratnam, also known as Dhanu. She belonged to the LTTE from the mid - 1980's and trained to become a Black Tigress. She was the first to use a suicide belt. She is famous for killing the Indian Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in May 1991. She detonated her explosive vest after bowing down at Ghandi's feet during an election rally. Tamil separatism between the Buddhist Sinhalese majority and the mostly Hindu Tamil minority has been part of Sri Lanka since it gained its independence from India in 1948. Since 1983, LTTE has been fighting for a separate homeland for minority ethnic Tamils. LTTE has accused the government of discrimination. As a result, LTTE incorporated the use suicide bombers to assist them in fighting for their independence.

Tamil society within Sri Lanka is traditional; therefore, women see membership in LTTE as an opportunity to be as equal to men. Female bombers share similar motivations to that of men, such as nationalism and

²⁶⁶ Schweitzer Yoram, *Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?*

revenge for suffering and oppression. “The LTTE has justified women’s involvement as its way of assisting women’s liberation and counteracting the oppressive traditionalism of the present society.” Another motivation for women within Tamil society is the desire to redeem themselves from incidents of sexual violence caused by the enemy. Many women have been raped and exposed to violence through the years of armed conflict. It is believed that women who join LTTE and become female martyrs overcome the shame and dishonor that rape has caused them.

Female suicide bombers within the Middle East draw interesting parallels to the female suicide bombers within Sri Lanka. For example, the occupation of Palestine provides political motivation for women to become suicide bombers. The Palestinian – Israeli conflict is an ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine. The conflict has intensified since Israel’s occupation of Palestine during the 1967 War. The status and the future of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem remains today a primary concern.²⁶⁷

An organization within the Middle East that recruits female suicide bombers is the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). It is also known by the following names: Islamic Jihad of Palestine, PIJ-Shaqaqi Faction, PIJ- Shalla Factions and Al-Quds Brigades.¹ They are located and operate primarily in Israel, West Bank and the Gaza Strip. PIJ is committed to the creation of an Islamic Palestinian state. They target and commit attacks against Israeli military and civilians inside Israel and the Palestinian territories. “Palestinian suicide bombing is a violent, politically motivated attack, carried out by people who deliberately blow themselves up together with a chosen target.”

In May 2003, Palestinian Islamic Jihad’s (PIJ) first female suicide bomber, Hiba Daraghmen, a 19 year old student, detonated a bomb in a shopping mall. A few months later in October 2003, the second PIJ female bomber struck, a 29 year lawyer, Hanadi Jaradat killed Israeli and Arab men, women and children in a popular restaurant.¹ As of June 2006, a woman claiming to represent Al Fatah- al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade announced the establishment of a secret military unit of 100 female suicide bombers from the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem. The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade is a group of West Bank militias affiliated with former Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat’s al-Fatah. The al-Aqsa attack was against the Israeli military and settlers from the West Bank, Gaza strip and Jerusalem. The group’s objective is to establish a Palestinian state, and as of 2002, they have begun to use insurgent attacks against Israeli civilians. The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade’s ideology is Palestinian nationalism, not political Islam.

Another political organization, Hamas, publicizes the use of women for their suicide missions. Toward the end of 1987, Hamas was formed as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim brotherhood. Their goal is to establish an Islamic Palestinian State in Israel. They are concentrated in Gaza Strip and West Bank and attack within Israel’s military and citizens. Hamas (Harkat- El Mukawma el Islamiya or “The Islamic Resistance Movement”) was inspired and

²⁶⁷ Pape A. Robert, *Dying to Win, The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*

assisted by Hezbollah. In January 2004, the first female Hamas bomber, Reem al-Reyashi, a 22 year old, killed four Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint with a ten pound bomb with ball bearings and screws. She is known as the first mother to commit a suicide mission. She quotes, *"I was hoping to be the first woman, where parts of my body can fly everywhere"*. She left behind her husband and two children, ages 3 and 1. It is reported that her attack was a joint operation between Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade.

The Al- Qaeda Network and Iraqi insurgents also have women committing suicide bombings. In March 2003, an interview was published by the Asharq Al- Awsat where a woman, Um Osama, claimed to be leader of the women Mujahadeen of Al- Qaeda. It is said that this network organizes female suicide bombers units from Afghans, Arabs, Chechens and others. Their main target is the United States. During the time of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, also in March 2003, two women, Waddad Jamil Jassem and Nour Qaddour Al-Shanbari, joined forces and attacked coalition forces utilizing a suicide car bomb attack at a checkpoint in Iraq. One of the female insurgents was pregnant at the time. In a video, Waddad Jamil Jassem, expressed her motivation by stating, "I have devoted myself to Jihad for the sake of God and against the American British and Israeli infidels and to defend the soil of our precious and dear country." The other female bomber, Nour Qaddour al-Shanbari, identified herself as "martyrdom-seeker." Gender confusion has also occurred in cases of Iraq suicide bombing missions. Many of the women dress up as men to carry out their missions. The first thought to be female suicide bomber for Al- Qaeda in Iraq was dressed as a male and detonated herself in Tal Afar in September 2005. Her reasoning and identity has yet to be disclosed.

Similar to the LTTE within Sri Lanka, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has a substantial number of women in its suicide unit. It is also a very traditional and extremely conservative society in which women have limited roles. In Kurdistan society, there is no such thing as equal rights, but the PKK grants equal rights for women. The PKK was founded in 1974 as a Marxist-Leninist separatist organization and was formally named the Kurdistan Workers Party in 1978. It is a secessionist secular Islamic movement. According to the U.S. State Department, PKK's primary goal is the establishment of an independent, democratic Kurdish state in southeast Turkey, northern Iraq, and parts of Iran and Syria. The method of suicide bombing is used to persuade the Turkish government in accepting PPK's demands of an independent, democratic Kurdish state.

The PKK are known for the use of women feigning pregnancies as suicide bombers. In June 1996, the first female PKK bomber strapped a bomb to her stomach as if she was pregnant. In Sivas, Turkey, Otas Gular, a 29 year old dressed as a pregnant woman, detonated her bomb and killed 2 policemen and wounded another. This was the third known bombing attack by PKK females who appeared to be pregnant.

MOTIVATING FACTORS OF FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

So, within the Middle East, what inspires a woman to become a suicide bomber? Motivations vary. The participation of women in suicide

bombing occurs for several reasons. Some of the motivational factors include: revenge for a personal loss, the desire to redeem the family name, the chance to escape the patriarchal societies and achieve fame, such as martyrdom, and the opportunity to gain financial rewards for their families. Female bombers often have social and political motivations rather than religious ones that inspire them. It seems, though, that many of these women share a common feeling that is at the core of their inspiration. These women are driven to blow themselves up by a feeling of desperation for change that has been fueled by their current environment.

For instance, the women who join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil (LTTE) are motivated by oppressive tactics taken by their government. "The government has committed organized violence against the Tamils through a systematic campaign of disappearances, rape, checkpoint searches, and torture—as well as the elimination of whole villages in remote areas."²⁶⁸ These tactics motivate these women to seek revenge for being oppressed as a people by not having equals rights within their society. Both men and women of the Tamil population feel that joining the LTTE provides them an opportunity to fight for change. In this respect, an effective measure taken by the LTTE is the utilization of the suicide bomber that helps publicize their fight for change.

Moreover, in certain instances, Tamil women solely seek revenge after being raped and tortured. These women join the LTTE after they have witnessed rape, heard about a rape from other villager, or witnessed the killing of Tamil's youth by the Sri Lankan Army.

*"Terrorism is often seen as a viable option for Tamil women who are survivors of sexual violence. Following a rape, Tamil women are considered 'damaged goods' and social customs prevent them from getting married or bearing children...The shame brought on by sexual violation is thus magnified by the humiliation of not being able to fulfill childbearing duties. Their participation compensates for their inability to give birth to future generations, and restores their personal and familial dignity."*²⁶⁹

These women's anger and hatred toward the Sri Lankan Army fuel their motivation to blow themselves up in an attempt to restore their personal dignity and their family's honor.

Similarly, female suicide bombers within the Middle East are often motivated by the feeling of nationalism sparked by Israel's occupation of Palestine. These individuals appear to be driven by a sense of humiliation or injustice caused by oppression. They feel that other (more peaceful) strategies have failed and becoming a suicide bomber is their sole expression of outrage. "The perception regarding the plight of the Palestinian people influence the willingness of young Egyptians, Saudis, Iraqis, and others (both men and women) to participate in suicide attacks."

The role religion plays in suicide terrorism consists mainly within the context of national resistance. Religion is a motivational factor but not the driving force. It offers the moral justification for committing these seemingly

²⁶⁸ Wntr Dadedalus, Goliath Article 2007, Female Suicide Bombers: A Global Trend

²⁶⁹ Von Knop Katharina, The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women

immoral acts. Suicide bombers can then see their own actions as being driven by a higher order; they believe their sacrifice will provide rewards for them in the afterlife. “Devout Muslims believe that, in death, every martyr, male or female, is welcomed by a minimum of 70 apparitions (hour-el-ein) of unnatural beauty who wipe away the martyr’s sins, open the gates of heaven, and provide them with all the pleasures that God has given to mankind.”

Beyond religious and patriotic motivations, female suicide bombers may receive large sums of money that can improve their family’s social status and enhance their own reputation. After their death, their families are showered with honor. Additionally, suicide bombers expect to be admired and envied by those left behind. Photographs capture them in heroic positions and are often used as recruitment tools.

Some women consider combat as a way to escape the predestined life that is expected of them. The traditional role of women throughout the Middle East and elsewhere has been that of nurturer and naïve creator of human life.⁶ For some women, suicide bombing is a way of leveling the patriarchal society through revolutionary zeal – the women demonstrate that their commitment is no less than those of their brothers, sons, or husbands. “When women become human bombs, their intent is to make a statement not only in the name of a country, a religion, a leader, but also in the name of their gender.”

The evidence of what drives women to blow themselves up is apparent. Motivations are comprised of religion, nationalism, economic, social and personal glory. It is often social and political motivations rather than an inherently religious one that inspires a female bomber. It is also important to recognize the psychology behind the decision of becoming a female suicide bomber. The perception of death is not viewed as “committing suicide” but more so as a glorified death. The role of the female suicide bomber stems from a mixture of motives driven by specific circumstances of despair and desperation fueled by her environment.

ROLES OF FEMALE SUICIDE BOMBERS

Research reveals that despite their high profile, women play a marginal role within their insurgent organizations, both numerically and in corporate structure. They are definitely not the leaders within their organizations. The female insurgent is not responsible for the planning of the operations, and on many of the cases, they are dispatched to their missions with barely a say as to their targets, the timing of the bombing, and the way the operation should be conducted. The female insurgent has not been trained as fighters, since suicide missions require little investment in job training, such as in time or money. For many of the women, the contribution of a suicide mission to their national or religious struggle is precisely a form of employment in the male-dominated domain of suicide bombing.

In addition, women arouse less suspicion and are better able to clear security obstacles. They do not have to undergo special training or possess specialized combat skills. Moreover, one of the major roles of a female suicide bomber is the fact that a woman attracts great media attention. This is a great asset to the insurgent organization. Media provides both an advertising and

recruitment tool for the insurgent groups. “Women who kill or threaten to kill are hot news. It is a reaction that knows no state or religious boundaries.” The insurgent organization’s cause or grievance will automatically enjoy greater exposure, which is the main objective of bombing itself.

Currently, there is no general profile of the “female suicide bomber”. However, for many of the insurgent organizations, a woman is just a vehicle for bringing the bomb to its target, just like a man. The international insurgent organizations, such as those of the Palestinian liberation movement and Al Qaeda in Iraq, promise little opportunity for women. Becoming a female suicide bomber does not guarantee the improved status of women in society. These women are not integral members of any political organization. They have no commitment to a broad political ideology. Instead, these female suicide bombers are simply expendable human bombs, who are often misused and manipulated into sacrificing themselves.

CONCLUSION

The utilization of the female suicide bomber is not a new phenomenon. However, with its recent increase, especially in the Middle East, this phenomenon should be further investigated to truly understand what motivates a woman to strap a bomb to her body and blow herself up. Throughout history, insurgent organizations have realized the impact suicide bombing can have on a society. In particular, a woman’s participation in the suicide bombing arena has aroused a mixture of shock and intrigue and elevated the level of public interest. A suicide bombing committed by a woman receives more media attention than one committed by a man. This media coverage provides both an advertising and recruitment tool for insurgent organizations. Furthermore, there are operational exigencies that dictate the use of female suicide bombers. Women arouse less suspicion so they are better able to clear checkpoints and other security measures. Female suicide bombers do not need to undergo any special training or possess any specialized skill sets so they offer a very efficient use of human resources.

The reality of women embracing the acceptance of death stems from long period of collective oppression, suffering, humiliation, and a notion of powerlessness. Suicide bombing offers women an outlet for their feelings of desperation and frustration from a world filled with restriction. It provides women a platform for their struggles to be proclaimed. By participating in suicide bombings, women symbolically assume the power to challenge the patriarchal notion and destabilize the current social and political identities found in their environment.

Although it may not be possible to create a general profile that represents all female martyrs, insurgent organizations will continue to use suicide bomber tactics and employ female suicide bombers. It seems like these female suicide bombers are motivated by the same factors as men. These include: nationalism, ideology, political agendas, revenge for a personal loss, and the sense of duty. If we assume that female suicide bombers are motivated solely by gender equality, we fail to recognize the legitimacy of females within violent organizations. With this in mind, terrorism is a manifestation of a

complex explanation. The factors responsible for the women's role in terrorism are comprised of social, political and religious beliefs. The importance of understanding the "why" behind female terrorism highlights the women's participation and role within terrorism. Thus, by taking steps to stabilize women's political, economic, and social opportunities within these societies, we may lessen their vulnerability to insurgent organizations and in turn, protect all of us from a potential suicide attack being committed by a woman.

THE ROLE OF TURKEY

INTRODUCTION

No country has tried harder to get out of the Middle East than Turkey, through its efforts to transform itself into an advanced and westernized state, and by trying to become a member of the European Union (EU). While Turkey ruled much of the Middle East region during the Ottoman Empire, it has traditionally remained a bystander in Middle Eastern politics subsequently.

For more than eighty five years under the Ataturkists, Turkey wanted little to do with the Arab world or with Islam. Turkey believed that it had little to offer or gain from getting involved in the problems of the Middle East. The region represented an unhappy association with Turkey's past, in which Arabs and Turks viewed each other with mutual hostility and suspicion – Arabs because of extended Turkish hegemony over the Arab world as well as the country's pro-Western policies and Turks because of Arab betrayal of the Ottoman Empire in joining with Great Britain in World War I.

Recent developments indicate a fundamental shift in Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey today is a more active and visible player in the Middle East and has made important contributions to the region. After alienating itself from its southern and eastern neighbours for decades, Turkey seems to have rediscovered its identity, reconciled itself with its past and re-examined its role in the Middle East. Geographically and politically, Turkey falls between two worlds – the Middle East and the Eurasia – and this aspect places Turkey in a strategic position. In addition, its secular and democratic characteristics, with a dominantly Muslim population and a decidedly international outlook as reflected in its aspiration of joining the EU, have a very positive role in the world.

Thus, Turkey does have an important role in the Middle East; and it can play a crucial and unique role in shaping the future, towards a more stable Middle East. Turkey also represents a great opportunity for the West, serving as a critical bridge to the Middle East.

This paper examines Turkey's role in the future of the Middle East while analyzing the past and present of Turkey. The paper also discusses the origin of Turks, the rise and fall of Ottoman Empire and the birth of the Republic of Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire as a product of the remarkable reforms launched by Kemal Ataturk in the 1920s. Further, the paper assesses Turkey's growing activism in the Middle East together with an evaluation of its politics and religion, security policy, foreign policy, Middle East diplomacy and economic diplomacy. It also discusses the limitations and challenges Turkey faces today.

The paper attempts to project Turkey's strategic role in the future of the Middle East in a number of fronts, including in the Middle East peace process, relations between the Middle East and the West, regional security, Middle East politics and economy, and also as a driving force in conceptualizing, if not forming, the Middle East Union.

THE ORIGIN OF THE TURKS

The first historical references to the Turks appear in Chinese records of about 200 BC. Specific references in Chinese sources in the sixth Century A.D. identify the tribal kingdom called Tu-Küe located on the Orkhon River south of Lake Baikal. The earliest known example of writing in a Turkic language was found in that area, and can be dated from about 730 AD. After the sixth Century, the Turks migrated out of central Asia, and among those were the Oguz Turks, who had embraced Islam in the tenth Century and established themselves around Bukhara in Transoxania under their khan (chief), Seljuk. After a split among the tribes, one branch of the Oguz led by descendants of Seljuk, entered service with the Abbasid caliphs of Baghdad, who were the spiritual leaders of Islam as well as temporal rulers of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Persia. Known as *gazis* (warriors of the Islamic faith), the Turkish horsemen were organized in tribal bands to defend the frontiers of the caliphate.²⁷⁰

In 1055 AD a Seljuk khan, Tugrul Bey, occupied Baghdad and forced the caliph to recognize him as sultan (temporal leader) in Persia and Mesopotamia. His regime came to be known as the Great Seljuk sultanate (1037-1194), a Persianate medieval Sunni Muslim empire.²⁷¹ The Seljuks brought revival, energy, and reunion to the Islamic civilization until then dominated by Arabs and Persians. According to the Seljuks, they brought to the Muslims "fighting spirit and fanatical aggression". They were also patrons of art and literature as well as founders of universities such as the Nizamiyah universities of Baghdad and Nishapur. Their reign is characterized by Persian astronomers such as Omar Khayyám (1048-1131 AD) and the Persian philosopher al-Ghazali (1058-1111 AD).²⁷²

From 1077 to 1307 AD, the Sultanate of Rûm (i.e. Byzantine Empire) with its capital at Iconium (Konya) emerged in Anatolia as the strongest branch of the Great Seljuk Empire. The sultanate prospered, particularly during the late 12th and early 13th Centuries when it took from the Byzantines key ports on the Mediterranean and Black Sea coasts.²⁷³ In the late thirteenth Century Rum survived as a vassal of the Mongols, who had already subjugated the Great Seljuk sultanate at Baghdad. Mongol influence in the region had disappeared by the 1330s, leaving behind *gazi* emirates that competed for supremacy.²⁷⁴

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

With the demise of the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum, around 1300 AD, a new power emerged in Anatolia – that of the Ottoman Turks. This was the Islamic/Ottoman (Turkish) empire, which reached its zenith under the rule of

²⁷⁰ Paul M. Pitman III, ed., *The Rise of the Turks and the Ottoman Empire*, Turkey: A Country Study, The Library of Congress, 1987.

²⁷¹ M.A. Amir-Moezzi, "Shahrbanu", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Online Edition.

²⁷² *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Nizam al-Mulk", Online Edition, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/533602/Seljuq>

²⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seljuk_Sultanate_of_Rum

²⁷⁴ Paul M. Pitman III, ed., *The Rise of the Turks and the Ottoman Empire*, Turkey: A Country Study, 1987.

Suleiman the Magnificent in 1550 AD. While the Ottoman dynasty was established in 1299 AD by Osman Bey in Sogut, a region east of modern-day Bursa, the Ottoman Empire can really be traced to 1453 AD when Mehmed II Khan Gazi, at the age of 21, conquered Constantinople, bringing an end to the Byzantine Empire. The inspirational leadership of Mehmed II did much for the Ottoman power, with expansion of its territory. He revitalized Istanbul and dedicated considerable wealth to revamping a number of key centres throughout modern-day Turkey. In his reign, Istanbul became a centre of intellectualism, attracting Muslim scholars and creative talent from throughout the Arab and Asian world. The architecture of the city including the Blue Mosque, built during the reign of the Ottomans, still attracts scores of architectural scholars and tourists.

Once the reign of the fourth Ottoman ruler, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent ended in 1566 AD, however, the empire began to exhibit cracks in its previously invincible structure. When Catherine the Great of Russia (1762-1796 AD) regained control of the Black Sea region after a series of Russo-Turkish Wars against the Ottoman Empire, the platform had been laid for the demise of the Ottoman Empire.²⁷⁵ During this time, large amounts of silver and gold were being plundered from the Americas, which not only furnished the money with starting the Industrial Revolution, it also devalued Turkish money required to buy the tools of war.²⁷⁶ By the middle of the 19th Century, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire – the “sick man of Europe - was imminent, and European powers started positioning themselves to claim the spoils.²⁷⁷

THE BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Having originally entered the World War I as an ally of Germany, the Turks eventually surrendered to the allied powers. The victorious Allied Powers (the United Kingdom, France, and the Russian Empire) sought the dismemberment of the Ottoman state through the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920, a peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Allies at the end of World War I.²⁷⁸ Under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Pasha, a military commander, the Turkish War of Independence (May 1919–October 1923) was waged with the aim of revoking the terms of the Treaty of Sèvres. The political developments during this period have made a lasting impact which continues to affect the character of the Turkish nation and its integrity.

Mustafa Kemal put forth the notion that there would be only one way for the liberation of the Turkish people in the aftermath of World War I, namely, through the creation of an independent, sovereign Turkish state. On 23

²⁷⁵ Katherine Stoneburner, *Catherine the Great of Russia: An Early Modern Woman of Power*, <http://users.manchester.edu/>.

²⁷⁶ Jack Weatherford, *Indian Givers*, New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1988, p. 16.

²⁷⁷ J.W. Smith, *The World's Wasted Wealth II*, Chapter 14, Institute for Economic Democracy, 1994.

²⁷⁸ Patrick Kinross, *The Ottoman Centuries: The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Empire*, Morrow, 1977.

April 1920, in the midst of the War of Independence, nationalists convened the Grand National Assembly in Ankara, in defiance of the Ottoman regime, and elected Mustafa Kemal its president.²⁷⁹ By September 18, 1922, the occupying armies were repelled and the country saw the birth of the new Turkish state. On November 1, the Grand National Assembly formally abolished the Sultanate, thus ending 623 years of Ottoman rule. The Treaty of Lausanne of July 24, 1923, led to the international recognition of the sovereignty of the newly formed "Republic of Turkey" as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire.²⁸⁰ On October 29, 1923, the Grand National Assembly proclaimed the Republic of Turkey. Mustafa Kemal was named its president and Ankara its capital, and the modern state of Turkey was born.

ATATURK'S TURKEY

As the first president of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk²⁸¹ founded the modern Turkish Republic out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk initiated a series of radical reforms of the country's political, social, and economic life that were aimed at rapidly transforming Turkey into a modern state and founding a new secular republic from the remnants of its Ottoman past. A secular legal code, modelled along European lines, was introduced that completely altered laws affecting women, marriage, and family relations. The ideological foundation of Atatürk's reform program became known as Kemalism. Its main points were enumerated in the "Six Arrows" or the basic principles of Kemalism: republicanism, nationalism, populism, reformism, etatism (statism), and secularism. In addition, the complementary principles encompassed national sovereignty, national independence, national unity and togetherness, peace at home peace abroad, modernization, scientificism and rationalism, and humanitarianism.²⁸² These were regarded as "fundamental and unchanging principles" guiding the republic, and were written into its constitution.

Of all the Kemalist reforms, the exclusion of Islam from an official role in the life of the nation shocked Atatürk's contemporaries most profoundly. The abolition of the caliphate ended any connection between the state and religion. The Islamic religious orders were suppressed, religious schools were closed, public education was secularized, and the *shariat* was revoked. A university reform was introduced in 1933 similar to the western models. One of the most significant reforms of Atatürk was the abolition of the use of the Arabic script and the adoption of the Latin script. These changes required readjustment of the entire economic and social framework of the Turkish people.^{283,284}

²⁷⁹ Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995.

²⁸⁰ Shaw, Stanford Jay; Kural Shaw, Ezel, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, 1977.

²⁸¹ The honorific surname "Atatürk" (*Father Turk*) presented by Turkish parliament in 1934.

²⁸² Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey (<http://www.turizm.net/turkey/history/ataturk.html>)

²⁸³ Helen Chapin Metz, ed. *Turkey: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995.

Atatürk's foreign policy, which had as its main object the preservation of the independence and integrity of the new republic, was conservative and successful. The president enunciated the principle of "peace at home and peace abroad", which became the cornerstone of Turkey's foreign relations and internal nation building. By the end of 1925, friendship treaties had been negotiated with fifteen states. These included a twenty-year treaty of friendship and neutrality signed that year with the Soviet Union that remained in effect until unilaterally abrogated by the Soviet Union in 1945. Turkey subsequently joined Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia in the Balkan Pact to counter the increasingly aggressive foreign policy of fascist Italy and the effect of a potential Bulgarian alignment with Nazi Germany. Turkey also entered into a nonaggression treaty with Afghanistan, Iraq, and Iran in 1937.²⁸⁵

TURKEY AFTER ATATÜRK

Turkey remained neutral during most of World War II but entered on the side of the Allies on February 23, 1945 as a ceremonial gesture and became a charter member of the United Nations in 1945.²⁸⁶ Difficulties faced by Greece after the war in quelling a communist rebellion, along with demands by the Soviet Union for military bases in the Turkish Straits, prompted the United States (US) to declare the Truman Doctrine in 1947. The doctrine enunciated American intentions to guarantee the security of Turkey and Greece, and resulted in large-scale US military and economic support.²⁸⁷ After participating with the United Nations forces in the Korean conflict, Turkey joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, becoming a bulwark against Soviet expansion into the Mediterranean.

From the late 1940s into the 1990s, seeing the primary threat as emanating from the Soviet Union and its bloc, Turkey emphasized its alliance with the West, symbolized by its NATO membership, and especially with the US. It was thus opposed to radical Arab regimes which were allied with Moscow. The other key feature of Turkish policy was the conflict with Greece over the Aegean Sea borders, Cyprus, and other issues. Since both countries were part of the Western alliance, however, this friction was usually restrained.²⁸⁸ Following a decade of inter-communal violence on the island of Cyprus and the Greek military coup of July 1974, Turkey invaded the Republic of Cyprus and the island remains divided today.²⁸⁹

Throughout the Cold War years and well into the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy agenda and strategic orientation was framed by the powerful

²⁸⁴ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, <http://www.sephardicstudies.org/ataturk.html>

²⁸⁵ Helen Chapin Metz, ed., *Turkey: A Country Study*, Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1995.

²⁸⁶ Growth in United Nations membership (1945–2005)", United Nations (<http://www.un.org/Overview/growth.htm>).

²⁸⁷ James Huston, *Outposts and Allies: US Army Logistics in the Cold War, 1945–1953*, Susquehanna University Press, 1988.

²⁸⁸ Barry Rubin, *Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment*, Global Politician, 2008.

²⁸⁹ Timeline: Cyprus, British Broadcasting Corporation., 2006-12-12 (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/1021835.stm>).

military and the Kemalist establishment. Several leaders tried to weaken the army's and the foreign ministry's hold over the policy-making apparatus in the 1990s, however, none have made significant headway in doing so.²⁹⁰ Following the end of the single-party period in 1945, the multi-party period between the 1960s and the 1980s was marked by periods of political instability and several military coups d'état.²⁹¹

With the Cold War's end in the 1990s, the Soviet Union and its bloc disappeared, removing the threat from the north. Instead, ethnically Turkish states emerged with which Turkey could have good relations. But Turks also knew they had to figure out how to reconfigure their alliance with the West in a situation where Turkey might be considered less of an asset. The earlier part of this process involved the virtual end of the conflict with Greece. There was also an important Middle Eastern component. The new threat was defined as emanating from radical neighbors like Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This approach also coincided with the Kurdish question. The radical Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK),²⁹² which was carrying on a bloody terrorist war against Turkey, was a client of Syria. Turkey, too, had to be very much concerned with the internal situation in Iraq, with its Kurdish majority in the north. Equally, Iran's support for Islamism, a threat to Turkey's secularist republic, made it seem almost as much an enemy in Ankara as it was perceived as being in Tel Aviv.²⁹³ Turkey's re-evaluation of its ties with Israel was also intensified by this rethinking.²⁹⁴ The armed forces, which respected Israel's military achievements as well as seeking to buy its technological know-how, were a particularly avid advocate for the alliance.²⁹⁵

THE NEW REGIME OF THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY

While Turkey is already today the most democratic, secular state in the Muslim world, secularism remained an elite ideology, whereas Islam, the religion of 98 per cent of the over 70 million population, continues to be a strong influence on most of the people, especially in rural areas and lower-class urban neighborhoods.²⁹⁶

With the formation of a government by the Justice and Development party (Turkish name: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, known as the AKP) in 2002, Turkey entered a new era. The new Islamic party's leaders identified the AKP as a center-to-right, conservative, traditional values grouping that strongly

²⁹⁰ Piotr Zaleski, Turkish Foreign Policy: Telling Style From Substance, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Vol.7-No.4, 2008/9.

²⁹¹ William Mathew Hale, Turkish Politics and the Military, Routledge, UK, 1994, ISBN 0-4150-2455-2.

²⁹² The Kurdistan Workers' Party (in Kurdish: *Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*), best known as PKK is a separatist militant organization, founded in the late 1970s and its goal has been to create an independent, Kurdish state in Turkey.

²⁹³ Barry Rubin, Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment, Global Politician, 2008.

²⁹⁴ Meltem Müftüleri Baç, "Turkey and Israel: An Evolving Partnership," Ariel Center for Policy Research, Policy Paper no. 47, 1998, synopsis, at <http://www.acpr.org.il/publications/policy-papers/pp047-xs.html>.

²⁹⁵ Barry Rubin, Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment, Global Politician, 2008.

²⁹⁶ http://atheism.about.com/library/FAQs/islam/countries/bl_TurkeyReligionPolitics.htm

favoured EU membership. In the 2002 election, it won 34 percent of the vote and gained two-thirds of the seats in parliament. Its policies received such wide support that it raised that figure to 48 percent in the 2007 elections. The success of the party was not due exclusively—or even largely—to its Islamist orientation. The key factors were the demonstrable incompetence and fragmentation of the opposition, the country's economic slump and the AKP government's success in overcoming it. And once the AKP proved that it was not being run by Islamist extremists, a growing respect for the party became fashionable even in highly secular and westernized circles.²⁹⁷

Some secular Turks and some Europeans are concerned with what they perceive as a progressive “Islamisation” of Turkish society in recent years. They relate this to the AKP’s alleged “hidden agenda” to turn Turkey into a state based on Islamist principles. One consequence of this perception was that ten of the eleven judges of the Constitutional Court, a bastion of Turkish secularism, found the AKP guilty in 2008 of being “a focal point of anti-secular activities”. The court did not, however, find enough evidence to close the party down.²⁹⁸ There have been three Islamist parties since the 1970s with a real chance of acquiring power, all were judicially invalidated for the threat they posed to secularism in Turkey.²⁹⁹

NEW APPROACHES IN FOREIGN POLICY

Twenty years ago, wariness or hostility defined Turkey’s relations with all of its many neighbours. Today, ties with only two of the eight states bordering Turkey remain problematic, Cyprus and Armenia, Turkey having initiated promising processes to settle outstanding problems with both. Having been absent for many decades from the Balkans, Central Asia, Middle East and Africa, Turkish diplomacy is now active and appreciated on several fronts. Turkey’s new neighbourhood policy made its first breakthrough in 1998. Year 1999 marked a major shift in Turkey’s relations with the outside world. Two tragic earthquakes – the first in the Turkish city of Izmit, the second across the Aegean, in Athens—generated an unprecedented outpouring of sympathy and support among Greeks and Turks, paving the way for a political rapprochement between historical foes. It was also in 1999 that Ankara’s EU accession prospects received a monumental boost, with European leaders’ agreement—at a summit in Helsinki—to grant Turkey the status of an EU candidate state.³⁰⁰

After the 2002 electoral triumph, the AKP government realized that Turkey should remain institutionally anchored in the West, but it should also forge new relations with the South and East, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by post-Cold War geopolitics. Several terms –“zero

²⁹⁷ Barry Rubin, *Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment*, Global Politician, 2008.

²⁹⁸ *Turkey in Europe: Breaking the vicious circle*, Second Report of the Independent Commission on Turkey, Sept. 2009.

²⁹⁹ Marvin Howe, *Turkey Today: A Nation Divided over Islam's Revival*, Boulder: Westview, 2000, pp. 1-10, 179-94.

³⁰⁰ Piotr Zalewski, *Turkish Foreign Policy: Telling Style From Substance*, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Winter 2008/9.

problems with neighbors”, “strategic depth” or “neo-Ottomanism”– have been used to describe Turkey’s newfound appetite for engaging with its near-abroad, each of them accompanied by a substantial body of literature. Yet what the AKP’s vision boils down to is the recognition that Turkey is, all at once, a European, Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country. As then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul noted in 2005, Turkey’s goals are “to promote good neighborly relations with all, to replace disagreement with cooperation, to seek innovative mechanisms and channels to resolve regional conflicts, to encourage positive change in our region, and to build cross-cultural bridges of dialogue and understanding.”³⁰¹

In recent years, more changes happened regarding Turkey's relations with other Middle Eastern countries and the US. Relations with Damascus eased considerably after Turkey successfully intimidated Syria away from supporting the PKK and the subsequent capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Once Saddam Hussein was overthrown, Iraq was no longer a threat. Also, the mutual Islamic/Islamist orientation between Turkey and Iran as well as being two non-Arab Muslim countries in the region brought them closer. All three of these regimes thus now constitute far less of a threat to Turkey. Ironically, the very success of the US role in reducing the strategic threats posed by these three Middle Eastern states changed the calculus of former Turkish dependence on the US for strategic protection in the area.³⁰²

Turkey’s relations with the US underwent a serious crisis in 2003 when Turkish parliament refused to permit American troops to open a northern front into Iraq through Turkey’s border. Again in 2005, as the US sought to isolate Syria over Damascus's alleged responsibility for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and its central role in funnelling *jihadis* into Iraq, the Turkish government continued a policy of deepening its diplomatic and economic ties with the Syrians.³⁰³ But relations have gradually improved, getting a boost in 2007, when Washington supported Turkey’s military campaign against Kurdish separatists in northern Iraq.

MIDDLE EAST DIPLOMACY

Since the AKP came to power in late 2002, Ankara has pursued a conscious strategy of reestablishing Turkey's links with the former Ottoman domains to the south and the east. The AKP government embarked on an ambitious foreign policy – concomitant with their equally bold domestic political and reform program – that sought to secure Turkey's bid to become a member of the EU while simultaneously cultivating relationships with

³⁰¹ Piotr Zalewski, Turkish Foreign Policy: Telling Style From Substance, Turkish Policy Quarterly, Winter 2008/9.

³⁰² Graham E. Fuller, Turkey’s Strategic Model: Myths and Realities, The Washington Quarterly, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Summer 2004, pp. 51–64.

³⁰³ Steven A. Cook, The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

Damascus, Baghdad, Tehran, Beirut, Riyadh and Cairo as well as with Tel Aviv.³⁰⁴

Relations with Syria

Under the leadership of Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Syrian President Assad, Ankara and Damascus have overcome their old differences and improved their political, economic, and socio-cultural ties. Turkey resisted siding with US policy of isolating Syria, and served instead, alongside France, as a conduit for opening Damascus to the outside world. Ankara sponsored indirect talks between Israelis and Syrians in 2008, the first such talks after decades.³⁰⁵ Syria had previously opposed NATO-member Turkey's few overtures to the Arab world; it now became its ally, helping Turkey become an observer at the Arab League.³⁰⁶ The joint Turkish-Syrian military exercise, the first ever for an Arab army with a NATO member, and the subsequent military technical agreement in April 2009 show further deepening of bilateral relations between Turkey and Syria. This also has important political ramifications for Syria, Turkey and the region.³⁰⁷ In October 2009, visa requirements were lifted for citizens travelling between the two countries and also the first session of a new Syrian-Turkish Strategic Cooperation Council took place in Aleppo, with steps taken to work together in areas from education to foreign affairs.³⁰⁸

Relations with Iraq

More complex and even more urgent are relations with Iraq. Specifically, Turkey felt threatened by the relative anarchy in Iraq coupled with the rise of Kurdish power there. The fact that the US presence did not crack down enough on the PKK presence in northern Iraq was a special irritant. Turkey does want a stable, moderate Iraq. Its specific demands are that there be no independent Kurdish state, that anti-Turkish terrorists are not allowed to operate in northern Iraq, and that the ethnic Turkish population there, be treated fairly.³⁰⁹ The growing relations between Ankara and Erbil, the seat of the Kurdish Regional Government, combined with considerable Turkish investment in northern Iraq mitigates a complicating factor in Washington's Iraq policy. The situation in Kirkuk and the persistence of PKK violence against Turkey remain flashpoints, but as the Turks and Iraqi Kurds develop closer ties, the magnitude of these problems can diminish. With the improved Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish relations, the Kurdish president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani,

³⁰⁴ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

³⁰⁵ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations.

³⁰⁶ *Turkey in Europe: Breaking the vicious circle*, Second Report of the Independent Commission on Turkey, Sept. 2009.

³⁰⁷ Bilal Y. Saab, *Syria and Turkey Deepen Bilateral Relations*, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, May 06, 2009.

³⁰⁸ Sarah Birke, *From pariah to power broker – a renewed identity for Damascus*, *The National*, 6 November 2009.

³⁰⁹ Barry Rubin, *Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment*, *Global Politician*, 2008.

has called upon PKK terrorists to lay down their arms or leave Iraq.³¹⁰ The relative stability of northern Iraq, compared to the violent disorder in the rest of the country, therefore, has depended on Turkish cooperation, especially facilitating cross-border commerce.³¹¹

Relations with Iran

In recent months, Turkey has multiplied its diplomatic efforts to help ease the nuclear stand-off between Iran and the West. Turkey does not want to see a nuclear Iran, but that's chiefly because Turks are more afraid of the regional repercussions of such a development than of the threat it would pose to their own country.³¹² Turkey has a level and frequency of access to the Iranian leadership that is greater than that of EU countries, and consistently supports the EU position on Iran's nuclear programme and on halting any weaponisation.³¹³ The Turkish leadership also supports the Obama administration's efforts to establish a dialogue with Tehran. For Turkey, good bilateral relations with Iran and regional stability are critically important, not for ideological reasons, but economic calculation.³¹⁴

Relations with Lebanon

Ankara's diplomatic engagement in the Lebanon crisis in the summer and fall of 2006 is another example of Turkey's new activism in the Middle East. The Erdogan government's decision to send 1,000 troops to participate in the UN peacekeeping force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) represented an important departure from Turkey's traditional policy of avoiding deep involvement in Middle Eastern affairs. The decision provoked a lively internal debate in Turkey and was sharply criticised by Turkey's other mainstream political parties, whose leaders argued that Turkey should not get actively involved in the conflict. Some members of Erdogan's own party also feared Turkey could be drawn into a military confrontation with Hezbollah, arguing that it was "not Turkey's responsibility to protect others' national interests." Erdogan, by contrast, maintained that Turkey could not afford to be a "mere bystander" and that the best way to protect Turkish national interests was to participate in the peacekeeping process.³¹⁵

Relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt

Relations with Saudi Arabia have also been strengthened, highlighted by August 2006 King Abdullah's visit to Turkey – the first of its kind in 40 years. Both countries have worked together to try to invigorate the Arab-Israeli

³¹⁰ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

³¹¹ Barry Rubin, *Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment*, Global Politician, 2008.

³¹² Sinan Ülgen, *Turkey's route to the EU may be via the Middle East*, *Europe's World Journal*, Spring 2009.

³¹³ *Turkey in Europe: Breaking the vicious circle*, Second Report of the Independent Commission on Turkey, Sept. 2009.

³¹⁴ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

³¹⁵ Stephen F. Larrabee, *How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role*, *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009.

peace process as well as to contain Iran's rising power. Ties to Egypt, another regional power, have also been strengthened. During a visit to Ankara by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in March 2007, the leaders of the two countries decided to establish a new strategic dialogue on energy cooperation and the strengthening of regional security.³¹⁶

Relations with Israel

Close ties with Israel, especially in the defence and intelligence areas, have been one of the cornerstones of Turkish policy in the Middle East since 1996. But Turkish policy toward Israel has begun to change under the AKP as the government has pursued a much more actively pro-Palestinian policy than its recent predecessors. Prime Minister Erdogan has been openly critical of Israeli policy in the West Bank and Gaza, calling it an act of "state terror". Beneath the surface, cooperation in the defence and intelligence areas has quietly continued. A \$165m agreement on airborne imagery intelligence was signed on the eve of the Gaza bombardment. The Israeli air force continues to conduct training missions at Turkey's training base in Konya.³¹⁷

From the start, the Israelis perceived a Palestinian tilt in AKP's approach to the Middle East and were wary of Ankara's relations with Tehran. At the same time, the Israelis, by their own admission, have complete trust in Prime Minister Erdogan's efforts to mediate between Israel and Syria. Ankara also argues that Israeli actions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip only undermine their efforts and those of others to broker peace.³¹⁸

TURKEY'S REGIONAL POWER STATUS

In recent years, Turkish diplomacy has scored a number of successes in the region. Turkey's regional power status was symbolized in November 2007 when Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas addressed the Turkish parliament, making it the first time that an Israeli head of state spoke in the legislative chamber of a Muslim country. They had come to Ankara to preside over the signing of an agreement with Turkey to create two industrial zones on the border between Israel and the West Bank, which would be operated with Turkish help.³¹⁹

Ankara played an instrumental role in bringing about an end to the factional strife in Lebanon and its policy on Syria also produced tangible results. The decision to participate in the UN peacekeeping mission during Lebanon crisis in 2006 had allowed Turkey to show that it was a regional player whose influence had to be taken into consideration. It also enabled Turkey to underscore its European credentials by being among the largest European contributors to the UNIFIL force. And it won accolades in Washington, which had strongly encouraged Turkish participation. Finally, it allowed Turkey to demonstrate its newfound commonality of interests with the established Arab

³¹⁶ Ibid

³¹⁷ Ibid

³¹⁸ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

³¹⁹ Barry Rubin, *Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment*, Global Politician, 2008.

states of the region.³²⁰ Similarly, in 2008, Turkey's relationship with both Syria and Israel brought about several rounds of proximity talks between Syrian and Israeli diplomats in Istanbul, a contribution to the Arab-Israeli peace process that goes beyond what is normally achieved by the EU. Getting leverage with Syria helps Turkey become a key player in the Middle East peace process.³²¹ Turkey was also able to backup Egyptian and French initiatives—at their requests—with its own talks with Hamas to help broker an end to the Gaza crisis in January 2009.³²²

Its improved relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt highlights the way Turkey has begun to reach out to leading Sunni Arab states in the Middle East, and is yet another example of Turkey's new regional activism. The driving force behind this enhanced cooperation has been strategic, not religious. It reflects the growing recognition on the part of the Turkish leadership that stability on Turkey's southern border requires Ankara's active engagement with its Middle Eastern neighbours and deeper participation in regional peace efforts.³²³

Turkey's current active role in various issues of the Middle East clearly shows its intention to create for itself a powerbroker role in the region on issues that matter to the EU and the US. From the perspective of Turkey, it wants to play a part on Arab-Israeli peacemaking for several reasons. One of them is prestige and showing the value of good relations with Turkey; another is to boost the AKP's moderate credentials.

The idea that more stability in the region is good for Turkey, along with strong sympathies for the Palestinians, are additional factors pushing in this direction. In terms of providing a channel for secret communications, an assistor of economic development and a peace supporter to balance the rejectionists in the Arab world, Turkey has some real value.³²⁴

There can be no doubt that Turkey's growing activism in its foreign policy, especially in relation to the Middle East, has begun to enhance the role and influence of Turkey in its own region. Turkey is now firmly set to become a regional power, with its recent election to the UN Security Council a further testimony to Ankara's diplomatic prowess.³²⁵

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Turkey's deepening involvement in Middle East foreign policy does carry with it diplomatic risks and challenges.

³²⁰ Stephen F. Larrabee, How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role, *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009.

³²¹ Bilal . Saab, Syria and Turkey Deepen Bilateral Relations, *Foreign Policy*, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, May 2009.

³²² Turkey in Europe: Breaking the vicious circle, Second Report of the Independent Commission on Turkey, Sept. 2009.

³²³ Stephen F. Larrabee, How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role, *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009.

³²⁴ Barry Rubin, Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment, *Global Politician*, 2008.

³²⁵ Sinan Ülgen, Turkey's route to the EU may be via the Middle East, *Europe's World Journal*, Spring 2009.

That fact was evident in February 2006, when the Erdogan government hosted a high-ranking Hamas delegation to Ankara led by Khaled Mashaal, a few weeks after the elections in the Palestinian territories. It drew strong criticism from Israel and the US Congress, though it was supposed to highlight Turkey's ability to play a larger diplomatic role in the Middle East.³²⁶

It could be a difficult balancing act for Turkey to work on strengthening its ties with neighbors Syria and Iran, while having strong relations with Israel. As seen during the Peres visit in 2007, despite the general sense of goodwill, the topic of Iran was one that clearly separated Ankara and Tel Aviv, at least publicly. "Turkey instills trust. Iran instills fear," the Israeli president told parliament during his address.³²⁷

There are also limits to what Turkey can accomplish on Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Turkey does not want to antagonize its new friends, Syria and Iran. And the AKP's Palestinian sympathies run as much or more to Hamas than to Fatah³²⁸ affecting Turkey's ability to act as an unbiased mediator in the Arab-Israeli dispute.³²⁹

The other challenges for Turkey includes whether it has the capacity to pursue an activist role in the region without undermining its other priorities, and the extent to which other regional powers want Ankara to play the role it intends. Thus far, the Turkey seems able to balance its desire to be influential in the Middle East with other national interests in the Caucasus, Cyprus, and Europe. There is also a palpable sense in the Middle East that Turkish activism, while helpful at times, can nevertheless undermine the efforts of more traditional regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Egypt. As Cairo and Riyadh seek Palestinian reconciliation, there is concern that Turkish activism will provide a way for Hamas to resist Arab pressure to come to terms with Fatah.³³⁰

The mutual hostility and suspicion between Turks and Arabs is another important obstacle stands in the way of Turkey's full integration into the Middle East and, as a result, could deprive it of the role it deserves. More than eighty five years after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, a mutual suspicion-largely unfounded-persists. The former rulers have not forgotten what they saw as the Arab "betrayal" of rallying to the British during World War I to gain their independence. The former subject peoples have not forgotten the centuries of Ottoman rule and the harsh repression that followed

³²⁶ Stephen F. Larrabee, How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role, *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009.

³²⁷ Yigal Schleifer, Turkey: Ankara Raising Its Middle East Diplomatic Profile, *Eurasia Insight*, November 2007.

³²⁸ Barry Rubin, Turkey and the Middle East: An Updated Assessment, *Global Politician*, 2008.

³²⁹ Stephen F. Larrabee, How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role, *Europe's World*, Autumn 2009.

³³⁰ Steven A. Cook, The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy, *The Council on Foreign Relations*, April 2009.

the emergence of their national movements, and some Arabs suspect Ankara of harboring "Ottoman ambitions."³³¹

Any state that has wished to destabilize or weaken Turkey over the years — Britain, Russia, Armenia, Greece, Iraq, Iran, Syria — has played the Kurdish card against Turkey at one point or another. An unhappy Diyarbakir, the unofficial capital of Turkey's Kurdish region, represents a constant threat to Turkey's stability and renders the country permanently vulnerable to external manipulation by enemies. A content Diyarbakir, or a Kurdish population happily integrated into Turkey and enjoying the state's many benefits, actually reverses the dynamic. Turkey has begun to recognize the wisdom of this approach and has taken considerable, although not yet fully sufficient, steps toward meeting Kurdish desires for cultural security, cultural autonomy, linguistic rights, and recognition of the Kurds as a separate people. If Turkey can bring itself fully to implement its program of minority rights for Kurds within Turkey, it will be one of the few Muslim countries that will have successfully resolved an internal problem between differing Muslim ethnic groups.³³² If Turkey is successful in accommodating Kurds, it will help Syria do the same.³³³

On the domestic front, Ankara's growing relations with its Muslim neighbors has led some critics from Turkey's secular establishment to accuse the government of pursuing an "Islamic" foreign policy — one that would reorient Turkey eastwards. Staunch secularists accuse the AKP of replacing pursuit of closer links with the EU with ties to Syria, Hamas and Iran. The visit of King Abdullah in 2006, for example, was critically covered by many Turkish "secular" media outlets, which accused the AKP of bending over backwards to the Saudi king.³³⁴

TURKEY AS A STRATEGIC PARTNER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

The diplomacy of Ankara has shown a remarkable dynamism and never since the birth of the republic has the international context been as favorable to Turkey as it is today.³³⁵ Turkey's growing activism in the Middle East is now being underpinned by a confluence of regional factors and geopolitical shifts. Turkey has been able to make headway in the turbulent waters of the Middle East because of the growing lack of US legitimacy and lack of EU influence. In other words, as a rising regional power, Turkey has benefited from the handicaps of the global powers. The US lost its ability to

³³¹ Eric Rouleau, *The Challenges To Turkey*, Foreign Affairs, The Council On Foreign Relations, Nov./Dec. 1993.

³³² Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities*, The Washington Quarterly, The Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Summer 2004, Pp. 51–64.

³³³ Minhac Çelik, *Turkey's Role in Syrian Detente with West Crucial*, Today's Zaman, 1 October 2009.

³³⁴ Yigal Schleifer, *Turkey: Ankara Raising Its Middle East Diplomatic Profile*, Eurasia Insight, November 2007.

³³⁵ Eric Rouleau, *The Challenges to Turkey*, Foreign Affairs, November/December 1993 (<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/>).

play a more constructive role in the Middle East following its ill-fated intervention in Iraq. The EU has faced a different dilemma, stemming from a real lack of unity and, therefore, influence. In light of these serious deficiencies on the part of the main western powers, Turkey has been able to leverage both its regional ties and its standing in the transatlantic community to play a more instrumental role vis-à-vis its southern neighbors.³³⁶

Moreover, Turkey now has good reason to seek independent relations with several Muslim neighbors whose political evolution will be complex and difficult but who are no longer likely to be Turkey's enemy. In turn, these same states view Turkey more charitably as it demonstrates a rediscovery of its Islamic roots and an increasing sense of independence from Washington. In particular, Arabs sat up and took notice that a democratic Turkey could say no to Washington on assisting the US invasion of Iraq, something despotic Arab rulers dared not do. In short, Turkey's shift toward greater independence from Washington, improving ties with its Arab and Iranian neighbors, improved ties with Russia, and more open acknowledgment of its Islamic past all serve to make Turkey more a part of the Middle East than ever before. Now that Turkey's profile is more sympathetic to Muslim states, its own domestic accomplishments are viewed with greater sympathy and respect and thus facilitate Turkey's serving in part as a regional model—unthinkable when Turkey was deeply involved in NATO and at strategic loggerheads with an Arab world that looked to Moscow for support.³³⁷ Turkey has been more prepared than ever to take advantage of these fundamental shifts and play a pivotal role as a strategic partner in shaping the new Middle East.

TURKEY AS A MEDIATOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS

Turkey's initiatives in the Israeli-Arab multilateral negotiations have confirmed its status as a regional power and as a mediator in the new era now dawning in the Middle East. Turkey has some valuable trump cards in this regard. As the first Muslim country to recognize Israel at the time of its creation in 1948, it has maintained excellent relations with the Jewish state ever since. It was also the first non-Arab Muslim country to support the Palestine Liberation Organization's proclamation of the State of Palestine in 1988.³³⁸ Turkish recent overtures to Syria, undertaken in spite of warnings from Washington, have paid off handsomely. Turkey was able not only to defuse the international tensions surrounding its Arab neighbor, but also to engineer the start of direct talks between Syria and Israel, a crucial contribution to the elusive Middle East peace process.³³⁹ Also Turkey's role as a facilitator in improving relations between

³³⁶ Sinan Ülgen, Turkey's Route to the EU May Be via the Middle East, *Europe's World Journal*, Spring 2009.

³³⁷ Graham E. Fuller, Turkey's Strategic Model: Myths and Realities, *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 2004.

³³⁸ Eric Rouleau, The Challenges to Turkey, *Foreign Affairs*, The Council on Foreign Relations, Nov./Dec. 1993.

³³⁹ Sinan Ülgen, Turkey's route to the EU may be via the Middle East, *Europe's World Journal*, Spring 2009.

Syria and the West is viewed as critical in the region.³⁴⁰ If the new Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu places an emphasis on striking a deal with Syria, as many expect, Turkey will certainly play a prominent role in bringing the two parties together and brokering their negotiations.³⁴¹

TURKEY AS A MODEL SECULAR DEMOCRACY

As a Muslim power with a moderate Islamic yet secular system, Turkey offers a credible alternative to the fundamentalism that ravages the region and constitutes as well a counterweight to Khomeinist/Islamist Iran. Its successful adaptation to the market economy and its evolution toward democracy could serve as an example for a number of Arab states that fear democracy's possibly destabilizing effects and that have resisted adapting to the modern world.³⁴² Therefore, as being the model secular democracy in the Middle East, the success of Turkish society in achieving far more freedom and prosperity than any other country in the Middle East is a constant reminder that democracy is not a feature found exclusively in the West. This fuels the hope that such an experience can be emulated by their neighbors. Whether the hope is realistic remains to be seen.

And Turkey's potential for influence in the Middle East has been further enhanced by the erosion of Arab nationalism, the main structural barrier that traditionally prevented Turkish involvement in the Middle East. Arab nationalism is now gradually replaced by a rising political class more influenced by religion – a supranational ideology. As a result, the Ottoman legacy of a working state structure, tolerant of religion, was beginning to be viewed in a more favorable light. The Turkish model, whose particularity for many Middle Eastern observers was its ability to nurture a democracy-friendly political Islam, was suddenly in demand. And too is Turkey.³⁴³ Thus, the Turkey's emergence and its active participation in the Middle Eastern issues deserve to be nurtured and rewarded by all those whose interests lie in a stable and democratic Middle East.

TURKEY AS A MAJOR PLAYER IN REGIONAL SECURITY

Bordered by eight countries and evolving regions: Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, Asia and the Mediterranean, Turkey has managed to normalize relations with most of its neighbors, under its “zero problems with its neighbors” policy, the most recent attempt to be launched is with Armenia. In most cases these relations have progressed from bad to very good as is the case with Syria and Iraq in particular. It can be said that Ankara had closed the chapter on its role in Cold War politics, which had polarized the world for

³⁴⁰ Minhac Çelik, Turkey's role in Syrian detente with West crucial, *Today's Zaman*, 1 October 2009.

³⁴¹ Steven A. Cook, *The Evolving Turkish Role in Mideast Peace Diplomacy*, The Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.

³⁴² Eric Rouleau, *The Challenges to Turkey*, Foreign Affairs, The Council on Foreign Relations, November/December 1993.

³⁴³ Sinan Ülgen, Turkey's route to the EU may be via the Middle East, *Europe's World Journal*, Spring 2009.

decades,³⁴⁴ and has contributed to greater regional stability. The AKP government argues that instability in these regions is consequential for Turkey, requiring Ankara's active engagement in support of regional security and development. The policy also aims to increase Turkey's influence as an "independent" actor and valid interlocutor for the Muslim east and south. Turkey's recent activism in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which brings together 56 mostly Muslim-majority countries and other Islamic groups, is very much part of this equation.³⁴⁵

When Turkey joined NATO, it assumed a quiet role. Regionally, its relations with Greece, Syria, Armenia, and Iraq have given the world only a small taste of its capabilities. But, under the current geopolitical realities, Turkey's role has grown into a prominent one. Turkey has the ability to pull Muslims away from radical Islam. It can be the beacon in the Muslim world for the benefits of secular Islam and thereby to reshape the Muslim world.

TURKEY AS A BRIDGE-BUILDER

Since the end of the Cold War Turkey has begun to increasingly diversify its foreign policy by becoming an important Middle East actor. This does not mean that Turkey is turning its back on the West.³⁴⁶ Turkey's policy now is to maintain a proactive role in all the alliances, associations and groups that it belongs to. It does not sacrifice one at the expense of the other, nor does it value one over the other. As such Turkey's strategic objective to become a full member of the EU does not mean that it forgoes its relations with Asia and the Middle East. Its alliance with the US, through NATO, has not damaged its relations with Iran, and by the same token Turkey's sympathy and support of Palestinian rights have not turned Israel into an enemy.³⁴⁷ Similarly, Turkey's initiative to bring Israel and Syria together has shown that at a time when the US is not able to exert effective influence in the region, countries like Turkey can go their own way to good effect. Ankara is also actively engaged in trying to mediate between Iran and the US, hoping to significantly contribute to ongoing western efforts.³⁴⁸ With this new approach, Turkey's strong ties to the Middle East can be an asset for the West as Turkey can serve as a bridge to the Middle East.

Geographically and politically, the country falls between two worlds. Its geo-strategic position means that Turkey can play a crucial role in mediating between Muslim countries and the West. Turkey's bid for EU membership is strengthened by its good relations with its neighbors in the Middle East, which

³⁴⁴ Osama Al-Sharif, Turkey's New Role Examined, Arab News, 14 September 2009, (<http://www.Arabnews.com>).

³⁴⁵ Zeyno Baran, Turkey: Partnership on the Brink, The Journal of International Security Affairs, Number 15, Fall 2008.

³⁴⁶ Stephen F. Larrabee, How Turkey is re-discovering its Middle East role, Europe's World, Autumn 2009.

³⁴⁷ Osama Al-Sharif, Turkey's New Role Examined, Arab News, 14 September 2009, (<http://www.Arabnews.com>).

³⁴⁸ Zeyno Baran, Turkey: Partnership on the Brink, The Journal of International Security Affairs, Number 15, Fall 2008.

would make Turkey a valuable ally for advancing EU interests in the region. So Turkish accession would not lead to a weaker Europe, as some Europeans like to argue, on the contrary, it would make Europe a more influential and capable world power. Turkey is not only a geographical and political, but also a cultural and military bridge between East and West. The US is very well aware of Turkey's importance. In contrast to Turkey's role as a "buffer" between the Soviet Union and the West during the Cold War era, it can become a strong "bridge" between the West and the Middle East in the current post-cold war plus post-September 11th world.

TURKEY AS A FACILITATOR FOR A HEALTHY ECONOMY

In 2008, the Turkish government has sealed two contracts with Syria and Iraq to establish a greater economic zone similar to that of the EU to tackle political and ethnic conflicts through economic development. Turkey also believes that Syria could become a gateway to the Arab world for Turkish goods, while Turkey could become a gateway for Syrian goods to the EU and the West in general.³⁴⁹

Turkey also has a similar framework with Gulf countries. Meantime, the industrial park project on the border between Israel and the West Bank is also indicative of the niche Ankara – which has strong relations with Israel as well as Syria and Iran – would like to carve out for itself in the region. This whole exercise of economic diplomacy in the region is a display of Turkey projecting 'soft power' in the Middle East and confirming that it can play the role of a facilitator.³⁵⁰

Turkey wants to transform the Middle East into an economic zone free of problems and crises. As this region has recently experienced full-fledged wars, failures of economic models and terrorist attacks, the "Middle East Union" still remains a blur and a dark picture for many. Turkey has taken very important and serious steps; however, there are potential problems in the region which includes instability in Iraq, problems between Iraq and Syria, water crises and other problems. To establish such an economic zone for the welfare of regional countries, this model should also include other countries.³⁵¹

Nevertheless, speculating on Turkey's economic dimension of the relations in the Middle East, it could be said that Turkey has the capacity to transform its relations with Iraq and Syria into a healthy economy, which can spill over to other countries, contributing to their economic development and also attracting other partners from the region.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's leadership hopes to place the country among "the ten biggest and most powerful countries" by the Republic's 100th anniversary (2023), as

³⁴⁹ Bilal Y. Saab, Syria and Turkey Deepen Bilateral Relations, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, May 06, 2009.

³⁵⁰ Yigal Schleifer, Turkey: Ankara Raising Its Middle East Diplomatic Profile, Eurasia Insight, November 2007.

³⁵¹ Mahir Zeynalov, Turkey to spearhead union in Middle East, - nations laud move, Today's Zaman, 20 September 2009.

Prime Minister Erdogan recently asserted.³⁵² Turkey' has unique geopolitical assets, being a Eurasian country with access to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean and vital sea routes, and with its rich Ottoman history and linkage to former subjects in the Balkans, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Turkey, a country of over 70 million, is multiethnic and multicultural, and its pluralistic background is an asset to reach out to its neighbors and play a key role in conflict resolution and prevention, and in regional security.

The Turkish capital Ankara is fast emerging as a hub for Middle Eastern diplomatic traffic which represents an important departure in Turkish foreign policy. This new activism in the Middle East does not mean that Turkey is about to de-anchor itself from the West nor is it a sign of the "creeping Islamisation" of Turkish foreign policy. Rather, it represents a timely response to structural changes in Turkey's security environment since the end of the Cold War and the opportunity presented it through the current geopolitical shift while launching various initiatives aimed at extending its sphere of influence. Turkey is clearly following a diplomacy that seeks positive and proactive results, especially in a region that has been exhausted by futile politics and conspiracies. Turkey's diplomatic role in the Middle East has scored several successes in recent years. Turkey is also pursuing an active role in all regional and international forums with the aim of reflecting its growing political and economic roles.

Indeed, the Middle East presents many challenges to the West and a constructive Turkish position may be instrumental to the maintaining of peace and stability in the region. On the range of important issues from Iraq and Iran to Middle East peace, Turkey's policies are generally consistent with those of the US. Therefore, the Turkey's strategic partnership offers many advantages to the Middle East and the West, in particular the US. Democratic secular Turkey could provide the nucleus for a sustainable partnership between the West and the Middle East — as opposed to the authoritarian rulers upon which Washington has relied for five decades. The US leadership understands that it would be too difficult to solve regional problems without Turkey's involvement.

The stakes for Turkey and the future of the Middle East are clearly very high. A stable, democratic, secular, liberal Turkey can be a strategic partner and a major contributor to the peace, stability and economic development in the future of the Middle East, especially a stabilizing influence on Iraq, as well as a democratic example for the rest of the Muslim world.

³⁵² Zeyno Baran, Turkey: Partnership on the Brink, *The Journal of International Security Affairs*, Number 15, Fall 2008.

THE ROLE OF IRAN

It is a fact of history that small states are always wary of large neighboring states. Iran is one of the largest states both geographically and demographically in the Middle East and its evolution will undoubtedly impact its neighbors and will redefine the regional balance of power. As Iran develops, relations with its neighbors will get ever more strained.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to understand Iran's relations with its neighbors it is important to place it into its historical context as history has set the foundations of those relations.

Today it is often forgotten that under the name of the Islamic Republic of Iran lies the ancient Persian Empire. The Persian Empire has a very long and rich history that dates back more than 2500 years. As a matter of fact it celebrated its 2500th unification anniversary, in 1971 in Persepolis. Ironically, this event would eventually be recognized as the beginning of the end of Iran led by the Shah on a Western model.

Around 630 AD marked the birth of Islam. At that time, the Persian Empire encompassed today's Iran, part of Iraq, the south coast of the Gulf, Oman and Yemen. Islam spread rapidly in Iran, however, the first Shia Islamic government would only be established under the Safavid Dynasty, by Shah Ismail Ist, in 1501 AD. The Safavids would rule until 1722 AD when Afghan rebels defeated Shah Sultan Hossein. Domestically, the Safavids contributed to the centralization of the state while internationally, they promoted bilateral state contacts and also frequently warred with the Ottoman Empire, the Uzbeks and Portuguese. The Safavids, who ruled for two hundred years, were succeeded by the Zand dynasty which lasted only three generations followed by the Qajar in 1794 AD.

The Qajar dynasty established Teheran as Iran's capital and launched a number of reforms aimed at modernizing the state. However, during the 19th Century the Qajar would suffer from a number of wars with Imperial Russia, which would ultimately result in a loss of territory to both Russia and the British Empire. The weakened Qajar dynasty would be further weakened during World War I and would ultimately be overthrown by Reza Khan in 1925. This change would mark the beginning of the second important phase of Iran's development.

Shah Reza Khan would lead the modernization of the Iran by promoting industrialization, initiating railroad construction and seeking to establish a national educational system. Geopolitically, he attempted to balance the Russian and British influence in the region by entertaining relations with Germany. However, with the advent of World War II these ties would alarm Russia and Britain, which would decide to invade Iran in 1941 in order to secure oil fields and ensure supply lines. Shah Reza Khan would be forced to abdicate in favor of his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi.

In 1951, Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh was elected Prime Minister and acquired great popularity by nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. This

angered Britain, which was Iran main oil exploiter and as a result imposed an economic embargo. In 1953, Britain with the United States successfully plotted against Mossadegh who would be arrested creating a power vacuum that would be filled by Shah Pahlavi.³⁵³ This event fostered deep suspicion within Iranian society towards Western influence.

In the following years, the rule of Shah Pahlavi would become ever more autocratic as he sought to suppress any form of political opposition. In parallel, he further pursued industrialization and launched what is known as the “white revolution” which consisted in a series of deep economic and social reforms. However, Shah Pahlavi was perceived as a “puppet” of Western influence. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shia clergy, played on these two facts and emerged as a central figure on the national scene in the mid 1960s. This led to the 1978-79 Iranian revolution, also referred to as the Islamic revolution.³⁵⁴

The Islamic revolution, a popularly based revolution, would lay the foundations of today’s Islamic Republic of Iran with the adoption, on 24 October 1979, of its new constitution. The Republic would name Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. The following month, in November, the American embassy would be occupied by Iranian revolutionary students and 67 American diplomats would be taken hostage. The objective was to secure the extradition of Shah Pahlavi who had fled and was receiving medical treatment in New York. The operation backfired and provoked deep American anger. The hostage crisis lasted 444 days and cost President Carter his reelection.

On 22 September 1980, a year later, trying to profit from the perceived instability, Saddam Hussein launched an attack on Iran in order to regain disputed lands and obtain control of the river channel to the port of Basra. In Iran, this war was known as the Imposed. It lasted eight years until September 1988, costing 200 000 Iranian soldiers lives and 300 000 Iraqi soldier lives. The war was reminiscent of the 637AD battle of Qadisiyyah between Arabs and Persians which ended in the defeat of the latter. The Imposed War ended in a stalemate.

What emerges from this brief historical account is that Iran’s long and rich history has often been influenced by outside actors, both regionally and internationally and this has created a deep sense of suspicion towards other powers and a feeling of national frustration as Iran’s importance is not currently fully recognized.

IRAN TODAY

Today, Iran has a population of approximately 74 million and is predominantly Shia Islam. Tehran is its capital with 7.8 million and is the largest city in the Middle East.³⁵⁵ The national language is Persian. In 2008,

³⁵³ Wikipedia : Iran

³⁵⁴ “The History of Iran”, Elton L. Daniel

³⁵⁵ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population division: Iran
<http://esa.un.org/unpp/>

Iran's Gross Domestic Product was estimated at \$843 billion dollars and in 2005, Iran's car industry produced nearly one million cars.^{356 357}

In order to analyze how Islamic Republic of Iran's relations will evolve with its neighbor it necessary to identify how it will develop first. Its national interests will dictate its development and those are defined by the party in power and the political architecture.

The power structure

The Supreme Leader, established by the 1979 Constitution, is the highest-ranking religious and political authority of the nation. The role of the Supreme Leader is to delineate the general policies of the Islamic Republic and assumes the command of the armed forces. He has the last say in matters pertaining to foreign policy and is appointed by the Assembly of Experts which also has the power to dismiss him. As important, he is also the highest religious authority of the nation. There have been two Supreme Leaders since 1979: Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

The Guardian Council, the second most important political and religious body after the Supreme Leader, is composed of 12 members (6 Islamic jurists, 6 legal experts) and yields considerable influence in Iran's political life. It acts as the final authority in interpreting Islamic values and is charged with interpreting the Iranian constitution. The Guardian Council acts as an overall watchdog.

The President of Iran, head of the executive branch and currently headed by Mr. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is the highest popularly elected official and is subordinate to the Supreme Leader. Unlike many Presidents, he does not control the armed forces and does not have control of the Iran's foreign policy. The office of the president is relatively weak internationally. All presidential candidates must be approved by the Guardian Council.

The Parliament (Majlis), composed of 290 members popularly elected, drafts legislation, approves the national budget and ratifies treaties. However, as with the office of the President, every candidate must be approved by the Guardian Council before running for election and all the legislation enacted must also be approved by the Guardian Council. This filter has very often blocked reform minded candidates and legislation proposed by the moderate opposition.

In short, the government structure promotes and protects Islamic values but also provides for a certain degree of democracy.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the Supreme Leader and the Guardian Council play a very influential role in Iran's political life and direction.

Interests of the current regime

Historically, Iran has been subject to numerous outside interventions and therefore today's leadership seeks to counter that influence and reassert its

³⁵⁶ CIA – World Factbook : Iran

³⁵⁷ "Iran Car Production Nears 1 Million In 2005" IndustryWeek, 10 January 2006
http://www.industryweek.com/articles/iran_car_production_nears_1_million_in_2005_11247.asp

regional influence and restore its national pride. One of the elements to reassert its national pride is the nuclear program. By developing such a technology, Iran would demonstrate its scientific knowledge and its potential might, as it would have the knowhow to produce nuclear weapons, even if it does not actually produce them.

It is however doubtful that the regime will engage in the production of such weapons as it would be considered internationally as a provocation to the West. It would establish a deterrent relationship between the U.S. and might trigger a preemptive nuclear strike by Israel. In addition, Iranian authorities have reasserted their wish to remain within the context of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty that prohibits the production of nuclear weapons but allows the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.³⁵⁸

The recent presidential elections and the following events have demonstrated that the regime is under intense pressure from the reformist movement led by students but that its overall stability is not at stake. Therefore, it is fair to assume in our analysis that Iran's current structure as described will remain unchanged in the medium term.

Shia Islam and Sunni Islam

A key element to the relationship between Iran and its neighbors is its use of Shia-Sunni divide.

Shia Islam differs from Sunni Islam in the relation between the individual and his relationship with God. Shia Islam is based, like Sunni Islam, on the Holy book of the Quran and the message of the last prophet of Islam, Muhammad. However, in contrast to other schools of thought, Shia Islam holds that Muhammad's family and certain individuals among his descendants, who are known as Imams, have special spiritual and political rule over the community. In other words, in Shia Islam the individual does not have a direct relationship with God unlike Sunni Islam.

As a result, unlike Sunni Islam, Shia Islam is highly hierarchical as it goes from the simple mullah to the Grand Ayatollah. Therefore, its message is more consistent and unitary when compared to Sunni Islam.

Shia Islam is the second largest denomination of Islam after Sunni Islam and represents approximately 10% of the Muslim population.³⁵⁹ However, regionally, Iran's population is larger than that of most of its neighbor's combined. This creates an important imbalance that must be taken into consideration when discussing its relations with its neighbors.

RELATIONS WITH NEIGHBORS

Now that we have set the basic tenants of Iran's functioning, we can now study how its relations with its neighbors will evolve and whether those relations will be strained. This paper will restrict its analysis to Iran's Middle East immediate neighbors who are Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and the

³⁵⁸ "Iran Will Not Quit Treaty, Its Nuclear Chief Asserts" The New York Times, 5 December 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/middleeast/06iran.html?emc=tnt&tntemail0=y>

³⁵⁹ "L'Iran et l'Arc Chiite : Entre Mythe et réalité", Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI), http://www.ifri.org/files/Moyen_Orient/crIranArcchiite_161106.pdf

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as a whole. It will not consider the relations with the neighboring states to the north namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Turkmenistan as they are generally considered to be outside of the Middle East. Nor will we consider the wider Middle East comprising Israel, Lebanon, Syria and the link with the Hezbollah organization.

Iran - Iraq

Iran and Iraq share a long common history that has always been difficult. This difficulty lies in the fact Iran claims to be the guardian of Shia Islam, yet Iraq is its birthplace as it is home to the holy sites of Najaf and Karbala. In Shia Islam, each Shia Muslim has a duty to make a pilgrimage to one of these sites unless he does not have the means.

Therefore, Iran and Iraq share a strong complex common cultural bond divided by a border.

It is important to note that Iraq's population of 28 million and is approximately 60% Shia. However, its Sunni minority has traditionally ruled it.³⁶⁰ Saddam Hussein was a Sunni Muslim. This has fostered a sense of frustration throughout the Shia population.

This frustration is, however, subdued today as the Shias now lead it. It is the first time in the history of the Middle East that Shias rule an Arab state. The repercussions of this precedent will have to be followed closely, but it has not gone unnoticed by other Arab states.

In essence, the U.S. led invasion in 2003 and the removal of Saddam Hussein has largely benefited Iran, a country that the United States has sought to contain since the 1979 revolution.

Looking into the future, this relationship can only strengthen as the United States is gradually withdrawing its troops. As a relative authority vacuum will be created as a consequence of this withdrawal it is highly likely that Iran will try to assist Iraq in maintaining order and stability as it does not have an interest in witnessing a return of the ruling Sunni elite. Nonetheless, were the situation to evolve counter to U.S. interests, it is highly likely that the United States would return. Therefore, the fate of this relation is heavily dependent on a third factor namely the United States.

Iran - Saudi Arabia

The dynamic of the relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia differs in nature from the relationship with Iraq. Saudi Arabia is a Sunni dominated country and is Custodian of the holy Muslim sites of Mecca and Medina.

Saudi Arabia, located across the Arab Gulf, is a kingdom of approximately 28 million ruled by King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz.³⁶¹ Its capital is Riyadh and its population is mostly composed of Sunni Muslims of the Hanbali school. Hanbali Sunnis have strong anti-Shia tendencies.³⁶²

³⁶⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population division: Iraq
<http://esa.un.org/unpp/>

³⁶¹ CIA – Factbook : Saudi Arabia

³⁶² “L'Iran et l'Arc Chiite : Entre Mythe et réalité”, Institut français des relations internationales,
http://www.ifri.org/files/Moyen_Orient/crIranArcchiite_161106.pdf

Therefore, although Saudi Arabia and Iran have long established diplomatic relations since 1928, their relationship can be characterized as an uneasy one.

The kingdom hosts an important Shia communities located along the Gulf's coast and to the south on the border with Yemen. These communities create a rift within Saudi society, as Shias will tend to look to Tehran instead of Riyadh as their authority to follow and get guidance from. This uneasiness was recently highlighted when King Abdullah stated that Saudi Arabia would not allow anyone "to disturb the atmosphere of the Hajj, endangering the safety of pilgrims, or create divisions among Muslims" as a response to Iran who had called on Shiite faithful, on their way to Mecca, to promote demonstrations against the West and ongoing wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Palestine.³⁶³ This is also a reflection of the strong unitary message of Shia Islam.

In addition, Shia and Sunnis do not mix in Saudi Arabia, hence, leading to an ever widening gap between the two communities. For Saudi Arabia, managing these intercultural relations is a delicate and important matter for its safety and stability.

This relationship is further complicated by the alliance the kingdom entertains with the United States. America provides security assurances and maintains the stability of the leadership in return for access to Saudi Arabia's resources. Saudi Arabia has traditionally distanced itself from U.S. policy towards Iran and has resisted efforts to isolate it, but Iran still resents the alliance. Saudi Arabia has recognized that U.S. interests in the Gulf rely heavily on securing its access to natural resources and most importantly oil. It is a pragmatic long-term position that Saudi Arabia has adopted, as oil will run out, U.S. support might wane, but Iran will always be just across the Gulf.

It should be noted that the Kingdom is also wary of the renewed relation between Iran and Iraq and its Shia dominated government. From a geostrategic perspective however, Iran does not have any direct interests in intervening militarily in Saudi Arabia. The only military scenario where Iran would envisage an operation in Saudi Arabia would be if Shia communities were under threat by the Saudi regime. Furthermore, unlike Iraq and Afghanistan, Iran does not share a border with Saudi Arabia so a military operation would either require Iraqi consent which currently could be obtained or have to be of a maritime nature and would therefore encounter the United States Fifth Fleet stationed in the Gulf. In addition, an attack on Saudi Arabia would undoubtedly provoke a reaction from the United States.

On Tehran's side, there is a historical resentment for the ransack in 1802 by Saudi Wahhabis of Karbala in and the destruction of Fatima's mausoleum in Medina during the 1920s.³⁶⁴ Today, Shiites still weep on the tomb of Fatima, however there does not appear to be an appetite for revenge.

³⁶³ "King Abdullah warns Khamenei: No to the "Politicization" of the pilgrimage to Mecca", www.asianews.it, 3 November 2009, <http://www.asianews.it/index.php?l=en&art=16761&geo=1&theme=5&size=A>

³⁶⁴ The Essential Guide to the Middle East, Dilip Hiro, P.264.

Lastly, another factor affecting the relationship is the fact that King Abdullah is 84 years old and Grand Ayatollah Khamenei is only 70. Saudi Arabia has no clear successor to the King where as according to the Iranian Constitution should something happen to the Ayatollah a succession process exists. As a result, the Kingdom's continuity and stability is put into question.

In the long run, it is doubtful to believe that Iran and Saudi Arabia relations will warm as they are separated both culturally and economically. Relations will remain tense but a conflict between the two countries is unlikely.

Iran and Saudi Arabia respectively consider themselves the centers of Shia Islam and Sunni Islam and this reality will always make it difficult for both countries to get closer.

Iran - Afghanistan

The relationship can be described as ambivalent as Iran did not support the Taliban when they were in power during the 1990s and is now believed to be supporting them because of renewed U.S. efforts to stabilize the country.

Historically, Afghanistan has always been perceived by Iran as being part of the greater sphere of influence of the Persian Empire. Afghan rebels have played a role in the shaping of Shia Iran.

As U.S. Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, stated "Afghanistan is a weak country in a bad location" and is suffering from a surrogate confrontation between Western influences, under the NATO umbrella, and an Iranian resurgence.

From a strategic perspective, Afghanistan completes the encirclement of Iran by the United States which, since the 1979 revolution, has applied a policy of dual containment (Iraq-Iran).

The present situation in Afghanistan is a continuation of the confrontation between the United States and Iran that took place after its operation in Iraq in 2003 as it is indeed strategically wiser for Iran to lessen the intensity of the conflict in Iraq, where a Shia Government was elected, and transfer it in a different theater, Afghanistan. In doing so, Iran is weakening the encirclement led by the United States.

As the West increases their presence to stabilize the country and fight the Taliban, Iran perceives this as a potential threat and counters those efforts.

The relationship is further complicated by the situation of the Afghan refugees residing in Iran which number close to two millions. These refugees are the consequence of the 1980s war with the Soviet Union and repatriation creates stress on an already weak government. It is used by Iran when it wishes to assert pressure on the Afghan government.

However, Iran does not have a too strong an interest in promoting widespread instability in Afghanistan as this pushes local populations to cultivate poppy seeds for income which then finds a consumption and transit market in Iran's large cities. This in turn can lead to civil unrest and is in contradiction with Islamic ideals.

The relationship with Afghanistan will always suffer from *realpolitik* and will evolve accordingly.

Gulf Cooperation Council countries

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which consists of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, is a political and economic union aimed at reinforcing their economic integration. The dynamic of the relation between the GCC countries, with the exception of Saudi Arabia, is based on the small state large state relationship. In these relationships small states seek the support of larger states for their defense.

To cite an example the island state of Bahrain which is composed at 90% of Shia and is ruled by the Sunni minority. Iran has an irredentist claim over this country. Hence, after Iran's Islamic revolution, Shia fundamentalists orchestrated a failed coup under the auspices of the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Bahrain (IFLB). By 1995, after a number of large demonstrations inspired partly, again, by the IFLB, the Emir decided to let Washington establish its Fifth Fleet in Bahrain.³⁶⁵ In short, Bahrain sought the support of a large state in order to counter the influence of Iran. This dynamic is repeated with the other states of the GCC such as Kuwait.

These relationships are further complicated by the fact that many of the GCC countries were at one time or another part of the Persian Empire and, as highlighted, host important Shia communities.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen Iran is a large pivotal country in the Middle East that has continually been contained by Western powers.

A possible parallel could be drawn with 19th Century Germany. At that time, Germany had to deal with British, French and Russian containment efforts.³⁶⁶ Like Germany, Iran could become a regional economic powerhouse and also could provide the region with an important market. In turn, the region could become economically dependent which would make for uneasy relations.

The conclusion to be drawn from this analogy is not optimistic as the rise of German power in central Europe led to the Franco-Prussian war, followed in turn by World War I and World War II.

Iran's relations with its weak neighboring states will largely be dependent on the latter. It has to be noted that, when consulted, most neighboring countries primarily fear a powerful, nuclear capable Iran, instead of a powerful nuclear armed Israel.³⁶⁷

In that regard, Iran is playing the Russian and China cards. China is thirsty for energy. It signed, in 2004, two agreements to export a total of 350 million metric tons of liquefied gas over 25 years.³⁶⁸ This has brought the support from China at the United Nations Security Council on matters relating to Iran's nuclear program development.

³⁶⁵ The Essential Guide to the Middle East, Dilip Hiro, P. 72

³⁶⁶ Diplomacy, Henry Kissinger, P. 137

³⁶⁷ "An Iranian nuclear bomb, or the bombing of Iran?", The Economist, 8 December 2009.

³⁶⁸ "China, Iran Sign Biggest Oil & Gas Deal", ChinaDaily.com.cn, 31 October 2004, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-10/31/content_387140.htm

Iran already has the important support of the Russian Federation notably for the development of its nuclear program. As highlighted, Iran and Russia have long entertained close and sometimes difficult relations. Furthermore, Russia does not have an interest in aligning with the United States as the 1979 revolution opened the door to its influence in the region.

As mentioned, the United States developed the policy of Dual Containment towards Iran and time will tell if this policy will be followed upon. Currently as was demonstrated, since the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iran has greatly increased its influence in the region fostering fears among its neighbors.

The region is witnessing a realignment of positions of all actors. A delicate and subtle balance will have to be found among all the actors of the region and relations will always be tense.

THE IRAN NUCLEAR PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

Iran's nuclear program is one of the most important and complex political issues on the agenda of the IAEA and the international community. The nuclear issue has also become a fundamentally national mobilizing issue in Iran itself, and all political factions, groups, parties, and individual figures with entirely different political views are unanimous in asserting Iran's right to have access to nuclear technology. Despite the above, the Iranian nuclear program causes deep concern to Iran's Arab neighbors.

The nuclear program of Iran was launched in the 1950s with the help of the United States as part of the Atoms for Peace program initiated under President Eisenhower. The first nuclear reactors in Iran and Pakistan and India were built under the programme. The support, encouragement and participation of the United States and Western European governments in Iran's nuclear program continued right until the 1979 Islamic revolution that toppled the Shah of Iran.

After the Iranian Revolution in 1979, the Iranian government temporarily disbanded elements of the program, and then revived it with several research sites, a uranium mine, a nuclear reactor, and uranium processing facilities that include three known uranium enrichment plants.

Enriched uranium is a kind of uranium in which the percent composition of uranium-235 has been increased through the process of isotope separation. Natural uranium is only about 0.7% pure. Enriched uranium is therefore a critical component for both civil nuclear power generation and military nuclear weapons.

The International Atomic Energy Agency attempts to monitor and control enriched uranium supplies and processes in its efforts to ensure nuclear power generation safety and curb nuclear weapons proliferation.

HISTORY OF THE IRAN PROGRAM

1950 and 60s

The foundations for Iran's nuclear program were laid after a 1953 CIA-supported coup deposed the democratically-elected Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadegh and brought Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to power.

As mentioned earlier, a civil nuclear co-operation program was established under the U.S. Atoms for Peace Program.

In 1967, the Tehran Nuclear Research Center (TNRC) was established and run by the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI). The TNRC was equipped with a U.S.-supplied, 5-megawatt nuclear research reactor, which became operational in 1967 and was fueled by highly enriched uranium.

Iran signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970, thus accepting to place its nuclear program under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency in conformity with the relevant provisions of the treaty.

The 1970s

The Shah approved plans to construct, with U.S. help, up to 23 nuclear power stations by the year 2000. In 1974, the Shah envisioned a time when the world's oil supply would run out, and declared, "Petroleum is a noble material, much too valuable to burn... We envision producing, as soon as possible, 23 000 megawatts of electricity using nuclear plants".

The 1980s

In 1979 the Revolution started, and Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) of its plans to restart its nuclear program using indigenously-made nuclear fuel. Iran paid the U.S. to deliver new fuel and upgrade its power in accordance with a contract signed before the revolution. The U.S. delivered neither the fuel nor returned the billions of dollars it had received in payment.

The 1990s

In 1995, Iran signed a contract with the Russian Ministry of Atomic Energy to finish the reactors at Bushehr with the understanding that they will be under the IAEA safeguards. . They are designed to produce up to 180 kgr/year of plutonium in their spent fuel. The agreement called for Russia to complete the first reactor at Bushehr within four years, although it is still unfinished; to provide a 30-50 megawatt thermal light-water research reactor, 2,000 tons of natural uranium, and training for about 15 Iranian nuclear scientists per year. Iran and Russia also agreed to discuss the construction of a gas centrifuge uranium-enrichment facility in Iran. However, in 1995, the US announced that it had convinced Russia to cancel the centrifuge agreement, although Russia later denied that the agreement with Iran ever existed. The light-water research reactor deal has also been cancelled.

After the 1995 agreement was signed by Iran and Russia, the Clinton administration tried, unsuccessfully, to convince Russia to cancel the agreement, but its entreaties were rebuffed by Russia which saw the Bushehr project as an opening for her own ailing nuclear industry to establish itself in the international market. Having failed in its attempts, the Clinton administration then began charging that the plutonium that the reactors would produce would be used by Iran for making nuclear weapons. However, this issue was also being addressed by Iran and Russia, since they were negotiating an agreement by which the nuclear wastes from the Bushehr reactors would be returned to Russia which has a large facility in southern Siberia for storing the waste (although Russian environmental laws appear to forbid the storing nuclear waste of another country in Russia), but no agreement has been reached yet. It was reported recently that Iran has demanded payments for returning the spent fuel to Russia, contending that she pays to buy the fuel from Russia in the first place, and therefore she should also be paid for the spent fuel. If true, this would be an absurd demand, because if Russia is to pay for Iran's nuclear wastes, she should also be paid for keeping Iran's nuclear waste. The issue of who should pay whom appears to be the only obstacle to reaching an

agreement between Iran and Russia concerning the nuclear waste.³⁶⁹ After it appeared that the plutonium issue would be addressed by Russia, the US, under huge pressure from Israel, began claiming that, while the Bushehr reactors cannot be directly used for making nuclear weapons, they will train a generation of Iranian scientists and engineers for operating the reactor, which in turn will prepare Iran for making nuclear weapons. Having a nuclear reactor is not necessary for obtaining the necessary know-how for developing a nuclear bomb (although it certainly helps). The best example is provided by Iraq. Israel bombed and destroyed Iraq's only nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981, before it started operating, yet when its nuclear weapon program was discovered after the 1991 Gulf war, Iraq was only months away from making a nuclear bomb.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Iran insists enrichment activities are intended for peaceful purposes therefore within Article Four of the Non- Proliferation Treaty, which states that “Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the Parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination and in conformity with Articles I and II of this Treaty”.

The Western countries, including the United States and the European Union, allege that Iran is pursuing nuclear weapons, or a nuclear weapons "capability", even though there is no evidence of any such activities. The Western view is essentially based on suspicions about Iranian intentions, and on the insistence that the onus is on Iran to prove otherwise.

After Iran still refused to suspend enrichment, as required by the UN Security Council Resolution 1737, the Council decided in March 2007 to widen the scope of the sanctions.

In UN Security Council Resolution 1803 of March 3, 2008, the Council decided to extend those sanctions to cover additional financial institutions, restrict travel of additional persons, and bar exports of nuclear- and missile-related dual-use goods to Iran.

The implementation of the sanctions is monitored by a Security Council Committee established under Security Council resolution 1737.³⁷⁰

A Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East

Paradoxically enough, Iran has consistently supported the creation of a nuclear-weapons free zone in the Middle East. In 1974, as concerns in the region grew over Israel's nuclear weapons programme, Iran formally proposed the concept of a nuclear weapon free zone in the Middle East in UN General Assembly resolution 35/147 . The Shah of Iran had made a similar appeal five years earlier but had failed to attract any support. The call for the creation of nuclear weapons free zone in the Middle East was reiterated repeatedly, including by Iran's President Ahmadinejad.

The GCC Nuclear Summit, held in May 2009 in Dubai brought together senior decision makers from the energy sector and government

³⁶⁹ Foreign Affairs magazine(July 2009)

³⁷⁰ Non – Proliferation Treaty (www.wikipedia.org)

officials from the Middle East and abroad, and is considered of high importance to the development of nuclear energy in the region. The Summit recognized that, “when used for peaceful purposes and safely harvested, nuclear energy can be the answer to an expanding and insatiable appetite in world demand for more energy”.

Arab views

Many Arab countries ,notably the neighboring Gulf countries believe that Iran is using its civilian nuclear program as a cover-up to develop nuclear weapons. Other Arab leaders would perhaps support the Iranian nuclear program on the pretext that, after all, Iran is a fellow Muslim state that shares a strong hostility for Israel. Moreover, Pakistan's triumph in developing nuclear weapons to combat India's nuclear program generated great pride in the Muslim world.

The climate of suspicion aggravated by Iran’s increasing political role as a major Shia power in a predominantly Sunni region and Iran’s declared, and less declared, territorial claims on parts of the Gulf states have pushed the neighboring countries to extreme caution as to the nuclear ambitions of Iran.

Saudi Arabia had launched a strategic security review that set out three options:

- To acquire a nuclear capability as a deterrent;
- To maintain or enter into an alliance with an existing nuclear power that would offer protection;
- To try to reach a regional agreement on having a Nuclear Free Zone in the Middle East.

In many areas in the Middle East , notably Syria and Palestine a spirit of frustration prevailed in view of the perceived double standards of the USA and other western countries in handling the nuclear issue in Iran and Israel, the latter being well known for its nuclear arsenal.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) wants to continue discussions to create a civil nuclear program due to increasing unease over the Iranian government's nuclear program, the need felt by the GCC nations to increase their own nuclear technological capabilities, and the desire to replace high-priced oil products (that can be sold abroad) for lower priced nuclear energy.

A case in point is Bahrain. While supporting access of all member states to nuclear technology for peaceful uses such as electricity and other form of energy, it expresses serious concerns about the Iranian nuclear program. Notwithstanding the traditionally strong commercial relations between Iran and Bahrain , those relations have become increasingly tense. Although Bahrain and Iran differ politically on many issues, Bahrain has consistently expressed support for the security and stability in Iran and stressed interest in promoting cooperation between the two countries.

CONCLUSION

Iran is gradually becoming the strongest power in the Middle East and elaborating on its short-term plans, long-term goals and safety outlook. While it constantly indicates its readiness to negotiate with the IAEA and states

concerned about the scope and timing of its industrial-scale uranium enrichment, it also indicates its willingness to accept an IAEA verifiable cap on enrichment limit of reactor grade uranium.³⁷¹

Nevertheless, there is a penchant for secrecy, which makes it very difficult for anyone outside the innermost confines of the regime to really understand what is going on. But beyond that, the system itself does not lend itself to understanding even by the people inside it. It is a highly personalized system in which who speaks to whom about what on what day of the week often can be decisive on important policy matters.

The IAEA adopted on 27 November 2009 a resolution regarding the implementation of the NPT Safeguards agreement and the relevant provisions of Security Council Resolutions 1737(2006), 1747(2007), 1803(2008), and 1835(2008) that urge Iran to comply fully and without delay with its obligations under the above mentioned resolutions of the Security Council, and to meet the requirements of the Board of Governors of IAEA , including by suspending immediately the construction of a reactor at Qom and engaging with the Agency on the resolution of all outstanding issues concerning Iran's nuclear programme and, to this end, to cooperate fully with the IAEA by providing such access and information that the Agency requests to resolve these issues. Iran was specifically urged to provide the Agency with the requested clarifications regarding the purpose of the enrichment plant at Qom and the chronology of its design and construction.

The SC may soon adopt yet another resolution imposing new sanctions.

However, most countries believe that the way forward lies in remaining on the path of dialogue and debate, rather than confrontation and threats.

³⁷¹ Iran and the Middle East article (New York Times)

HEZBOLLAH

THE PARTY OF GOD

Hezbollah is a name that resonates with pride in the Arab World yet it is synonymous with terrorism in the Western World.

Many wonder of the reason behind such admiration from the Arab World despite their disagreements with many of Hezbollah's political leanings. High regard is attributed to Hezbollah's retaliation against Israel, its highly sophisticated technological weapons, and above all to its committed and constant community service.

Acts of kidnapping Israeli soldiers to exchange them for Arab prisoners (Palestinian, Lebanese etc) held in Israeli prisons have given this party a legendary reputation; a reputation prized by Arabs scarred by previous disappointment and despair.

Had you been in any Arab country in 2006 when this was taking place, you would have found many people to be proud of what Hezbollah was doing against their perception of Israeli atrocities, and would have witnessed slogans and posters of the head of Hezbollah (Hassan Nasrallah) widely sold in the streets.

On the other hand, if you were in a Western country, any media outlet would quickly denounce Hezbollah's act as terrorist in nature. All Israeli actions are seen as no more than a defence of its territory. The face is turned away from the thousands of imprisoned Palestinian held for years for allegedly engaging in acts of terrorism when they were only resisting Israeli occupation of their lands and homes in their struggle for self-determination.

Hezbollah continues to be mentioned in all major negotiations with either Syria or Iran, its two main supporters.

Furthermore, it brought up in discussions pertaining to any changes within the Lebanese political scene within which Hezbollah plays a great role.

Another issue of great interest to the international and local forces remains the possession of weapons that gives Hezbollah unprecedented leverage. This continues to be a bone of contention with Lebanese political parties and international forces headed by the United States who consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization.

Paying close attention to recent incidents in Iraq and witnessing how Iran has managed to create an extension of itself, it becomes clear that Hezbollah has benefited from its close ties with Iran.

Following Lebanon politics, it is fascinating to observe previous enemies of Hezbollah seeking new partnerships. Such a transformation makes this a fascinating subject to read and analyze.

If you ask anyone in Lebanon what is the relationship between Hezbollah and Iran or Syria, they will be quick to explain that in the absence of support from either country, Hezbollah would not have been able to reach the status it has today. Why then would Syria or Iran support Hezbollah? This paper will attempt to answer this question.

HISTORY

Hezbollah is a Muslim Shiite political group with a militant wing. The United States considers Hezbollah a terrorist organization. The group, which is active in Lebanon, is a major provider of social services, operating schools, hospitals, and agricultural services for thousands of Lebanese Shiites. Hezbollah's political standing was bolstered after a wave of violence in May 2008 prompted the Lebanon's lawmakers to compromise with the militant group. In August 2008, the country's parliament approved a national unity cabinet, giving Hezbollah and its allies veto power with eleven of thirty cabinet seats. Hezbollah also operates the Al-Manar satellite television channel and broadcast station.³⁷²

Hezbollah's base is in Lebanon's Shiite-dominated areas, that includes parts of Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley.

The most well-known leaders of the party are Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah who is considered the group's spiritual leader and Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's senior political leader who began as a military commander. Nasrallah's military and religious credentials—he studied in centers of Shiite theology in Iran and Iraq—quickly elevated him to a position of leadership within the group. Experts say he took advantage of rivalries within Hezbollah and the favor of the Head of Iran's theocratic government, Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, to become the group's secretary general in 1992, a position he still holds. On the other, Imad Fayezi Mugniyah was considered to be key planner of Hezbollah's worldwide operations for over twenty years. During the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s, many believed that Mugniyah trained with Al-Fatah. When both the Palestine Liberation Organization and Al-Fatah were expelled from Lebanon by Israeli forces in 1982, Mugniyah joined the newly formed Hezbollah and quickly rose to a senior position in the organization. On February 13, 2008, Mugniyah was killed in a car bombing in Damascus. Hezbollah officials accused Israel of launching the attacks that killed him, but the Israeli government has denied any involvement.³⁷³

Despite Israel's 2000 withdrawal from Lebanon, Hezbollah continued to periodically shell Israeli forces in the disputed Shebaa Farms border zone. Periodic conflict between the group and Israel erupted into full-scale war during the summer of 2006. An UN-brokered cease-fire was formalized in 2006, ending the five-week conflict, but not before one thousand people were killed and hundreds of thousands were forced to flee.

Contrary to popular belief, the political organization of Hezbollah emerged in 1985 only after the formation of the military arm in 1982. The birth of Hezbollah came about as a result of the foreign wars and internal violence in Lebanon. Iran has had the most prominent role in the emergence of this party particularly after the end of the Shiite Amal movement. The Amal movement, considered a Sunni army, was involved in large-scale massacres against the

³⁷² Council on Foreign Relations "Hezbollah"

³⁷³ *ibid*

Palestinians in Lebanon. It could no longer promote Iran and therefore had to be replaced by another party. The main purpose was to bring Iran into the current events of the region and link it to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN

Many claim Hezbollah to be an Iranian party in Lebanon as indicated from its mission statement that clearly states “We have founded a new Islamic state which will follow the orders of one just and wise commander, Imam Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini”. Ibrahim Amin (leader in the party) explained this approach in 1987, when he said: “We do not say that we are part of Iran; we are Iran in Lebanon and Lebanon in Iran”.

Observers need to pay close attention to this as it holds the key to understanding Hezbollah. For instance, the current Secretary General of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah is the legitimate representative of Ali Khamenei in Lebanon.

Iran worked hard to give the party the ideal image often supporting it financially to attract more fighters into its ranks. According to the author of *The Secret Wars*, the total monthly wage of each fighter was five thousand Lebanese lira, the highest fighter wage possible in Lebanon in 1986. This high salary drew many Amal movement fighters to join Hezbollah ranks.³⁷⁴

In order to prevent internal conflicts and for fear of distorting the party’s image, Iran had to cover all the party’s financial needs, which amounted to three and a half million dollars in 1990.

Several health, social and educational institutions began to appear. For example the “Jihad for Construction” institution has a lot of engineers, technicians and workers. Since 1988 its mission was to survey the damage caused by Israeli attacks, rebuild destroyed houses and shelters, dig wells, rebuild clinics and schools, and implement agriculture training courses. Furthermore, through the Veterinary Medicine center, veterinary services were provided that distributed about 120,000 seedlings in South and Bekaa valley.

Similarly, the Islamic Health Society since its inception in 1984 provided medical services through its centers, clinics and hospitals in poor areas. An association namely the “Foundation of Good Loan” was aimed to provide needy people with non-interest-based loans. The “Association of Islamic Charitable Aid” worked to help families to become self-sufficient, upgrading their educational level and caring of orphans and disabled. The “Martyr Foundation” aimed to raise the educational and social quality of martyrs families. More recently, the institution of “Islamic Education” worked on establishing schools in most of Lebanon areas to take care of martyrs’ children.

Hezbollah also encouraged and supported many civil societies such as a “Support of the Islamic Resistance” Society which launched campaigns to collect donations, blood donation, holding seminars and exhibitions in different regions in Lebanon. Such civil societies helped promote the objectives and the

³⁷⁴ Irantracker.org “Iran-Lebanese Hezbollah relationship”

messages of the resistance to mobilize support for operations against the occupation forces.

Consequently, the party was able to integrate into the social fabric of Lebanon. This enabled Hezbollah to articulate the policies of "adjustment", adopted in the face of internal political changes, without changing its priority of confronting the occupation armies.

We can summarize the mutual benefits between Hezbollah and Iran in the following points:

- First: The Party promotes the principles of the Iranian revolution with its financial burdens taken care of by Iran.
- Second: Iran has provided weapons for Hezbollah to liberate the south (not to fight Israel) within the Lebanese internal structure. By doing this, Iran aims to make Hezbollah a well-known party in the Muslim world, paving the way for the Iranian interests with ease. Its goal is to imprint the Iran fingerprint in the Arab region.
- Third: Hezbollah secures a foothold for Iranian politics that seek to exploit the issue of Israel to a greater extent in spite of geographical distance. Hezbollah becomes Iran's bargaining chip that it uses to manipulate a situation.³⁷⁵

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIA

The party's relationship with Syria is quite strong. Syria has paid special attention to Hezbollah, facilitating its military operations. It has exempted Hezbollah from the implementation of the "Al-Taif Accord" that requires the disbanding and disarming of all militias.

The mutual benefits between Syria and Hezbollah can be summarized as follows:

- First: strengthen and develop a close alliance between Syria and Iran by supporting Hezbollah.
- Second: Hezbollah is an important bargaining tool in the Syrian-Israeli relations.
- Third: In return, Hezbollah continues to receive aid from Syria, as it guarantees the Syrians that it will remove any obstacles or internal objections in Lebanon.
- Fourth: Due to the Hezbollah presence in Lebanon, Syria does not need to have resistance movements in the Golan Heights, because the Israeli response will be on the Syrian army not on the resistance.³⁷⁶

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE U.S.

The United States accuses Hezbollah and its affiliates for planning or being linked to a lengthy series of attacks against the United States, Israel, and other Western targets. These attacks include:

- a series of kidnappings of Westerners in Lebanon, including several Americans, in the 1980s;

³⁷⁵ Albainah.net/ Ali Bakir "Hezbollah"

³⁷⁶ Twq.com" Hezbollah and Syria: Outgrowing the Proxy Relationship"

- the suicide truck bombings that killed more than 200 U.S. Marines at their barracks in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1983;
- the 1985 hijacking of TWA flight 847, which featured the famous footage of the plane's pilot leaning out of the cockpit with a gun to his head;
- two major 1990s attacks on Jewish targets in Argentina—the 1992 bombing of the Israeli Embassy (killing twenty-nine) and the 1994 bombing of a Jewish community center (killing ninety-five).
- a July 2006 raid on a border post in northern Israel in which two Israeli soldiers were taken captive. The abductions sparked an Israeli military campaign against Lebanon to which Hezbollah responded by firing rockets across the Lebanese border into Israel.³⁷⁷

For Hezbollah and other resistance movements these attacks of revenge are in retaliation against the injustices carried out by Israel in the Occupied Territories. The US and the West consider Hezbollah a terrorist party while the people in the region see it as a role model for all resistance movements.

THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ISRAEL

It is important to note the developments that occurred after Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon. No one can deny Hezbollah's role in the loss of some Israeli soldiers, however, the withdrawal was not a result of these losses. If this were the case, Israel would have withdrawn from the Gaza Strip a long time ago as human and economic losses have exceeded those of the incident in southern Lebanon. Similarly, if the Hezbollah attacks alone were the cause, then why did Israel not withdraw from Shebaa Farms despite strikes on Israelis.

Israel's withdrawal was a great achievement yet it re-shaped the strategies and political lines of the two parties. These are as follows:

- First: Israel's withdrawal means that there is no justification for the existence of Hezbollah as claimed because its main role was to liberate the Lebanese occupied lands. However this has not happened.
- Second: it was an introduction for the Syrian withdrawal. The Israeli withdrawal gave the most powerful countries, especially United States of America more credibility to put pressure on Syria to leave Lebanon as evident in 2005.³⁷⁸

It became apparent since the withdrawal of Israeli forces from southern Lebanon in 2000, that the role of Hezbollah was marginalized. It was forced to curtail its powerful operations for the benefit of others with more publicity. People in the Arab world were in love with Hezbollah because of its goals to liberate the lands and to stand in the face of Israel but on the other hand they were still wary of the Shiite practices in Iraq. This link between what

³⁷⁷ Council on Foreign Relations "Hezbollah"

³⁷⁸ experiencefestival.com" Hezbollah after the Israeli withdrawal"

is happening in Iraq and Hezbollah's media propaganda was drawn upon by many analysts and suggests the following.³⁷⁹

- First: Prisoners exchange with Israel. The issue of the past prisoners exchange, was a form of "media noise" created by Hezbollah to gain the spotlight yet it did not benefit the Palestinian people. According to a statement issued from the Palestinian Prisoner Society, most of the Palestinian prisoners who were released had completed shorter sentences as Israeli jails were no longer able to accommodate them. At that time, critics expressed their annoyance over Hezbollah exploitation of this and how it was perceived to be "Hezbollah" victory. Later, it was revealed that the bodies received by the party were not of Lebanese martyrs but of Palestinians which showed Israel to be victorious in this deal.
- Second: The reconnaissance plane "Mirsad 1", which Hezbollah began to depend on, was only a cover up from what was really happening in the streets of Iraq and Palestine. The timing coincided with the time where people had a favorable view of the Shiites. Yet being an Iranian tool, it became necessary to polish the image of Shiites in the Arab world and hide any Iranian-American cooperation. Meanwhile the Shiite higher reference has entered into a deep sleep without any comments, prompting outrage in many parts within and outside Iraq, especially after the announcement of reports that indicated that more than 80% of the National Guard were part of the massacres in Falluja with the U.S. troops are followers of Ayatollah Sistani and other Shiite militias.

HEZBOLLAH AND THE PALESTINIAN ISSUE

Of course, from the Lebanese perspective, Hezbollah is a sectarian party, meaning that it only cares about the affairs of its own community.

However, Hezbollah must remind itself that it stands by the Palestinian issue, but many accuse it of changing its attitude since the Israeli withdrawal, to become a protector and defender of Israeli borders.

Along with this serious issue came the article written by Brigadier General Sultan Abul-Enein, Secretary General of Fatah in Lebanon, published in "Al Quds Al Arabi" newspaper in 2004, entitled: "Hezbollah defeats the Palestinian resistance operations in the South". He wrote that Hezbollah wants resistance as an exclusive privilege especially in the Shebaa Farms and that the Palestinian people should not count on Hezbollah (which has its own set of priorities) or anyone else, but instead, should rely only on themselves.

During the recent Israeli war on Gaza, many people asked for the reason behind Hezbollah non-interference to help the Palestinians especially when it claims that it was created to do so. Many of these have come to the conclusion that Hezbollah is only a tool for Iran and not a real resistance movement.

³⁷⁹ Albainah.net/ Ali Bakir "Hezbollah"

THE FUTURE OF HEZBOLLAH

It is not the first time that the future of Hezbollah is discussed. Every time there is a regional or international development regarding Lebanon, Iran or Syria, the topic of Hezbollah and its future comes up. Hezbollah future was discussed on four previous occasions:

- First: With the prospects of a peaceful settlement on the Syrian-Israeli track in the White Plantation in the era of former U.S. President Bill Clinton, Hezbollah's future was raised because of its relationship with Syria and its involvement in the context of the Syrian strategy towards Israel.
- Second: During Israel's declaration of its intention to withdraw from southern Lebanon, where Tel Aviv made conditions relating to the regularization of the party status, within the framework of the Lebanese-Israeli track, but the issue was not resolved as a result of Israel's unilateral withdrawal without an agreement with the Lebanese government.
- Third: In the mid-nineties with tension in Syrian-Iranian relations, strong ties between Syria and United States were putting pressure on Damascus to stop supporting Hezbollah as an organization that threatens Israel's security.
- Fourth: After the assassination of the Lebanese Former Prime Minister Rafiq AL-Hariri and the withdrawal of Syrian troops, the Hezbollah issue began to grow inside and outside Lebanon.

But the future, even if it was difficult for us to predict it, may not necessarily divert from the three scenarios given below with regard to disarmament of the party in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 1559.

The first scenario: disarmament through internal bargaining:

This scenario assumes that most Lebanese factions agree to disarm Hezbollah depending on number of arguments, including:

- The Al-Taif Accords had explicitly called for the disarming of all Lebanese militias (including those that were resisting the occupation like Amal, the Communists and others) and that Hezbollah exception in this text was a result of the Syrian and Iranian support. However, sooner or later, Hezbollah may have to hand over its weapon.
- Since everyone is demanding a sovereign and independent state of Lebanon, this requires the removal of all forms of non-formal arms, so that the Lebanese army and the police are the only entities that should have the capacity to protect the rules, enforce the law, and defend the sovereignty and independence of Lebanon.
- From now onwards, Hezbollah cannot be considered to be a representative part of the government while at the same time maintaining an armed wing, because that would raise the sensitivity among other Lebanese communities.

On the whole and in all cases, this scenario seems to be difficult to achieve.

The second scenario: the disarmament of Hezbollah after an Israeli withdrawal from Shebaa:

In case of the failure of the first scenario failure, there is information to suggest that the U.S. may resort to another scenario to persuade Israel to withdraw from the Shebaa Farms. This would eliminate the argument that Hezbollah is resisting Israeli occupation of Shebaa Farms and thereby Hezbollah loses its justification for existence.

This scenario is used in the case that the Lebanese parties agree to avoid tackling the issue of Hezbollah's weapons and thus evade the effects of international resolution and the failure of plans to dismantle Hezbollah.

The only option for Israel and international powers in the event of the Lebanese government is to confirm that Shebaa Farms belongs to Lebanon. If Syria submits a written recognition of the sovereignty over the Farms (despite the fact that Syria had officially stated on many occasions, by Vice President Faruq al-Shara, or by Foreign Minister Walid Al-Muallem, that the Shebaa Farms are Lebanese) if Israel does so and withdraws from Shebaa Farms, Hezbollah will not have any other excuse to keep its weapons, and there will be no legitimate or legal justification for the existence of Hezbollah as a military resistance organization.

The problem in this scenario is that if Israel is not sure that the Lebanese state as well as United Nations forces will govern and control the Lebanese-Israeli borders, it will not withdraw because it may allow the Palestinian militants in Lebanon to start armed operations against Israel, and therefore keeping Hezbollah in the game is much better than taking it out.

The third scenario: a U.S. - Iran package to end its military status:

This scenario supports the opinions which say that there is a kind of cooperation between the United States and Iran and they are allied in some subjects like Afghanistan and Iraq, and that the United States may give Iran some concessions regarding its nuclear program.

But the possibility for this deal to emerge has a very low probability unless it supports Israeli withdrawal from the remaining Lebanese occupied territories.

Some see it in the interest of United States and Israel for the time being to keep Hezbollah, because it is a factor and a safety valve for the Lebanese-Israeli border, especially in a time when the so-called Salafi Jihadist forces that do not have any regional, local or internal balance standards. Support for this analysis depends on a number of things such:

- Hezbollah completely controls its areas and does not allow anyone to interfere in it and thus, dealing with the Hezbollah is much better than the impact of its absence from these areas.
- Hezbollah is "pragmatic" in the sense that it accepts dialogue and negotiations and exchanges like what happened during the prisoners exchange.

- Hezbollah has clearly announced several times that it does not interfere in any matters outside Lebanese territory.

Supporters of this scenario calls for more rapprochement with the Shiites, because dealing with them is based on interests, not principles, and that the Shiites in spite of their slogans are quite cooperative and open.

In conclusion we see that Hezbollah is a strong element in the political game in Lebanon, so all other Lebanese parties will have to deal with it.

In the other hand, the United States should also forget its past antipathy towards Hezbollah and start a new phase with this party, as with Iran and Syria.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION

INTRODUCTION

In spite of a growing tendency towards economic and political globalization and regionalism in today's world, the current situation and facts in the Middle East indicate that this region is not yet ready for integration.

The nations of the world are trying to resolve regional and global crises along with the challenges facing their countries by pursuing united, coordinated and cooperative policies and strategies. However, these policies and strategies differ in the Middle East because the crises in this region are different from those in other regions.

Developing a united Middle East has been an ambition for local politicians and statesmen for many years. Indeed, efforts have been made during the last seven decades to bring harmony and unity among Arab countries. Examples of these efforts include the establishment of The Arab League in 1945, the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 1969, the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1981, and the Arab Maghreb Union Treaty in 1989. However, all these initiatives have been unable to tackle the current conflicts and existing problems in the region due to diversities of interest, existing disparities, and disunity among member states. In addition, interference and exerting of influence by external world powers has been another obstacle for this ambition.

Elsewhere, in Europe, in South East Asia, in North America, in Africa, in the Caribbean and in the Pacific, many regional arrangements have been made promoting economic activities and the creation of closer ties among nations, some of which have been quite successful. The European Union (EU) model is a very good example of the success of regional agreements. The EU started out as the European Coal and Steel Community, then evolved into the European Economic Community (EEC), and European Community before it finally became a united organization. It is noteworthy that the establishment of the EU occurred after a great deal of devastating wars, conflicts, tensions and territorial disputes.

However, after comparing the characteristics of countries in the Middle East and Europe it is clear that the societies, culture, religion and geographical locations are not identical.

In order for regional integration to succeed, there needs to exist prerequisites and conditions which constitute a basis that can cement integration. In the Middle East many obstacles need to be examined.

This essay examines the reasons and factors preventing the creation of a Middle Eastern Union. It sheds light on the required elements and preconditions that do not exist among countries in this region.

SOURCES OF DISUNITY

The Middle East, situated at the crossroads of three continents, is a rich and diverse region of enormous cultural significance throughout history, and replete with diversity. It is the birthplace of major civilizations and the

world's three great religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, today there are serious divisive issues in this region such as, Israel-Palestine conflict, Iran's nuclear enrichment program, terrorist activities, suicide bombs, fundamentalism and extremism, Al-Qaida, Taliban, Hamas, Hezbollah, war on terrorism in Iran and Afghanistan, just to name a few.

After the discovery of oil in the 20th Century, the Middle East has been the arena for rivalry among powers. Other than oil, land and water have also been the source of tensions and conflict among the nations in this region. Additionally, religious tensions among Muslims, Jews, and Christians have also caused conflicts and tensions.

Considering the abovementioned issues, it is better to go through the reasons that are obvious obstacles for any integration of Middle East. The chief obstacles are as follows:

- 1- The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict,
- 2- Tensions between Iran and Israel,
- 3- The reinforcement of Islamic movements (Hezbollah and Hamas),
- 4- The threat of nuclear proliferation in the region.
- 5- Religious divisions and tensions (Muslims, Christians, Jews, Sunni Muslims, Shiite Muslims, Druze Muslims, Ibadis Muslims, etc.),
- 6- Ethnic divisions and tensions (Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Jews, Turks, etc.).
- 7- Linguistic variety and differences.
- 8- External influences.
- 9- Refugee problems.
- 10- Diversity of political systems.
- 11- Disunity among members of Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), GCC, Pan Arabism, and Arab League.
- 12- Unresolved territorial disputes between countries.
- 13- Oil as a source of blessing or tension.

It is worth elaborating each of these reasons in details as follows:

The ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict:

This conflict did not arise in the region itself but was planted there by external actors. Beginning with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, this conflict has been going on for ninety years already. It is an undeniable fact that unless a peace settlement for this conflict is reached, regional integration cannot be achieved in the Middle East. This is, in fact, the core problem of the Middle East.

Tensions between Iran and Israel

Tensions started between Iran and Israel after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Ayatollah Khomeini called Israel a "cancerous tumor", and since then Iran has routinely awaited Israel's demise. Iran does not recognize Israel as a country and refers to it as the "Zionist Regime". President Ahmadinejad has repeatedly expressed his contempt for the Jewish country since taking office in

2005. He has described the Holocaust as a myth and most famously, in 2006, was reported as saying he wanted to see Israel "wiped off the map".³⁸⁰ These provocative remarks indicate a more aggressive Iranian policy against the Jewish state. Furthermore, these tensions escalated due to Iran's recent development of nuclear enrichment programs and technology, which is a major concern to the Israel. The tensions sometimes are so high that there is likelihood a serious attack from any side.

The reinforcement of Islamic movements (Hezbollah and Hamas)

Iran and Syria are accused of intervening in Lebanon's affairs by supporting groups such as Hezbollah, Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Although Hezbollah and Hamas are not organizationally linked, it is said that Hezbollah provides military training as well as financial and moral support to the Sunni Palestinian group.

The threat of nuclear proliferation in the region

So far Israel and Pakistan are the only two nuclear powers in the Middle East. Iran's launching of its nuclear enrichment program has caused great concern to the surrounding countries, especially Israel, and has even prompted a nuclear surge in the Middle East. Almost a dozen Muslim nations have declared their interest in nuclear energy programs in the past years.³⁸¹ The nuclear ambitions of majority Sunni Muslim states such as Libya, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and possibly others, are partly a reaction to Israel's nuclear weapons capacity, and partly a reaction to Shiite Iran's high-profile nuclear bid, which is seen as Tehran's campaign for greater influence and prestige throughout the Middle East. This unprecedented demand for nuclear programs is a threat to the future of the region and the world.

Religious Divisions and Tensions

Three of the world's major religions, as well as smaller sects that continue to exist today, arose in the Middle East. Islam, however, is the predominant religion in most of the countries of this region.

About the 85 percent of Muslims worldwide are Sunni, and about 15 percent are Shiite. Most Sunnis are Arab and non-Arab, and most Shiites are in Iran and Iraq. There are always tensions between these two sects. These tensions are reflected in the relationships in Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and among the Shiia Houthis on the Yemen-Saudi borders. Tensions between Zionism and Islam are another example.

The following are approximate figures in the Middle East region (excluding figures for communities outside the Middle East in Africa, South Asia, Central Asia, and elsewhere):

- Sunni Muslims: 300 million (including Afghanistan and Pakistan)
- Shiite Muslims: 135 million (including Afghanistan and Pakistan)
- Druze Muslims: less than one million

³⁸⁰ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/sep/25/iran.israelandthepalestinians>

³⁸¹ http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2007/08/nuclear_surge.html

- Ibadhi Muslims: 2 million
- Christians: 14 million
- Jews: 6 million³⁸²

The Shias themselves are further sub-divided into the Zaydis, the Ismailis, the Ithna Asharis.

Ethnic Divisions and Tensions (Arabs, Persians, Kurds, Jewish, Turkish etc.)

Tensions have always existed among these ethnic groups in different countries. Even in the past and present, historical battles occurred over land or territory or the right of self-determination. Some of them are still fighting for their rights as minorities in some Middle Eastern countries.

The following is a rough break-down of major ethnicities:

- *Arab*: about 170 million citizens of Middle East are grouped under the umbrella Arab.
- *Persian*: more than 44 million citizens of Middle Eastern countries are Persian, and most are in Iran and Afghanistan.
- *Kurds*: approximately 20 million Kurds live in the Middle East. Over 5 million in Iraq, about the same in Iran, and Kurds are also found in Syria, Lebanon, and eastern part of Turkey.³⁸³
- *Jews*: approximately 7 million in the Middle East and believed to be descendants of the twelve Hebrew tribes that lived in the area of today's Israel in prehistoric times.
- *Punjabi*: approximately more than 77 million Punjabis live in the greater Middle East mostly in Pakistan.

Other ethnicities form minor populations of different countries in the Middle East such as, Berbers, Ibadis, Non-Arab Asians (Pakistani, Baluch and Indians) Africans, Gypsies, and Coptic etc.

Linguistic Variety and Differences

Language diversity among the nations of this region is another example of variety. Arabic is, in fact, the most common language in the Middle East. It is widely spoken in twenty two countries as well as by Palestinians – these include Algeria, Comoros, Djibouti, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Libya, Lebanon, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.), and Yemen. Arabic is also the official language for the Arab population in Israel. Farsi or Persian as it is often called because it is the language of Persia is spoken in the former Persia, which is now Iran and Afghanistan. It is also used as a minor, though unofficial, language in Bahrain and the U.A.E.³⁸⁴ Other languages spoken in the Middle East include Turkish, Kurdish, Urdu, Hebrew, and Coptic.

External Influences

External powers have been fighting for dominance in the region. Russia works behind the scenes in Iran and Syria, selling Iran commercial

³⁸² What every American should know about the Middle East, by Melissa Rossi-page22

³⁸³ ibid - Page 20.

³⁸⁴ <http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art27809.asp>

nuclear technology and missiles. Moscow is building Iran's nuclear plants and making ballistic missile deals as well as pushing for a natural gas cartel OPEC with Iran and Venezuela. Russia is also moving in as an arms supplier to Egypt and is reportedly building at least one naval base in Syria, on the Mediterranean, close to Lebanese border. The French too have gotten into the action with a new base being constructed in the Gulf; off the United Arab Emirates (now a French nuclear energy customer). The 2003 invasion rooted the United States has in the Middle East, with permanent military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan. The United States consistently supported Israel's aggressive moves against its neighbors, be it Lebanon, Syria, or the Palestinian territories. Israel has received the bulk of foreign aid budget (over sixty billion dollars since 1975). The United States vetoed thirty-two United Nations resolutions concerning Israel. The United States depends on a few Middle Eastern countries mostly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iraq for oil. Since the Persian Gulf War as well as 2001 War on Terror the United States established military bases in the Gulf Arab countries by deploying military men there. In fact, it is all the resources and energy that has triggered powers to dominate this region as well as its conflicts.

Refugee Problems

The refugee issue is the biggest problem in the Middle East. Over eight million have lost their homes because of wars. Four million or more Palestinians who lost their lands during the Arab-Israeli wars have been living in camps for over fifty years.³⁸⁵ Approximately two million Iraqis have fled the conflict in Iraq with the majority taking refuge in Syria and Jordan.³⁸⁶ Approximately 3 million Afghan refugees are in Iran and Pakistan.

Diversity of Political Systems

A variety of political systems and governments are operating in the Middle East - republics, theocratic republics, Islamic republics, parliamentary democracies, constitutional monarchies, nominal constitutional monarchies, hereditary monarchies, traditional monarchies, federations. Some of them are strongly pro-western and pro-American in their relationships. In addition, due to the historical problems among the countries of the region, these countries seek partnerships and alliances with big powers rather the regional countries. Many Arab countries of Middle East are ruled by royal families, some younger rulers are progressive and are modernizing and opening up their countries, giving new rights to citizens; yet they also grapples with the role religion plays in their governments and there are tensions between conservatives and reformers.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC):

The Organization of the Islamic Conference was set up in Rabat, Morocco on September 25, 1969 in reaction to an arson attack against the Al-Aqsa Mosque in 1969.³⁸⁷ With almost sixty Member States, whose people are mainly followers of the Islamic religion, the OIC is today the second largest

385 The Middle East by Melissa Rossi, page 8.

386 CIA- The world Fact Book-International Disputes

387 http://www.fimcivilsociety.org/en/library/OIC_Overview_and_Analysis.pdf

international organization after the UN and represents a substantial portion of the world's developing countries. However, the group remains disunited. A very good example of lack of cohesion and harmony among OIC members can be noticed concerning the United Nations' resolutions.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

In 1981, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates founded the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to strengthen regional, political and military cooperation. It was established due to the fear from Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979. The GCC faces significant changes as it deals with political transitions, uncertain relations with a new Iraq, rapprochement with Iran and shifting oil market. In Bahrain, the Shiite majority has long agitated for equal political and economic rights.³⁸⁸ For GCC countries, one of their most prominent external issues is how to handle a diplomatically revived Iran.

Pan Arabism

This is the nationalist notion of cultural and political unity among Arab countries. Its origins lie in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when increased literacy led to a cultural and literary renaissance among Arabs of the Middle East. This contributed to political agitation and led to the independence of most Arab states from the Ottoman Empire (1918) and from the European powers (by the mid-20th Century). An important event was the founding in 1943 of the Baath Party, which formed branches in several countries, and became the ruling party in Syria and Iraq. Another was the founding of the Arab League in 1945. Pan-Arabism's most charismatic and effective proponent was Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. After Nasser's death, Syria's Hafiz al-Assad, Iraq's Saddam Hussein, and Libya's Muammar al-Qaddafi tried to assume the mantle of Arab leadership but their efforts came to naught.³⁸⁹

The Arab League

The formation of the Arab League by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Transjordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen was mainly due to the establishment of Israel. Lack of unity among 22 members of Arab League can be seen in the 20th Arab League Summit in 2008. Only 11 heads of state of Arab countries travelled to the conference and the others boycotted the annual gathering. They criticized Syria for inviting Iran to attend the summit as an observer. These countries in fact are divided into two groups of radicals and moderates.

Unresolved Territorial Disputes

The United Arab Emirates continues to be embroiled with Tehran in a dispute over three tiny islands (Tunb Islands and Abu Musa Island) in the Persian Gulf that Iran claimed on the eve of UAE independence in 1971. The Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied with the almost 1,000-strong UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) patrolling a buffer zone since 1964; lacking a treaty or other documentation describing the boundary. Portions of

³⁸⁸ See the Middle East, CQ Press, a division of congressional quarterly INC-Washington DC.

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³⁸⁹ <http://www.answers.com/topic/pan-arabism>

the Lebanon-Syria boundary are unclear with several sections in dispute. Since 2000, Lebanon has claimed Shabaa farms in the Golan Heights.³⁹⁰ Of course the very flagrant Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is another major dispute. Libya has claimed more than 32,000 sq km in southeastern Algeria and about 25,000 sq km in the Tommo region of Niger in a currently dormant dispute.

The Impact of Oil

Since the discovery of oil and especially when Britain decided to upgrade the its navy in 1913, it dramatically rearranged the whole region - economically, politically, and geographically - all to best serve Britain's military needs. When the navy switched to oil instead of much heavier coal - every major navy in the world soon followed suit - it shifted the weight of the world. Moreover, it is the paramount role of oil that the West and the US are involved in. It is the energy and resources in the region that created rivalry and dominance among powers both in the cold war era and at the present time. The Middle East has been the world's main source of energy for years and has its stability been very critical for the industrial countries. It has even triggered wars and battles in the region.

CONCLUSION

Integration is one of the main elements of the globalization process that can have different forms, namely economic integration, political integration and social integration. Countries of the world that have a common history and background are making efforts to ensure their political and economic interests, and fulfill their needs through putting aside their differences and establishing unification, coalitions and partnerships to improve and foster higher economic growth and development. This is exemplified by the trade blocs mentioned earlier.

Some regional agreements have been successful to some extent, however, there are regions such as the Middle East where such integration aspirations have failed.

The wish for the integration of Middle East that ultimately leads to formation of a Middle Eastern Union is a great idea in today's globalized world. However, the Middle East is not ready for the realization of this scheme as the required preconditions will take many years yet. In addition, any move towards achieving this ambition may face the preventive reactions of other major players whose interests are concerned.

Unless the conflict of Israel-Palestine is solved, this goal cannot be attained. In fact, this is one of the major reasons for blocking unity and peace in the region among Arabs and Jews. It is also the reason that has involved some external powers as supporters of the two sides and has triggered the Islamic extremist groups to continue their fight and terrorist acts in the region.

The threat of the proliferation of nuclear arms is also a determinant for the future of the region. There is a high possibility that Iran may achieve nuclear capacity and that would lead to increasing tensions.

390 CIA- World Fact Book-International Disputes

In addition, the external powers and their interest in the region and their long running strategies as well as domination over the resources are another face of the coin for preventing this goal.

Fundamentalism and radicalism are other threats that would never allow countries of the region to unite. In the same line, terrorism is a major threat not only to this region but to all counties of the world.

Lack of democratic values and respect for human rights as well as a violation of minority rights among countries in this region are other preventing factors for achieving this goal.

In addition, the role of external powers and their political will in failure of this scheme should not be forgotten. This is due to the fact that the national interest of these powers could be undermined by the formation of a new united region that is rich in energy and oil. Furthermore, the creation of a union, where most of countries are Islamic, would be akin to the return of the Ottoman Empire.

Rising tensions between religious sects and especially Shiite and Sunni are also the signs of fragmentation.

Overall, we can say that the Middle Eastern countries are not ready to develop economic, political and social integrity in the region. The creation of a Middle Eastern Union requires some prerequisites that this region lacks. We can categorize the major preventing factors as follows:

- Political factors
- Economic factors
- Historical factors

Political factors

Many political factors are preventing the formation of regional unity. The policies and interests of these governments differ from one country to another country. Based on their interests, they have established political and strategic partners with the United States and the Western countries. Some are boosting their economy and infrastructure while others are strengthening military power and making efforts to expand their dominance. A prominent example is Israel.

In this category extremists and fundamentalists as well as terrorist networks should not be ignored. These groups instead of bringing unity and harmony in the region, are fueling tensions leading to bringing other powers in the region.

Israel is happy to take advantage of rifts and weaknesses among Arab countries and it would follow its strategy to further weaken and divide the Arab world, thwarting any chance of unity of purpose, common goal and vision.

It is noteworthy to mention the Greater Middle East and North Africa initiative, which was proposed by the United States and G8 countries in 2003, and its failure due to strong objection of Arab countries and reluctance and skeptical views of the European Union, as an example of conflict of interests that was not welcomed.

Economic factors

The nature of economic model in the Middle East does not allow for the establishment of Middle Eastern Union because the majority of the economy in the Middle East is either controlled by the state or follows the rentier economic model. Economies in these countries are not tax-based; rather, they are based on income that comes from natural resources (i.e., oil and natural gas) which is controlled by the state.

The countries of the Middle East have passed through two decades with relatively little economic progress. Wealth is unevenly distributed between the countries. The United Arab Emirates and Israel are the two offering highest living standards for the entire population. However some other countries in the region offer the greatest economic problems for their entire populations.

As mentioned before many regional cooperation attempts have been launched in the past six decades through bilateral arrangements that were confined to tariff reductions for small number of goods and comprehensive programs aimed to create pan-Arab market institutions. Landmark agreements during the 1950s and 1960s include the transit agreements between members of the Arab League in 1953, the Arab Economic Unity Agreements of 1957, and the attempt by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria to form an Arab Common Market in 1964. During the 1980s, 18 members of the Arab League signed the Trade Facilitation and Trade Promotion Accord of 1981, the Gulf Cooperation Council was established in 1989, and the Arab Maghreb Union came into existence during the same year. More recently, the Greater Arab Free Trade Area was set up in 1997, and the Agadir Agreement between Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia followed in 2004.³⁹¹

According to Melissa Rossi³⁹², Middle Eastern countries are divided into two parts. Middle East I, or the eastern branch, is the oil-rich region that sits near the Persian Gulf. Its countries except Iran and Iraq are ruled almost exclusively by royal families. Many younger rulers in the eastern branch are progressive and are modernizing and opening up their countries, giving new rights to citizens; yet the eastern branch also grapples with the role religion plays in its governments, and there are tensions between conservatives and reformers. They are concerned about the rise of hegemony of Iran in the region and vulnerable to attacks, so they have mighty arsenals and most have security agreements with the United States.

The other region, Middle East II, or the western branch, lies closer to the Mediterranean and is short on petroleum, tight on money, and slower on development. The only affluent exception is Israel.

Historical factors

Pivotal events had played significant roles in the transformation of circumstances in the Middle East region namely, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1923 following the First World War, the creation of Israel in 1948, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979.

391 Regional Integration for Global Competitiveness page 35

392 Author of what every American should know about the Middle East

The decline of the Ottoman Empire led to the occupation of the Arab provinces of Ottoman Empire by Britain and France that drew a new map for the Middle East on the basis of their own political and economic interests and dominance. This was another element that contributed to the sense of nationalism that had already emerged among Arabs under the Ottoman Empire.

The creation of Israel as a result of the proponents of the ideology of Zionism opened a new page in the history of the Middle East. It was another major event in the history of the Middle East that followed by devastating wars among Arabs and Israeli state and this unfinished ongoing conflict is a clear consequence of Britain's machinations.

The Islamic Revolution in Iran rang the alarm bell in the region and the world. This led to the creation of GCC in the region. Furthermore, it later on followed by the Iraq and Iran war continued for eight years. The Islamic Revolution further escalated the tensions between Israel and Iran.

To reach and fulfill the ambition of Middle East integration, Middle Eastern states should work on finding solutions for their differences through enhanced bilateral and multilateral regional cooperation, increasing trade and investments opportunities, political, economic and social reforms, coordinated peace and security policies in their countries as well as strengthening democracy and human rights. Until that happens, integration will remain a dream only.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

The media occupies a special place in Middle Eastern society and politics. The media permeates all works of life and exercises a profound. Coverage of such significant issues as the Palestinian-Israel conflict occupies center stage in the Middle East, and dissatisfaction fed by the media retains the capacity to spill out into the street. Media coverage of sensitive subjects can also affect relations in the Middle East. Because of the significance of the media, many Middle Eastern regimes heavily censor them. Only the news network Al-Jazeera remains independent of direct state control. Yet, censorship is only part of the problem, because individual response to the media is more than a function of coverage and “spin.” Other significant variables include circumstance and education, social background, and political persuasion.

In light of the significance of the media in the Middle East, the purpose of this paper is to describe and examine the role of the media in the region. The object is to determine similarities and differences in the role and effects of the media under seemingly very identical circumstances. The working hypothesis holds that media the world over share many common characteristics. Among them are the necessities to deal with ownership, to adapt to rapidly changing technology and methods, to contend with the proliferation of means, to operate in diverse environments, and to deal with various challenges to forthright news reporting and commentary. A major problem is the issue of bias. The important question is not whether bias exists, but to what degree? And, with what perceived effects? And, with what practical implications? A comparative perspective constitutes an important point of departure for an attempt to answer these and related questions.

FREEDOM OF THE MEDIA

Media freedom is nowhere on the agenda in the Middle East, North Africa and Arab Gulf. The region remains generally opposed to the free flow of news despite some easing of press laws and a few signs for opening up and greater tolerance.

The three sub-regions have very different national constitutions and press laws and a variety of regimes (that also often clash with each other, sometimes violently) but they all share a determination to control the news.

All of them ban journalists from dealing with sensitive topics (such as religion, border questions, the huge fortunes of their rulers and the state of their armed forces). They all have an elite that cannot be criticized (presidents, reigning families, the very rich and those tied to the regime) and censor the media as soon as it reports social unrest in Gafsa (Tunisia), Sidi Ifni (Morocco) and Mahalla (Egypt) or wants to witness a war (Israel and Egypt recently joined to ban journalists from the Gaza Strip).

But things are slowly moving in the right direction and taboos are shrinking. Journalists are less docile and some are rebelling. Government news

monopolies are cracking, with the rise of satellite TV stations that mock frontiers (to the irritation of the Arab League information ministers) and the internet which gets round the censors despite imprisonment of bloggers and other users in Morocco, Egypt and Iran. Newspapers spring up here and there or keep going despite the odds as proof that authoritarian regimes and pliant media are not inevitable in the region.

MEDIA AND INVESTMENT

Countries in the Middle East continue to invest in IT infrastructure and media projects as part of their strategies to develop the local economies and create employment. Among the major examples are Jordan's plans to establish a free IT zone in Amman, which will give sales and income tax breaks to the software companies and business development firms based in the zone. The zone is part of a strategy designed to increase the number of Internet users from 26 percent to 50 percent. It aims to increase employment in the sector and to boost the sector's revenue from \$2.2 billion in 2009 to \$3 billion by the end of 2011.³⁹³

In addition to existing regional hubs Dubai Media City Internet City, the United Arab Emirates launched a new content creation zone to support media content in the Middle East. The new Abu Dhabi-based zone aims to employ Arab media professionals in film, broadcast, digital and publishing. CNN, BBC, the Financial Times, Thomas Reuters Foundation, and Thomas Foundation are among the partners of the zone.

At the same time, some countries have initiated efforts to develop Arabic Web content. In this regard, Microsoft is working on transition technology that would make the Arabic language more accessible to internet users as part of Qatar's Supreme Council for Information and Communication Technology's initiative to develop more Web sites with Arabic content.³⁹⁴

The number of Internet users is likely to continue to rise, especially with the introduction of technologies that overcome poor ICT infrastructure that hinders Internet access in the region. WiMAX, for example, was commercially available by the end of March 2009 in Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia, while operators in other parts of the region have started testing the service. Additionally, broadband markets are growing fast in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, and Tunisia.³⁹⁵

Demographic factors are also expected to contribute to the growth of internet population. The Arab Media Outlook 2008-2012 says that, "Digital media will be thriven in the Arab market because the market has a large, technologically accomplished demographic groups, its youth who are comfortable with it and will customize it to their own requirements." The

³⁹³ Keach Hagey, "Capital launches media zone to nurture young Arab talent," The National, October 13, 2008,

³⁹⁴ Chris V. Panganiban, "Technology to promote Arabic online," The Peninsula, April 19, 2009, <http://www.thepeninsulaqatar.com>

³⁹⁵ "Has the age of fixed wireless broadband services arrived in the Arab World? By end of March 2009, six Arab countries had eleven commercially launched," Arab Advisors Group, April 16, 2009. <http://www.arabadvisors.com /Pressers/presse-160409.htm>.

report also revealed that, “over 50% of the population in Yemen, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco and Egypt are estimated to be currently less than 25 years old, while the rest of the countries the under 25, ‘net generation’ makes up around 35% and 47% of total population”.³⁹⁶

MEDIA CENSORSHIP

The Middle East is one of the most heavily censored regions in the world. Human rights watchdogs and free speech advocacy groups continue to criticize the media restrictions and repressive legal regimes, and the past few years, a great number of bloggers and cyber-dissidents have been jailed.

In April 2009, the International Federation of Journalists called for a radical overhaul of media laws in the Middle East, stating that the laws in most of the region’s countries still permit the jailing of journalists for undermining the reputation of the state, the president, the monarch or the religion. Such laws have often been used to suppress reporting of corruption or scrutiny of government actions.

This media environment created by authorities has been hostile to bloggers and online activism, resulting in a number of arrests across the region. In a list created by the Committee to Protect Journalists of the ten worst countries to be a blogger, four such countries (Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia) were from the region.³⁹⁷

The internet differs from the press and broadcasting in that government attempts to control it has far more impact on business activity especially the modern, international, IT-based types of business. The problem of reconciling censorship with the need for unfettered business access is illustrated by the United Arab Emirates, where one internet provider serving most of the country uses filtering extensively while the other, mainly serving the Dubai free zone, does not. How long these two conflicting approaches can survive side by side in the same country remains to be seen.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT

The mass media in the Arab world and the Middle East have undergone profound changes since the beginning of the 1990s. The introductions and spread of new technologies, including satellite television and the Internet, have extended media space beyond the local, national and regional realms. The trans-border flow of communications has provided many consumers with access to new technologies and the capacity to interact with a global discourse bypassing the limits of authoritarian information control. Since the Gulf war in 1990-1991, when the people in the Middle East tuned into CNN to receive fresh determined media development in the area. Egypt sent into orbit two satellites, Nile Sat 1 and 2, while Al Jazeera was born in 1996. The latter is now considered one of the Middle East's most effective media, and it enjoys substantial capabilities and popular credibility.

396 “2008 Africa - Telecoms, Mobile and Broadband in Northern Region,” ChinaCCM, December 2008, <http://www.chinaccm.com/4S/4S16/4S1607/news/20081205/111435.asp>.

397 Committee to Protect Journalists, “10 Worst Countries to be a Blogger,” April 30, 2009. <http://cpj.org/reports/2009/04/10 -worst-countries-to-be-ablogger.php>.

Media from outside the Middle East do not find the same kind of direct popular and commercial appeal. Rather, the influence of external media tends to be indirect. Still, new globalized media spaces have begun to change the fabric of the mass media in the Middle East, whether state or privately-owned. Evidence from Europe and elsewhere indicates that satellite service originating outside national borders do not usually attract audiences to threaten traditional national viewing patterns. In contrast, the existence of satellite services has encouraged otherwise reluctant governments in the Middle East to allow greater internal commercialization and competition.

Besides increased commercialization and competition, one of the most significant changes has been an increase in the number of media in the Middle East. This increase has been largely due to the influx of external media and the establishment of indigenous satellite TV and radio networks, like the Saudi-owned private Middle East Broadcasting Company (MBC), with a large audience throughout the Arabic-speaking world. These networks are the indirect result of external media penetration with the Middle Eastern states feeling the competition of external programs. The Middle East states have also slowly started to deregulate their media monopolies by inviting private investors to establish national alternatives to foreign satellite TV and radio. Most new channels are much more professional than their often monotonous and dull state-owned competitors.

THE POLITICAL ROLE

The mass media play various roles. Media are often the only forms of education, and as such, they are a very powerful influence on beliefs and opinion. This influence is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the relationship between the media and politics. Politics can justifiably be described as an important determining factor in daily life, and a major influence over many facets of day to day existence, including finances, healthcare, and employment. The media are often the major source of information about political affairs, and as such, the media shape what we actually know about the political system and what we may never find out. As a result, the media retain a certain "hold" over the political arena.

The media can judge, approve and criticize. They can make or break political careers, even parties. The information which the media provides helps the public to form attitudes, responses, and opinions about political events and actors. Thus, political parties understand the importance of keeping media "on-side." Obviously, the media have some impacts on politics, but the media question is to what extend? Other questions include how do the media manifest themselves, why should we care anyway? The latter imply that the media are there simply to communicate and to act as a transmitter of information between the political world and the consumer. Moreover, since the appearance of the modern press, media have often demonstrated a hidden agenda when reporting politics.³⁹⁸

398 Doris A. Graber, *Media Power In Politics*, University of Illinois, Chicago, 1993,21.

However, the situation stands in marked contrast in the Middle East. The authoritarian regimes exercise a great control on TV because it ranks among the most effective media assets. Meanwhile, newspapers are generally left to opposition parties as a kind of token gesture. Governments understand that newspapers can have only a very limited effect on population with low literacy rates.

THE FOREIGN POLICY EFFECTS

Assessment of media roles in foreign policy implies propaganda. How and when is propaganda used in foreign policy? Propaganda is an instrument of policy that governments use to influence a particular group, making the group think what governments want them to think and do what they want them to do. Although the advent of mass media during the 20th Century greatly increased the scale of propaganda, this is far from a new phenomena.

Within this context, propaganda has become an increasingly useful tool in foreign policy. For example, if Government X directs propaganda at the population of Government Y, then that population may support Government X, and therefore Government Y pursue a more supportive foreign policy towards Government X. One of the unique aspects of modern international political relations is the deliberate attempt by governments to influence the attitudes and behavior of foreign populations. However, it should be noted that public opinion has greater influence on foreign policy in democracies than in authoritarian regimes.³⁹⁹

Propaganda also displays an unofficial face through pressure groups or movements. Examples of this include the large Cuban anti-Castro group that has kept pressure on the US to maintain sanctions on Cuba and the large Jewish lobby that influences US foreign policy favorably towards Israel. Another clear example involved various black people from South Africa touring other countries hoping to raise awareness of apartheid. The hope of these emissaries was that these audiences would influence their governments to formulate a foreign policy to put pressure to South African government. Although not the sole cause for change, their actions encouraged many governments around the world to impose economic sanctions on South Africa.⁴⁰⁰

THE ECONOMIC EFFECTS

A change with tremendous economic implications is even now taking place. We are witnessing the emergence of the digital economy: Computers, the software that runs on them and the networks that connect them are key enabling technologies for the new economy. This economy is based on the digitization of information. Information has become easier to produce and harder to control. It is easy not just to duplicate, but also to replicate. Successful firms have to keep innovating to keep ahead of the copycats nipping at their heels.

The media as a constituent element of the digital economy has given rise to a world in which innovation is more important than industrial-style mass

399 Bagdikian, *The Information Machines, Their Impact on Men and the Media*, 94-95.

400 <http://www.bbc.arabic.com>

production. A world, in which investment buys new concepts or the means to create them, rather than new machines, is a world in which rapid change is a constant. This phenomenon has resulted in new rules of competition, new sorts of organizations, and new challenges for management. The media is an environment characterized by immediacy, globalization, virtualization, internet working innovation and convergence. The way in which economic values are altered and created is likely to affect media in a dramatic manner, thereby transferring impulse to the general structure of economics and societies.

The media in the Middle East play a limited role in the stock market, but they do broadly affect public economic activities. In Egypt and Tunisia, for example, government-sponsored advertising is important since these two countries depend on tourism as a source of national income. For Egypt, which possesses about one-third of the world's monuments and temples from antiquity, media-driven advertising supports tourism-based income.

THE SOCIAL EFFECTS

The media are among the most significant institutions within modern society. Most people are exposed to some form of media on a daily or regular basis. Thus, media can be described as an institution offering a range of different texts for consumption within socially and culturally a formed world.

Media in the Middle East differ somewhat from this pattern. Still, they play a huge role in educating people about environmental issues, health care, child care, and other health-related concerns. The media encourage people to work hard, and they emphasize the importance of creating a productive society to overcome social problems like unemployment, which is considered among the main reasons for terrorist activities. However, the media demonstrate little concern about the roles and relationships of men and women in society. These aspects of contemporary life are defined by religion and culture.⁴⁰¹

THE CULTURAL EFFECTS

The relationship between mass media and popular culture has always been controversial in the social science. While political economists highlight the role of the media industry in the creation of popular culture in the 20th Century, some scholars argue that popular culture is actually the creation of the populous itself. These scholars hold that popular culture is independent of the capitalist production process inherent in the communications sector. This argument is based on the immense interpretive power of the people, which holds that audiences are able to break through the implicit texts within media messages.

CASE STUDIES

Egypt

Egypt is a major regional media player; its press is one of the most influential and widely read in the region, and its TV and film industry supply much of the Arab-speaking world with various productions. The heart of Egypt's film industry is Media Production City, an enterprise launched with the

⁴⁰¹ Hafez, *Mass Media, Politics & Society in the Middle East*, 177.

intention of creating the "Hollywood of the East." Media criticism of the government is commonplace. Still, press laws which prescribe prison sentences for libel and "insults" encourage self-censorship on sensitive issues. Egypt has two state-run national TV channels and six regional channels. It is a key player in satellite TV; the Egyptian Space Channels are widely watched across the Arab-speaking world. These channels enjoy the support of the country's huge media production industry and have access to a large archive of Egyptian films and TV programs.

Officially, censorship was banned in 1980. Nonetheless, it still governs the editorial policies of the state media. Journalists from the opposition press, who are suspected of sympathizing with fundamentalist Islamic groups, are frequently questioned by police. The authorities' aim is to abolish or at least weaken the fundamentalist press, which is hostile to the government.⁴⁰²

Egypt's publications fall roughly into four groups. State-owned publications including Al Ahram (<http://ahram.org.eg>), Al Akhbar and Al Gomhuriya, are not censored. However, their editors are government appointees.

Reporters and columnists are given a fair amount of latitude in what they write, as long as they avoid certain taboos. Publications owned by political parties like Al Shaab, Al Wafd or Al Watan Al Arabi are not censored. The party leadership exercises varying degrees of control over editorial policies, which range from hard-line ideology to total chaos.

All media are vulnerable to various form of government pressure if they step beyond certain limits. The Supreme Press Council rarely allows independent publications like Al Osboa and Al Naba to register inside Egypt. A license requires informal clearance by all of Egypt's major security and intelligence agencies.

Most Egyptian publications are legally registered abroad because of the difficulties associated with Egyptian registration. The country in which they are most commonly registered is Cyprus, because of its proximity to Egypt and the relative ease with which a Cypriot license can be obtained. Thus, independent Egyptian publications are often collectively referred to as the Cyprus Press. These publications are subject to censorship from the Foreign Publications censor, who answers directly to the Minister of Information.

Egypt was the first Arab nation to have its own satellite, Nile sat. 101. The country's first private TV stations - Dream 1, Dream 2 and Al-Mihwar TV came on air in 2001, broadcasting via satellite.

The state monopoly on radio broadcasting was broken with the arrival of private commercial music stations in 2003. By offering the use of its media infrastructure and economic support, Egypt aims to attract foreign media companies to its "Free Media Zone," launched in 2000. In 2003, the International Telecommunication Union estimated that Egypt had around 2.7m Internet users.

402 <http://www.minfo.gov.eg>

Al-Jazeera

Al-Jazeera (meaning ‘The Peninsula’ or ‘island’ in Arabic) is the largest and most controversial Arabic news Channel in the Middle East, offering news coverage 24 hours a day from around the world and focusing on the hottest regions of conflict. It was founded in 1996, and is based in the State of Qatar; the Al-Jazeera news network is the fastest growing network among Arab communities and Arabic speaking people around the world. And as soon as 2002, it had offices in Washington, New York, London, Paris, Brussels, Moscow, Djakarta, and Islamabad operating around the clock.

Its popularity and importance became increasingly apparent after 9-11, when it was granted exclusive coverage of the war in Afghanistan. When the US - led strikes began in Kabul, Al-Jazeera alone offered the images of bombing and war that the global public demanded. Moreover, two weeks after 9-11, when a videotape of Osama bin Laden was anonymously dropped off at Al-Jazeera’s bureau in Kabul, Al-Jazeera had exclusive access to the message of bin Laden (and al-Qaeda), guaranteeing that the world, and especially America, was tuning in. All of sudden, Al-Jazeera was not delivering the news to its thirty-five million viewers, but it was also telling the world’s top story to billions of people around the planet via international media that had no choice but to use Al-Jazeera’s pictures.

Despite its controversial coverage, or maybe because of it, Al-Jazeera continues to grow in scope and popularity. In response to the flood of accusations of bias; Al-Jazeera maintains its mantra that it gives all sides a chance to defend their view, and presents news from the diverse perspectives of the Arab world. Indeed, the station was founded and thrives on living up to its motto: “The Opinion and the Other Opinion. Al-Jaber (2004) argues that part of the reason for Al-Jazeera’s popularity is that it is seen throughout the Middle East as “local news”, presenting information and viewpoints that are important for the various Arab communities. Reaching over an estimated 50 million viewers and available in any country with universal satellite capabilities (DVB-S), Al-Jazeera’s growth shows no signs of slowing. For instance, in November 2003, Al-Jazeera launched an Arabic sports channel called Al-Jazeera Sports, which quickly grew to become the top Arabic-language sports channel. On April 15, 2005, Al-Jazeera also launched Al-Jazeera Live, a channel that broadcasts conferences live without commentary. It is the first of its kind in the Arab world and is modeled after the US-channel C-SPAN. And on September 9, 2005, Al-Jazeera launched a channel called Al-Jazeera Children’s Channel. Al-Jazeera Children’s Channel (JCC) is the first all-Arabic-language channel devoted for children, and it produces 40% of its own programmes, a ratio touted as being one of the highest of any children’s channel worldwide.

In March of 2003, Al-Jazeera launched a website featuring its content in English (<http://english.aljazeera.net/Homepage>). While efforts by Internet hackers made the site inaccessible on its official debut, the website has since operated without hesitation. And while it receives a sizeable amount of “hits from outside of the Middle East, some critics have found that the content of the English web-page is significantly different from that of the organization’s

main website, which is in Arabic. Finally, in March of 2006, Al-Jazeera launched an all-English news channel to be broadcasted worldwide, called Al-Jazeera international. The new channel has broadcast centers in Doha, London, and Washington D.C. Needless to say, Al-Jazeera has become a global media organization to be reckoned with. Regardless of accusations of bias, the size and diversity of its audience continue to rise, and its coverage continues to expand. As the most listened to voice representing the citizens of the Arab world, studying Al-Jazeera is critical to furthering understanding of the people, politics, and culture of the Middle East.

Al-Hayat

Al-Hayat is one of the leading daily pan-Arab newspapers, with a circulation of almost 300,000. The original Al-Hayat was founded by a Lebanese journalist, Kamel Mrowa, a Shi'i Muslim, in Beirut, in 1946. In 1966, Mrowa was assassinated. The newspaper was shut down in 1976 following the outbreak of civil war in Lebanon.⁴⁰³ Al-Hayat was relaunched in 1988 by Jamil Mrowa, Kamel's son, with the financial support of the Saudi prince Khalid bin Sultan, who subsequently took over ownership. Al-Hayat played a decisive role during the first Gulf war; it opened its pages to Iraqi opposition movements.

In May 1993, the newspaper scooped every other news organization by breaking the news about the secret Oslo talks between Palestinians and Israelis. By 1997, Al-Hayat shocked its Arab readership by establishing a bureau in Jerusalem. As of that year, the newspaper had a daily circulation of about 300,000 and was staffed by Muslim, Catholic, Maronite, and Druse editors and reporters who formed "a highly professional team", according to a report in *The New York Times*. The *Times* report described the newspaper as a source of "iconoclastic interviews" and "having the most influential cultural pages anywhere in the Arab world. In January 1997 at least 14 letter bombs were mailed to the newspaper's headquarters in London and its bureau in New York, Washington and Riyadh. Two security guards were wounded by one of the bombs as it exploded at the headquarters. "Its ownership by Prince Khalid has meant that the paper treads softly when it comes to disquieting news about Saudi Arabia, a notable exception to its independence stand," according to the *New York Times* article. A special Saudi edition began in 2005 and sold over 150,000 copies a day.

In August 2007, the Saudi government banned Al-Hayat apparently because it criticized some government departments and refused to heed the information ministry's order.

Al-Arabiya

Al-Arabiya is an Arabic-language television news station. It was launched on March 3, 2003; the station is based in Dubai Media City, United Arab Emirates, and is partly owned by the Saudi broadcaster Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC). A free-to-air channel, it carries news, current affairs, business and financial markets, sports, talk shows, and documentaries.

403 Ibrahim, Youssef, M., "Al Hayat: Ajournalistic Noah's Ark"
(<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?>

It is rated among the top pan-Arab stations by Middle East audiences.⁴⁰⁴ Al-Arabiya says it tries to use neutral, non-supportive language when covering Islamic militant groups.⁴⁰⁵

On January 26, 2009 President of the United States Barack Obama gave his first formal interview as president to this television channel.⁴⁰⁶

Al-Arabiya was created to be a direct competitor of the Qatar-based Al-Jazeera. According to a 2008 New York Times profile of Al-Arabiya stated that the station was founded “to cure Arab television of its penchant for radical politics and violence,” with Al-Jazeera as its main target.

Investment and ownership

The original investment in Al-Arabiya was \$300 million by the Middle East Broadcasting Center, Lebanon’s Hariri Group, and other investors from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the Gulf states.

Track record and controversies

Al-Arabiya had been banned from reporting from Iraq by the country’s interim government in November 2003 after it broadcasted an audio tape in November 16 purportedly made by the deposed Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi government had also banned the channel on September 7, 2006 for one month for what it called “imprecise coverage”.

On February 14, 2005, Al-Arabiya was the first news satellite channel to air news of the assassination of Rafik Hariri,⁴⁰⁷ who was one of its early investors. On January 22, 2007, there was a large explosion at Al-Arabiya’s offices in Gaza City, just days after it was criticized by Hamas for “misquoting” one of the movement’s leaders. The offices were closed at the time of explosion and no injuries were reported. Hamas condemned the bombings.⁴⁰⁸

On October 9, 2008, Al-Arabiya website (www.alarabiya.net) was hacked.⁴⁰⁹ On September 2, 2008, Iran expelled Al-Arabiya’s Tehran bureau chief Hassan Fahs; he was the third Al-Arabiya correspondent expelled from Iran since the network opened an office there.⁴¹⁰ On June 14, 2009 the Iranian government ordered the Al-Arabiya office in Tehran to be closed for a week for “unfair reporting” of the Iranian presidential election. Seven days later,

404 Peter Feuilherade (20003-11-25). “Profile: Al-Arabiya TV.

(http://news.bc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3236654.stm)“BBC Monitoring.

405 Robert F. Worth (2008-01-04). “A voice of moderation helps transform Arab media (<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/01/04/africa/profile.php>)”.*International Herald Tribune*.

406 “Obama tells Al Arabiya peace talks should resume ([Http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/01/27/65087.html](http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/01/27/65087.html))”. AlArabiya.net.

407 “Major industry award and dynamic programming mark Al Arabiya’s third anniversary (<http://www.ameinfo.com/79335.html>)”. AME Info. 2006-03-04.

408 “Explosion at television offices in Gaza City (<http://www.euronews.net/2007/01/23/explosion-at-television-offices-in-gaza-city/>)”. Euronews.2007-01-23.

409 “Arabiya TV Website Hacked (http://www.kuwaittimes.net/read_news.php?newsid=NzQ3MTI5OTg1)”. *Kuwait Times*. 2008-10-11.

410 “IRAN: Al-Arabiya reporter banned from working (<http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/alerts/4531-iran-al-arabiya-reporter-banned-working/>)”. Menassat. 2008-09-03.

amid the 2009 Iranian election protests, the network's office was "closed indefinitely" by the government.⁴¹¹

Online

The Al-Arabiya website (www.alarabiya.net) was launched in February 2004 initially in Arabic. The website launched an English-language service in August 2007 and Persian and Urdu services in March 2008. The station also operates a business website that covers financial news and market data from the Middle East in Arabic (www.alaswaq.net). The Al-Arabiya News Channel is available live online on JumpTV. The live feed on the station's website does not work in the US. Live station, for unknown reasons, no longer broadcasts the network.

CONCLUSION

Governments in the Middle East continue to invest in media and IT projects, and at the same time are continuing to invest in censorship technologies to prevent their citizens from accessing a wide range of objectionable content. Also, while Western companies build ICT infrastructure necessary for development in the region, other Western companies provide the censors with technologies and data used to filter the internet.

The censors in the region attempt to control political content using technical filtering, laws and regulations, surveillance and monitoring, physical restrictions, and extra-legal harassment and arrests. Filtering of content deemed offensive for religious, moral, and cultural reasons is pervasive in many countries and is growing.

Though many governments acknowledge social filtering, most continue to disguise their political filtering practices by attempting to confuse users with different error messages.

The absence of technical filtering in some countries in the region by no means indicates free online environments in those countries; surveillance and monitoring practices and extra-legal harassment from security agencies create a climate of fear used to silence online dissidents.

Many ISPs block popular politically neutral online services such as online translation services and privacy tools fearing that they can be used to bypass the filtering regimes. The censors also over block web sites and services such as social networking Web sites and photo and video sharing Web sites because of the potential for content considered objectionable.

More users in the Middle East are using the internet for political campaigning and social activism; however, states continue to introduce more restrictive legal, technical and monitoring measures, amid growing local and regional calls to ease restrictions and remove barriers to the free flow of information.

⁴¹¹ "Al Arabiya's Tehran bureau closed indefinitely" (<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2009/06/21/76600.html>) "Al-Arabiya.net.2009-06-21

THE FUTURE SCENARIOS

INTRODUCTION

Imagine the Middle East playing a pivotal role in international politics, bringing peace initiatives to others. One could say it would never happen, as the Middle East still has much to do to get rid of the perpetual conflicts undermining its stability. How it could escape from the spotlight of current major powers? Indeed, the region has long been dominated by external interventions, interstate wars, interethnic violence compounded by the vagaries of oil prices.

Today's reality in the Middle East is slightly different. A growing number of countries are being recognized for their active role in international politics. They are greater involved in conflicts resolution and committed in peacekeeping operations. Their presence is felt in the international system and their voices start to be heard in various forums. One could also notice the emergence of new players in Middle Eastern diplomacy and a number of eminent diplomats from the region are being acknowledged for their leading role and diplomatic skills.

The objective of this paper is therefore to prove that even though conflicts persist in the Middle East and require international efforts, the latter could also become a region generating initiatives for peace and leading diplomatic actions. The paper will consider the impact of long running conflicts on the Middle East foreign policies, the impact of regional and international system, as well the influence of domestic factors. In view to better understand the evolving role of the Middle East in international politics, the focus will be on the Middle East foreign policy orientations, its presence within the international system, namely the United Nations, and its increasing regional initiatives and mediation efforts. The paper will be concluded on the projection of Middle East diplomacy trends into the future.

Conflicts in the Middle East

It is largely agreed, the Middle East has evolved within a perpetual climate of instability and unrest for decades. The Arab-Israeli conflict is one of the most dramatic that engraved the history of the region. One could remember the Hebron Massacre of August 1929, the emergence of Israel in 1948 against Arab opposition, Israel's victory in the Six-Day War, the Suez crisis of 1956, the 1969 War of Attrition, the 1970 Black September in Jordan, the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1982 Israel invasion of Lebanon. To be added to the list, the first Palestinian intifada in 1987, Israel raid on the West Bank in 2002, and the 2006 Lebanon War. More recently the Israel Operation Orchard of September 2007 and the 3 weeks Israeli raid on Gaza strip in December-January 2009 give evidence of the fragility of the region.⁴¹²

⁴¹² www.wikipedia.org

Besides, the Middle East witnessed perpetual inter-states confrontations and civil wars, among which the Syria-Jordan war in the 1960s, the North Yemen civil war (1962–1970), the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), the four-day war between Libya and Egypt in 1977, and the Sudanese civil war from 1956 up to now. A new axis of regional tension was also created with the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973, the 1979 Iranian revolution and the rise of radical Islam, and the 2003 occupation of Iraq. Indeed, all these events did not lead to a peaceful Middle East.

Up to now, successive international efforts had not succeeded to bring sustainable peace in the Middle East. However, the UN General Assembly Resolution 181 pertaining to the creation of a partitioned state with separate territories for the Jews and the Arabs in Palestine, the signing of peace treaties between Israel and Egypt in March 1979, and between Israel and Jordan in October 1994, the Agreements of Oslo I in 1993 and Oslo II in 1995 are considered as important benchmarks in the settlement of conflicts between Israel and Palestinian Arabs.

Impact on Middle East foreign policies

In view of the above, it appears that the state-state relations in the Middle East were, as ever, in turmoil. Obviously, the creation of Israel exacerbated the tension in the region, increasing the frustration of neighboring Arab countries and the deep resentment between Israel and Arabs. Hence, the primary focus of the Middle East foreign policies remains against Israeli occupation. Arab countries have shown the possibility of an alliance against a single enemy, but such an alliance was weakened by the unconditional support of external powers to Israel. The 1979 peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was the first breach in the Arab alliance against Israel. From that moment Palestinian Arabs seemed to be left on their own. The footprint of external powers (UK, France, US and USSR) in the Middle East, and, indeed the then rivalry between the two giants, the US and USSR from the 1950s until the end of the cold war, hampered any diplomatic initiatives from Middle Eastern countries. In sum, the solution of the Middle East crisis does not belong to countries of this region but to external powers.

THE REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The regional environment strongly impacts foreign policy behavior in the Middle East, in particular, with the spread of Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab ideals. Pan-Islamic organizations and movements expanded in the early 20th Century, together with Islamic institutions committed to interceding in aspects of both religious and secular life.⁴¹³ With the dissolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1948, Pan-Islamism was partly eclipsed by the emergence of the League of Arab States (LAS) which became the conduit for Arab diplomatic efforts. Thus, the LAS was used to jointly address the conflict

⁴¹³ Near & Middle East Titles: Islamic Movements in the Arab World 1913–1966, 1998, Cambridge archive edition

Israeli-Palestinian, to express the rejection of Western domination, the desirability of Arab unity, and to attempt to act in concert in defense of all-Arab interests.

Yet, the Pan Arabism advocated by the League of Arab States, had only served the interests of Egyptian hegemony and substantially constrained the foreign policy options of individual Arab states. The normative balance then shifted toward sovereignty. Splits among Muslim powers were evidenced by the four separate congresses held in 1962, the World Islamic Conference based in Karachi, the Islamic Congress based in Cairo, the Associates of the General Islamic Congress in Jerusalem, and the League of the Islamic World, initiated at Mecca.

In view of some scholars, the lack of positive interactions of Arab leaders led to a dissension that broke the moral power of Pan-Arabism.⁴¹⁴ The West drew benefit from the situation and entrenched protected client states dominated by traditional oligarchies and monarchies.

External Interventions

According to Carl Brown, the Middle East is a penetrated system, one subject to an exceptional level of external intervention even though its cultural distinctiveness is stubbornly resistant to subordination.⁴¹⁵

Obviously, the presence of external powers in the Middle East was motivated by the recognition of the strategic importance of the region. That was the case of the French control over Syria and Lebanon and Britain mandatory arrangements over Palestine in the aftermath of the World War I. The Middle East was also a designed field for the cold war between the US and the Soviet Union. These constraints continue in the post-cold war period, as the Middle East states had to cope with deteriorating economic conditions, and consequently, increasingly pursued policies accommodating to US objectives.

External powers are seen as acting at several levels: direct pressure, sanctions and embargoes, long-run influences of dependence and conspiracy. They control Middle East foreign policies through regional allies, who are themselves the clients of the great powers. Thus, at various times, Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan were seen as clients of the West, while Iraq, Syria, Egypt, South Yemen were seen as clients of the Soviet bloc. External powers not only involve the state in an arms race and the threat of military confrontation, but support rebellious communities also.⁴¹⁶

The Middle East justifies much of its foreign policy as a response to the threat posed by Israel and the generalized insecurity it creates. The events of 11 September 2001 did also stimulate deep feelings of antagonism in the US

⁴¹⁴ Pan-Arabism before Nasser: Egyptian Power Politics and the Palestine Question. Contributors: Michael Doran - author. Publisher: Oxford University Press. Place of Publication: New York. Publication Year: 1999

⁴¹⁵ The foreign policies of Middle East states, edited by Raymond Hinnebusch & Anourishiravan Ehteshami, 2001

⁴¹⁶ Diplomacy In The Near And Middle East 1535–1956

towards the Islamic world and against the US in the Middle East and beyond.

THE DOMESTIC ENVIRONMENT

The broader domestic environment provides another context for foreign policy. A range of environmental factors, of which geographic location, population, culture, ideology and religion, economic and military factors are the most evident.

Geography

The region benefits from an ideal geostrategic position, that might have facilitated the relation of its states with the western powers (US and European countries), with Asian giants (China, India) and South East Asian emerging states, with Africa, mainly African Muslim countries. However, the unending conflicts hampered any initiatives towards strengthening bilateral relations.

The extreme aridity of the lands and the harshness of climate conditions obviously impact foreign policy orientations. Also, the issue of water remains critical. This sensitivity is highlighted in the case of Turkey, located of the headwaters of Tigris and Euphrates river basin, creating a tension with downstream states. Thus, when geography intersects with strategic vulnerability, it is of direct importance. Israel's concern at its scarcity of land, and Iraq's limited access to the sea, are cases in point.

In contrast to its aridity, the Middle East natural oil wealth could be seen as a poisoned gift, a source of growth and power, as well as of troubles. Its impact on foreign policy behavior in the Middle East is paramount as will be indicated latter in this paper.

Population

The diversity of the population in the Middle East could be considered as an important factor in shaping foreign policy. Yet, the Middle East is peopled by Jews, Arabs, Iranians, Turks, Kurds, not to mention tens of thousands of foreign workers with their numerous religions and sects. Also, the state's identity can be quite distinct from national identities of the local population. Arab political consciousness generated by the Arabic language has been rendered problematic by the competition among Arab leaders for political prestige which contributed to the regional instability.⁴¹⁷

Thus, no state in the Middle East is entirely homogeneous in ethnic and linguistic terms. Even within Israel and despite the promotion of a single Israeli-Jewish identity and policy, differences in origin and political culture have affected both domestic and foreign policy.

Culture and Ideology

The strong tie between religion and foreign policy is visible in the Middle East, as religion is often used as a tool to facilitate the political actions of state. According to some scholars, religion helps to construct the individual's

⁴¹⁷ Identity and foreign policy in the Middle East, edited by Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, 2002

and the group's value system and world-view. Thus, it could become a source of conflict because people consider themselves in possession of the sole truth and reject any alternate views.⁴¹⁸

The history of the Middle East has also shown that three strands of ideology have contributed to the formation of its politics and international relations: nationalism, revolution, and Islamism. It appears that the nationalism served for most of the 20th Century as the dominant force amongst Arabs, Turks, Israelis and Iranians. In the case of Arab states, the assertion of a common Arab nationhood, and of solidarity in the face of western and Israeli hostility provided the basis of formal inter-Arab co-operation, after the founding of the Arab League in 1945. Egypt presented itself as the champion, but Egyptian calls for unity were seen by many others as a campaign for control of other states.

Revolutionary ideas were promoted in part by radical Arab and Iranian nationalists, in part by communist movements, but also by Islamists. Radical Arab nationalists in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Libya promoted social revolution.

Islam became a significant factor in the foreign relations of Middle Eastern states. Thus, Saudi Arabia attempted to promote coalition of Islamic states through the Organisation of the Islamic Conference that it set up in 1965.

In sum nationalism, revolution, and Islamism were the leading ideologies that shaped foreign policies of Middle East state at different times.

Economy

For Arab oil-producing countries of the Gulf, the reliance on the rent from oil affects the external alliance and security policy they pursue. Theoretically, the many forms of bilateral exchanges, conferences, joint communiqués, visits of ministers and heads of state, reinforce state-state relation but were also motivated by state calculation as much as shared inter-Arab concerns. Leaders of poor states visit the oil-producers to get money, conferences are held so that the more influential states could recruit the others to their agenda, leaders of potentially rival states met and embraced to prevent the other from supporting opposition within each state.

Actually, oil differentiates the interests of the Arabs between rich and poor states. As the oil producers invested their petrodollars in Western banks and real estate, their interests were increasingly detached from the rest of the Arab world. Given also the fact that Middle East oil forms the backbone of western economies, influence and involvement in the Middle East has been of paramount importance for the former and current imperial and super powers, including France, Britain, USA and the former Soviet Union.

The role of agriculture and industrial potential and their impact on the state is also determining. For Egypt, the substantial food aid received from the US, at over \$4 billion a year impacts its foreign policy and alter its nationalist

⁴¹⁸ Patterns of Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Role Discrimination and Religion. Ozdamar, Ibrahim and Akbaba, Yasemin. www.allacademic.com, 2009

sentiment. There are also many examples where a foreign policy that is economically catastrophic, has been pursued in the Middle East. The coast to Iran of its foreign policy after 1979, leading to embargoes and a freeze on credit and investment, Arab refusal over many decades to settle with Israel, the partial support by Yemen of Iraq in the 1990 crisis, and Iraqi resistance to sanctions in the years after that crisis, are all cases where foreign policy cannot be read as resulting from economic calculation.

Military Variables

The Middle East is the most militarized region in the world and most arms sales head there. A suppressed people that sees US influence as a major root cause of the current problems in the Middle East has led to a rise in Islamic militancy, acts of terrorism and anti-west sentiment, anti-US in particular.⁴¹⁹

Israel's overwhelming post-1967 military superiority also encouraged each Arab state to defend itself. Specifically, Egypt's pursuit of a separate peace with Israel upset the Arab-Israeli power balance, heightening the insecurity of other Arab states, notably Syria, and encouraging them to look to self-help through militarization and separate diplomacy. The Iran-Iraq war similarly stimulated the regional drive to self-help. In this new environment, survival depended more on raw military power than success in ideological competition.

Consequently, many Middle Eastern states tend to satisfy the material and social aspirations of the military elite in order to maintain their interests.

GROWING ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Foreign policy orientations

There are not one but multiple foreign policies in the Middle East. They are by and large pragmatic rather than ideological. They are based on a view of Europe as a source of economic resources and technology and as a counterweight to the US. There is a residual but strongly varying effect of colonial/imperial relations; the existing economic links and interests with Western states remain key factors; two significant irritants are European reluctance genuinely to open up its own market in key sectors, such as agriculture and petrochemicals, and European political pressure over political reform

Egypt maintains a paramount position within the international arena, after having restructured its foreign policy to better reflect the tie between economic and political objectives. In the aftermath of Nasser's regime, the country has changed its alliances and forged a close relation with pro-Western, moderate oil-producing states, particularly Saudi Arabia. The main feature of Mubarak's foreign policy is its strong link to national economic interests and the main target is to improve vital Egyptian interests.

⁴¹⁹ Middle East, by Anup Shah, February 01, 2009, www.globalissues.org

Iran's foreign policy is fragmented over key issues, including the importance of nuclear weapons.⁴²⁰ President Ahmadinejad has some influence over foreign policy but power remains mostly in the hands of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) and its supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei.

Jordan is considered pivotal in settling the region's protracted conflicts. It became a bastion of the moderate Arab camp and followed a generally pro-Western foreign policy, because of its vulnerability in the region. In the quest for peace with Israel, Jordan has to balance its own security needs with Palestinian aspirations. Indeed, Jordan played a significant role in the 1991 negotiations between Israel and the PLO that led to the Oslo Accords of 1993. In the recent past, Jordan has improved its diplomatic relations with neighbors.⁴²¹

Libya's activism in Africa and in the Mediterranean basin has led to a growing presence within the international arena. Qadhafi became a strong advocate of African Unity after his failure to advocate Arab unity. Many observers linked Libya's lack of restraint in foreign affairs with its oil wealth, which paid for foreign adventures while keeping the domestic population content.

As a small nation, Oman is keen to conduct a discreet diplomacy. It is a matter of principle for Oman that neighbors deserve particular respect and consideration, in order to contribute to a harmonious regional environment. Oman has consistently sought to enhance the integration of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), supporting moves towards customs and eventually monetary union as well as advocating greater and more effective security and military coordination. Many Omanis are adherents of the Ibadhi tradition of Islam, a distinctive strand with a strong tradition of tolerance, in which the practice of shura—consultative participation—is a central feature.

Saudi Arabia is a fervent supporter of the general Arab and Islamic interests. As a member of OPEC and the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, it tends to maintain cooperative relations with other oil-producing and major oil-consuming countries. The country also plays a prominent role in the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and Arab and Islamic financial and development assistance institutions, and is the headquarters of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Islamic Development Bank. Since ascending to the throne, King Abdallah has followed a more activist foreign policy, offering Saudi assistance and support in efforts to resolve regional crises in Lebanon, Sudan, and Somalia, fostering Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.

While in the past, Syria was known for its nationalism, it began to establish better connection with other states in the region and started to display an active foreign policy. It has developed regional free trade agreements

⁴²⁰ Kenneth Pollack and Ray Takeyh, the Brookings Institution, 2005, www.ForeignAffairs.org

⁴²¹ Foreign policy - Jordan <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/World-Leaders-2003>

through the greater Arab Free Trade Area, (GAFTA) and initialed the Association Agreement with the European Union. Ensuring national security, increasing influence among its Arab neighbors, and achieving a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement, which includes the return of the Golan Heights, are the primary goals of Syria's foreign policy.⁴²²

Turkey is known for its ambitious diplomacy and its trend to be more involved in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, and in the Caucasus. Indeed, Ankara is trying to secure its interests north, south, east and west. Turkey's aspirations for European Union (EU) membership is well known and even if the process goes slowly, many among Turkey's elites believe that the country benefits from closer ties with the EU, and from modernizing its legislative base.

Growing presence within the United Nations

The vitality of the Middle East diplomacy is also attested by the presence of eminent diplomats at various positions within the international system. The Presidency of the General Assembly, the Chairmanship of the Non Aligned Movement, the Chairmanship of the G77 and China, the Chairmanship of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, the Chairmanship of the Arab Group, are all held by Middle East States.

Presidency of the UN General Assembly

A number of renowned diplomats from the Middle East have been elected as President of the UN General Assembly from 1950, from Iran (5th session), Lebanon(13th and 24th sessions), Tunisia(16th session), Algeria (29th session), Iraq(36th session), Saudi Arabia(46th session), Bahrain(61st session) and currently from Libya (64th session).⁴²³ According to the criteria of rotation and equitable geographic representation that guided elections at the United Nations, Middle East countries do not have difficulty to be elected as President of this supreme body, as they are members of various regional groups of states, namely African states, Asian states and Eastern European states.

Membership of the Security Council

Countries from the Middle East have continuously occupied non permanent seats at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The current UNSC members are Libya (2009) and Turkey (2010). Countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Turkey had been members of this prestigious UN organ for more than three times, while Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Yemen had been members for only one time. Saudi Arabia had never a chance to seat at the Security Council, and obviously Israel and Palestine are still far from being members of the Security Council.⁴²⁴

Troop and Police Contributions

Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, Turkey, Tunisia, and Algeria have a proud record of commitment to United Nations Peacekeeping Operation. Such

⁴²² Foreign policy - Syria <http://www.nationsencyclopedia.com/World-Leaders-2003/Syria-Foreign-Policy.html>

⁴²³ General Assembly, www.un.org.

⁴²⁴ Security Council, www.un.org

activism is seen both as the nation's commitment to international peace and as a showcase of military proficiency. These countries are motivated to contribute to peacekeeping operations in order to gain influence in world affairs, to become a great power in international politics, and to have a better access to non-permanent membership of the Security Council. Yet, such commitment might also give the ticket for a future permanent seat in the context of the UN reform. It is noted that none of the rich Gulf oil-producer countries are attracted to contribute troops to UNPKO. In fact, deployment of troops attracts the poorer countries essentially.⁴²⁵

Regional Initiatives

A myriad of regional organizations and movements, institutions and Non Governmental organizations exist in the Middle East, but not all can be considered as powerful as they project themselves to be. The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in Egypt in 1928, is one of the most influential religious-ideological forces in the 20th and early 21st Century. However, it grew into an umbrella for Islamist organizations in Syria, Sudan, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen, Libya and Iraq and became a threat to others. It moderated considerably in the late 1980s, taking an exclusively political role.

The League of Arab States (LAS), is one of the most active in the Middle East in channeling regional initiatives. It has served as a forum to coordinate their policy positions, to deliberate on matters of common concern, to settle some Arab disputes and conflicts. The League has also served as a platform for the drafting of landmark documents promoting economic integration. It appears that the governance of the Arab League has been based on the duality of supra-national institutions and the sovereignty of the member states. Preservation of individual statehood derived from the natural preference of rulers to maintain their power and independence in decision making. Moreover, the fear of the richer to share their wealth in the name of Arab nationalism with the poorer, the feuds among Arab rulers, and the influence of external powers that might oppose Arab unity can be seen as obstacles towards a deeper integration of the League.⁴²⁶

Middle East states are mostly members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which is the second largest inter-governmental organization after the United Nations with 57 states spread over four continents. The fundamental purpose of the OIC is to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation among member states, to protect the vital interests of the Muslims, and to settle the conflicts and disputes involving member states. The Ten-Year Program of Action adopted in 2005 envisages joint action of member states, promotion of tolerance, extensive reforms in all spheres of activities, and promotion of human rights in the Muslim world, especially with regard to rights of children, women and elderly and the family values enshrined by Islam.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁵ Troop and Police contributing countries, www.un.org

⁴²⁶ www.wikipedia.org

⁴²⁷ www.oic-oci.org

The Middle East also witnessed the proliferation of organizations and institutions with a more specific economic profile such as the Arab Cooperation Council, the Arab Organization for Industrialization, the Arab Towns Organization, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), the Arab Center for Study of Arid zones and Drought, the Islamic development Bank (IDB), and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Such proliferation expresses the increasing importance for the Middle East to conciliate economic and political interests.

Regional Economic Cooperation

In dealing with the globalization, Middle East governments have made some efforts towards regional economic integration and cooperation. This is the case of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), established in 1981 and composed of six Gulf states: Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. The GCC has already its operational structures, such as the Standardization Authority, the Organization for Industrial Consultancy, the Auditing and Accounting Authority, the Gulf Radio and TV Authority, the Council of Health Ministers, the Education and Training Bureau, the Council of Labor & and Social Affairs Ministers, and the Gulf Cup Football Tournament.⁴²⁸

Peace Initiatives

The Arab Peace Initiative, proposed by the Arab League in 2002 paved the way for subsequent initiatives aimed at normalizing the relations between the entire Arab region and Israel. Recently, in 2009, Egypt has been in the forefront of mediations efforts between Palestinian factions (Hamas and Fatah), with the strong support of Jordan. Also, a growing number of Middle East states are getting involved in mediation and peace initiatives through more innovative ways and means. For instance, Turkey is trying to facilitate the Arab-Israeli rapprochement by sponsoring Israeli-Palestinian industrial border zones, which provide jobs for Arabs and facilitate business interactions. Turkey also initiated the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Pact to settle Russian-Georgian hostilities in August 2009.

Qatar investment in International Conference facilities seems to be efficient and generates substantial revenues. Thus, in Doha, a number of international forums, meetings, conferences are organized every year. More recently, Qatar has offered to host peace talks on Darfur conflict. The negotiations took place in November 2009 and engaged all parties including the government of Sudan and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). Qatar's diplomacy is quite keen to find peaceful solution to Darfur crisis and Doha is an active partner in peace initiatives.

FUTURE TRENDS

More than 80 years after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, 50 years after the end of colonialism, and less than 20 years after the end of the Cold

⁴²⁸ www.gccsg.org

War, the Middle East new era is expected to start. Yet, the vision of a peaceful, prosperous, democratic Middle East might take time to be realized.

To that end, the settlement of the Israeli-Arab, in particular the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is fundamental. The time has come to implement the peace initiatives expected to pave the way for two peaceful states of Israel and Palestine living side by side, or alternatively, to work for a single state solution in which all Muslims and Christians and Jews can live together in peace in the region.

A palpable change in the US new administration policy towards the Middle East could also offer a new opportunity to improve their relationship.

Wealthy oil-producer countries could bring sustained support to those which are still facing or have to recover from conflicts. Indeed, bringing economic solutions to the perpetual problem of instability in the region is the best means to ensuring lasting peace in the Middle East. While maintaining a good level of economic cooperation with Western countries, a number of the Middle East states are already keen to develop new partnerships.

Indeed, promoting inter-cultural and all inclusive dialogue remains essential in containing extremist positions and terrorist acts that undermine the credibility of the Middle East. Such effort requires a broader culture change within all societies in the region and the promotion of a climate of tolerance, of mutual respect and confidence, and of a culture of peace.

The world geopolitical balance will certainly change with the emergence of new powers such as China, India, Brazil, and with the active presence of regional entities such as the European Union, the African Union, and the ASEAN. The Middle East could also be considered as a future influent bloc, for its role in maintaining the balance between Muslim and Christian communities. It is expected to play a prominent role in international politics, giving its geostrategic position. It could become a sort of diplomatic hub, promoting relations and offering mediations between the East and the West, the North and the South.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above, the settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict, a reinforced solidarity among Middle East states, the promotion of strategic partnerships, a better use of the economic wealth of the region, and a broader culture change are all necessary prerequisites for an improved role of the Middle East in international politics. Yet, some countries have made substantial efforts and led initiatives within the international diplomatic arena. However, more remains to be done, and the Middle East has to learn from its past to build a greater future.
