STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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# THE MIDDLE EAST: LOOK TO THE PAST TO RESOLVE CONFLICT IN THE FUTURE

BY

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## ABSTRACT

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Throughout history, the West, primarily Britain, France, and the United States, have had conflict with the Middle East. Western nations have conquered and colonized the Middle East and have made efforts to change religions, governments, and territorial boundaries. Many of these attempts have led to violence, hatred, distrust, and acts of terrorism. An assessment of past actions relating to Western intervention and influence will be reviewed highlighting the impact of those actions on the region. This paper also examines the perceptions that are infused in the people throughout the region due to action taken by the U.S. and Western nations to resolve conflict or to attempt to influence Middle East nations.

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# THE MIDDLE EAST:
# LOOK TO THE PAST TO RESOLVE CONFLICT IN THE FUTURE

"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"

—George Santayana

Throughout history, the West, primarily Britain, France, and the United States, have had conflict with the Middle East. Western nations have conquered and colonized the Middle East and have made efforts to change religions, governments, and territorial boundaries. Many of these attempts have led to violence, hatred, distrust, and acts of terrorism. An assessment of past actions relating to Western intervention and influence will be reviewed highlighting the impact of those actions on the region. This paper also examines the perceptions that are infused in the people throughout the region due to action taken by the U.S. and Western nations to resolve conflict or to attempt to influence Middle East nations.

Colonial influence has dominated the Middle East for centuries and has caused a struggle between Western values and those of the Arab Islamic faith. The influence of the West has also increased the desire of Middle East nations to become more self-sufficient through economic and military means, many of these attempts have failed, leading to instability, corrupt governments, poverty and distrust of Western values and influence. U.S. policy makers must become extremely aware of the idiosyncrasies that govern Arab states and how religious beliefs affect the actions of Middle Eastern Arabs.

## THE HISTORICAL REFERENCE

President George W. Bush has vehemently stated a number of times that the war against terrorism is not a war against Arabs or Muslims. It is a struggle against a common enemy; Osama bin Laden and his organizations of terror.[1]

Osama bin Laden's message is extremely different from the statements of President Bush. Osama bin Laden is waging a religious war for Islam directed against infidels and especially the U.S., the most powerful nation in the world and one that is inhabited by infidels, Non-Muslims. In a variety of his videotaped statements, bin Laden makes frequent references to key historical events. One of these staged recriminations was on October 7, 2001 where he discussed the humiliation and disgrace that Islam has suffered for more than eighty years:

> "...and what America is facing today is something very little of what we have tasted for decades. Our nation, since nearly 80 years is tasting this humility. Sons are killed, and nobody answers the call."[2]

It can be assumed that bin Laden's Muslim listeners and the people he was addressing understood the reference that he made in his October 7, 2001 video tape, and immediately appreciated its significance. In order for American and European Middle Eastern scholars to identify the significance of this reference, they began a search for something that had happened more than eighty years ago. They came up with several answers.

In 1918, the Ottoman Empire, the last of the great Muslim sultanates, was finally defeated along with its capital Constantinople. It was occupied and much of its territory divided between the victorious British and French Empires. The Turks eventually succeeded in liberating their homeland, but they did so not in the name of Islam but through a secular nationalist movement. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the secular Turkish Republic meant that Turkish and Arab peoples, whose lives had been intertwined for so many centuries, were now on separate courses.[3]

One of the first acts of the Turkish government in November 1922 was to abolish the sultanate. The Ottoman sultanate was widely recognized as the caliph, the head of all Sunni Islam, and the last in a line of such rulers that dated back to the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D. After a brief experiment with a separate caliph, the Turks abolished the caliphate in March 1924. For 13 centuries, the caliphate had gone through many changes, but it remained a potent symbol of Muslim unity. Aga Khan, a prominent Indian leader, tried to persuade the Turks not to abolish the caliphate. In his memoirs, he states:

> "The reasons for Muslim concern were profound and historic–Turkey stood almost alone in the world of that time as the sole surviving independent Muslim nation: with all its shortcomings, the imperial regime in Constantinople was a visible and enduring reminder of the temporal greatness of Islam's achievements. In the caliphate there was, too, for all the Sunni sect or persuasion, a spiritual link of the utmost significance..."[4]

Historical references made by bin Laden's and magnified by Aga Khan seem difficult to understand for many Americans but are common knowledge among Muslims. They can only be accurately understood within the context of Middle Eastern perceptions of identity, and against the background of Middle Eastern history. The Muslim cultures, like all cultures, are shaped by history and the members of the culture are keenly aware of that history.

During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, both sides waged massive propaganda campaigns that frequently recounted events of the Battle of Qadisiyya dating as far back as the 7th century. These were not detailed narratives but incomplete stories and legends, and yet both sides employed them knowing that their targeted audiences would fully understand the intricate symbolic meanings contained within them. In the Middle East, the perception of history

is promoted from the pulpit, the schools, and by the media.[5] Although it may be somewhat biased and inaccurate, it is a vivid and powerful tool.

**COLONIAL INFLUENCE**

In the Western world, the basic unit of human organization is the nation-state. The nation-state is subdivided in various ways, one of which is by religion. Muslims on the other hand, do not see a nation subdivided into religious groups but a religion subdivided into nations. To some extent, this is because most of the nation-states that make up the Middle East are relatively new creations. They were created during the era of Anglo-French domination that followed the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Arab nations, for the most part, follow the state-building and frontier demarcations of their former colonial rulers, to include their names. Peter Mansfield states in his book; The Arab World:

> "Five new states were created from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire–Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine. Their structure and boundaries were decided by the powers with little regard for Arab wishes. They began their existence without any sense of national cohesion or loyalty and this was to make them virtually ungovernable when they became fully independent... Since these new Arab states were Western creations their people tend to regard their frontiers as artificial..."[6]

Iraq was a medieval province with borders very different from those of the modern republic. Syria, Palestine, and Libya are names from classical antiquity that had not been used in the region for 1000 years until they were revived and imposed by Europeans in the 20th century. Algeria and Tunisia do not even exist as words in Arabic and there is no word in the Arabic language for Arabia.

In the early centuries of the Muslim era, the Islamic community was one state under one ruler. Even after that community split up into many states, the idea of a single Islamic system of government and laws continued. The states were almost all from the same line of rulers or Muslim groups. There were also shifting frontiers of Islamic rule in the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, and Turkey. These Islamic states did not adhere to national or territorial boundaries established by their colonial rulers. Nation-states conceived by Western colonial powers rarely considered ethnic or religious boundaries when establishing the Arab states as we know them today.

Both Arabs and Turks produced a vast literature describing their struggles against Christian Europe, from the first Arab invasions in the 8th century to the final Turkish retreat in the 20th century. Islamic writers usually referred to their opponents not in territorial or ethnic terms but simply as infidels.

## THE RISE AND FALL OF MUSLIM RULE

During the medieval centuries in Europe, the most advanced civilization in the world was that of Islam. The civilization of Islam was determined to spread the word of Islam throughout the world. One of the basic tasks handed down to Muslims by the Prophet was jihad. This word means "striving" and is cited in the Quran. It is also interpreted to mean armed struggle for the defense or advancement of Muslim power.[7] The world was divided into two houses by Muslim law, the House of Islam, in which a Muslim government ruled and Muslim law prevailed, and the House of War, the rest of the world, still inhabited and ruled by infidels. Between the two, there would be a long-lasting state of war until the entire world either embraced Islam or submitted to the rule of the Muslim state.[8]

Muslims knew there were certain differences among the peoples of the House of War. Most of the Non-Muslims were simply believers in more than one god or worshiped idols. These people represented no serious threat to Islam and were likely prospects for conversion. The major exception was the Christians, whom Muslims recognized as having a religion of the same kind as their own, and therefore as their primary rival in the struggle for world domination.

In the lands under Muslim rule, Islamic law required that Jews and Christians be allowed to practice their religions and run their own affairs; however, they were not given the same privileges as Muslims. Islamic toleration, though far greater than the practices in Europe of the period, did not mean freedom or equality, it meant limited rights mixed with discrimination. For example, Non-Muslim, primarily Jewish or Christian, testimony against a Muslim was suspect in the courts. Jews and Christians generally could not build new places of worship. Non-Muslim people of the protected sects avoided military obligations, but paid discriminatory taxes and observed separate codes of dress and behavior.[9] In modern terms, Jews and Christians were considered second-class citizens. However, second-class citizenship established by law and the Quran was far better than the total lack of citizenship that was the fate of non-Christians and even some Christians in the West.

Under the medieval caliphate, and again under the Persian and Turkish dynasties, the empire of Islam was the richest, most powerful, most creative, most enlightened region in the world, and for most of the Middle Ages Christians were on the defensive. In the 15th century, the Christian counterattacks expanded. The Tartars were expelled from Russia, and the Moors from Spain. However, in southeastern Europe, where the Ottoman sultan confronted first the Byzantine and then the Holy Roman Emperor, Muslim power prevailed. As late as the 17th century, Turkish officials still ruled in Budapest and Belgrade, Turkish armies were besieging Vienna, and Barbary ships were raiding lands as distant as the British Isles.[10]

In 1683, the second Turkish siege of Vienna ended in total failure followed by headlong retreat. This was an entirely new experience for the Ottoman armies. A contemporary Turkish historian, Silihdar Mehmet Aga, described the disaster in a very short phrase: "This was a calamitous defeat, so great that there has been none like it since the first appearance of the Ottoman state."[11] This defeat indicated to the governing elite of the Ottoman Empire as well as those outside the governing elite that Europe was doing better and that the Ottoman Empire was consequently weaker and more endangered. Bernard Lewis, one of the West's foremost authorities on Islamic history and culture, asserts:

> "When things go wrong in a society, in a way and to a degree that can no longer be denied or concealed, there are various questions that one can ask. A common one, particularly in continental Europe yesterday and in the Middle East today is: "Who did this to us?" The answer to a question thus formulated is usually to place blame on external or domestic scapegoats—foreigners or minorities at home. The Ottomans, faced with the major crisis in their history, asked a different question: "What did we do wrong?" The debate on these two questions began in Turkey immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Carlowitz (1699); it resumed with new urgency after the Kucuk Kaynarca Treaty (1774). In a sense it is still going on today."[12]

The Ottoman Empire had good reason for concern, defeat followed defeat. The Christian European forces, having liberated their own lands, pursued their former invaders from where they had come. The Russians were moving into North and Central Asia, and the Portuguese into Africa and around Africa to South and Southeast Asia. Even small European powers such as Holland and Portugal were able to build vast empires in the East in order to establish a dominant role in trade.

When Napoleon Bonaparte landed in Egypt in 1798 the modern history of the occupation of the Middle Eastern countries began. Within a short time, General Bonaparte and his small expeditionary force were able to conquer, occupy, and rule Egypt. There had been before this, attacks, retreats, and losses of territory on the remote frontiers where the Turks and the Persians faced Austria and Russia. However, for a small Western force, like France, to invade one of the heartlands of Islam was a shock. The British later defeated the French and the French were forced to leave Egypt, however, they were not forced to leave by the Egyptians or Turks, but by a small squadron of the British Royal Navy, commanded by a young admiral named Horatio Nelson. This was a bitter lesson the Muslims had learned, not only were their lands being controlled by Western powers, but it was only a Western power that could remove another Western power.[13]

By the early 20th century, independence was regained by Turkey, Iran, and by some remote countries like Afghanistan. Almost the entire Muslim world had been incorporated into the four European empires: Britain, France, Russia, and the Netherlands. Middle Eastern governments and factions were forced to learn how to play these mighty rivals against one another. For a time, they played the game with some success while Western allies of Britain and France effectively dominated the region. Some Middle Eastern governments naturally looked to the enemies of those European allies for support. In the First World War, they turned to Germany.[14] In the Second World War, many Arab states attempted to remain neutral, but by war's end had sided with Western powers.[15] In the Cold War, many Arab nations turned towards the Soviet Union for support.[16]

**THE COLD WAR ERA AND ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS**

During the Cold War era, the U.S. was focused on events in Europe and the containment of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile Islamic extremist movements in the Middle East had started to emerge, condemning Western influence and corrupt governments. Anti-Americanism was on the rise and Islamic groups opposed to Western values were communicating their concerns through violence and revolutionary actions.

In Saudi Arabia on November 20, 1979, a group of approximately 200-300 Islamic extremists seized the Great Mosque in Mecca and held it for a time against the Saudi security forces. Their declared aim was to purify Islam and liberate the Holy Land of Arabia from the royal infidels and the corrupt religious leaders who supported them. Their leader blamed Westerners as the destroyers of fundamental Islamic values and the Saudi government as their accomplices. He called for a return to the old Islamic traditions of justice and equality. After some hard fighting the Saudis, with the help of French and Jordanian commandos, recaptured the Grand Mosque and suppressed the rebels.[17] Their leader was executed on January 9, 1980, along with 62 of his followers, among them Egyptians, Kuwaitis, Yemenis, and citizens of other Arab countries.[18]

Meanwhile, a demonstration in support of the rebels took place in the Pakistani capital, Islamabad. A rumor had circulated, endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was then in the process of establishing himself as the revolutionary leader in Iran, that American troops had been involved in the clashes in Mecca. A crowd of Muslim demonstrators attacked the American Embassy, two Americans and two Pakistani employees were killed. Khomeini stood by a report that was false, but his use of propaganda proved to be a very powerful instrument to incite rebellion against Western powers.[19]

These events took place within the context of the Iranian revolution of 1979. On November 4th, the U.S. Embassy in Teheran had been seized, and 52 Americans were taken hostage. The hostages were held for 445 days, until their release on January 20, 1981. The motives for this have become clearer. It is now apparent that the hostage crisis occurred not because relations between Iran and the U.S. were deteriorating but because they were improving. In the fall of 1979, the relatively moderate Iranian Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, had arranged to meet with the American national-security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. The two men met November 1, 1979 and were reported to have been photographed shaking hands. There seemed to be a real possibility in the eyes of the radicals that there might be some accommodation between the two countries, and for the radicals, that would be unacceptable. Protesters seized the Embassy and took the American diplomats hostage in order to destroy any hope of further relationships with the U.S.[20] History has unequivocally demonstrated that these Iranian Muslim extremists achieved their long-term strategic goal of distancing Iran from the United States.

**ARAB INCONSISTENCY**

The bitterness exhibited toward imperial powers has not always been consistent among Arab Middle Eastern states. This can been seen by the Soviet Union's conquest and heavy rule over tens of millions of Muslim subjects in Central Asia and in the Caucasus. Had it not been for U.S. opposition and the Cold War, the Arab world might well have shared the fate of Poland and Hungary, or Uzbekistan.

However, the Soviet Union did not suffer a similar backlash of anger and hatred from the Arab community as did the U.S. In 1979, the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan was a definite case of imperialist aggression, conquest, and domination. This invasion of Afghanistan only triggered a muted response in the Islamic world. The PLO observer at the United Nations defended the invasion, and the Organization of the Islamic Conference did little to protest it. There was an active lobby on behalf of the Soviet Union organized by Syria, South Yemen, the PLO, Algeria, and Libya. The inability of Muslim government to convey political and diplomatic pressure demonstrates a common lack of purpose. Ironically, the U.S. eventually orchestrated an Islamic response to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan[21] Bernard Lewis writes:

> "Pan-Islam, with its mini-jihad against a mini-enemy and its extreme caution elsewhere, did not carry conviction as a genuine force in international politics."[22]

## ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

As the Western European empires faded from imperial rule and influence, Middle Eastern anti-Americanism was attributed more and more to America's support for Israel, and Israel's conflict with the Palestinian Arabs, and neighboring Arab states.

Arab inconsistency can be seen in the events leading to and following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The Soviet Union played a significant role in procuring the majority by which the General Assembly of the United Nations voted to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and then gave Israel immediate recognition, as did the U.S. However, the U.S. government continued a partial arms embargo on Israel, while Czechoslovakia, at Moscow's direction, immediately sent a supply of weaponry, which enabled the new state to survive the attempts to destroy it. As late as the war of 1967, Israel still obtained most of its arms from Europe, mainly French suppliers, not the U.S.[23]

The Soviet Union was one of Israel's supporters during the early years. Yet, in September 1955, when Egypt announced an arms deal with the Soviet Union, there was an enthusiastic response in the Arab press. Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan met immediately and voted resolutions of congratulation to President Nasser, although Arabs had no special love of the Soviet Union and Communist ideology. What encouraged them was that the arms deal was a slap in the face for the West. The slap, and the agitated Western response, reinforced the mood of hatred and spite toward the West and encouraged its supporters. It also encouraged the U.S. to look more favorably on Israel, now seen as a reliable and potentially useful ally in an unfriendly region. This continued relationship also relates the vital interest the U.S. has placed on the security and well-being of Israel at the expense of other nations in the region.[24]

## DOUBLE STANDARDS

Many Arabs have expressed new grievances against U.S. policy towards the Middle East. Poverty and oppression affect almost the entire Muslim world. Both of these problems are attributed to U.S. involvement in the region. The first reason that is frequently cited by Middle Eastern Arab extremists is U.S. economic dominance and globalization. The second reason is U.S. support for Muslim tyrants and governments that contribute to this domination.[23]

Globalization has become a major theme in the Arab media, and it is usually raised in connection with U.S. economic penetration. The increasingly miserable economic situation in many of the Muslim states adds to their frustration and is considered one of the reasons for an increased resentment of Western values and reluctance of democratic principles.[24]

Arabs increasingly complain that the U.S. judges them by different and lower standards than it does Europeans and members of other nations. Arab Muslims feel the difference is in

their financial well-being and their political freedom. They emphasize that Western diplomats overlook or even defend actions and support rulers that they would not tolerate in their own countries.

An example of this occurred in 1991, when Western powers called on the Iraqi people, the Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south, to rise up against Saddam Hussein. U.S. forces watched while Saddam, using the helicopters that the ceasefire agreement had allowed him to retain, suppressed the Kurds and the Shiites group-by-group. The reasoning behind this action was that the U.S. led coalition wanted a change of government in Iraq, but they had hoped for a coup and not a revolution. The U.S. saw a genuine popular uprising as dangerous and it could lead to uncertainty or even anarchy in the region. A coup would be more predictable and could achieve the desired result and replace Saddam Hussein. Hussein has consistently rejected requests from the U.N. and Western Nations to improve human rights, and he is assumed to be the center of gravity for most of the support of terrorism and violence in the Middle East. The U.S. has allowed Saddam and his regime to remain in power giving the perception of tolerance towards corrupt and suppressive governments.[25] Ralph Peters, Wall Street Journal, states:

> "We squandered our victory in Desert Storm by not deposing Saddam Hussein because we feared a power vacuum. The price of an imaginary stability was the slaughter of the Shiites in the south and the Kurds in the north, with the remainder of the Iraq's people deprived and oppressed unto this day – while Saddam supports terrorism and nurses weapons of mass destruction."[26]

Dr. Shafeeq N. Ghabra, an expert on Gulf security and political issues, believes one method to stabilize this region is to invoke a regime change in Iraq. However, the Iraqi resistance groups are extremely suspicious of U.S. support for a regime change. The abandonment of Afghanistan after the departure of the Soviet Union in 1989 initiated their distrust. Their distrust was reinforced by the U.S. abandonment of the Iraqi resistance groups after the Gulf War.[27]

In 1982, trouble began in the Syrian city of Hama with an uprising headed by an illegal Sunni radical group called Ikhwan al Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood). At that time there were prohibitions enforced by the Syrian government to most forms of political activity. The government responded swiftly. Troops were sent and within a very short time, they had reduced a large part of the city to rubble. Amnesty International estimated the number killed somewhere between 10,000 -25,000 people. The action was ordered and supervised by the Syrian President, Hafiz al-Assad. The rebellion attracted little attention at the time. However, it did not prevent the U.S. from subsequently courting Assad by Secretaries of State James Baker,

Warren Christopher, and Madeleine Albright, and ultimately by President Clinton. It is doubtful that Americans would have supported a ruler who was responsible for similar crimes in Western countries against Western victims.[28]

In 1982, Lebanese militiamen carried out the annihilation of 800-1000 Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila. It was seen as revenge for the assassination of the Lebanese President Bashir Gemayyel. To a degree, the U.S. ignored the massacre of the refugees and allowed Israel the opportunity to establish and support the new Lebanese government. The new government, dominated by the Kata'ib, carried out additional atrocities. General Ariel Sharon, who at the time commanded the Israeli forces in Lebanon, also ignored the massacre, was reprimanded by an Israeli commission of inquiry for not having anticipated, and prevented the annihilation. He was later forced to resign from his position as Minister of Defense.

It is reasonable that the Palestinians and other Arabs should place some of the blame for the annihilation on Sharon. Some wanted to judge Sharon for crimes against humanity before a tribunal in Europe. However, no such crimes or acts against humanity were made regarding either Saddam Hussein or Hafiz al-Assad, who killed thousands of their compatriots. This reinforces the perception that leaders of Western culture or those that promote democratic principles are held to a higher standard than leaders in the Arab Muslims states.[29]

Modern forms of technology, such as Al-Jazeera-an Arab version of CNN and the internet, have communicated to the people of the Middle East the deep and widening gap between the opportunities of the free world outside their borders, and the repression within them. The ensuing anger is directed first against their leaders, and then against those whom they see as keeping those leaders in power, particularly the United States. Lisa Anderson, Dean of the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, states:

> "The U.S. and its international allies now find themselves supporting autocratic but compliant friends, willing to do the West regional and international favors at the price of the West's blind eyes to domestic tyranny."[30]

**NEW WORLD ORDER**

In 1991, the collapse of the Soviet Union left the U.S. as the sole world superpower. Gorbachev and President George H. Bush ended the bi-polar era of Middle Eastern history that had been put in place by France and Britain between the 1800s and 1900s. At first, it seemed that the era of imperial rivalry had ended with the withdrawal of both competitors. The Soviet Union could not play the imposing role and the U.S. was envisioning peace dividends and reluctant to intervene in foreign domestic issues. The talk of a "new world order" entered political lexicon with President George H. Bush's stated vision of the U.S. and her allies working

together to thwart aggression and resolve global problems. Simplistically, the fall of communism was thought to be the ideal time to seize the initiative and promote global democratization.[31]

However, most Middle Eastern countries did not see the new evolving world order in the same light as President Bush. For them this was simply a new phase in the old imperial game, with the U.S. as the latest in a succession of Western imperialists. In the absence of bi-polar rivals, Middle Eastern fundamentalists found themselves in a position to organize their own type of struggle for equality and prosperity. Therefore, they decided to turn to Western forms of modernization.

**FAILURE TO MODERNIZE**

U.S. policies and support for corrupt regimes in the Arab world, like the Shah of Iran, have caused resentment among Muslims. This resentment has only recently found its expression in acts of terrorism. In the 19th and 20th centuries, Muslims responded in two ways to the imbalance of power and wealth between their societies and those of the West.

The reformers or modernizers tried to identify the sources of Western wealth and power and adapt them to their own use. Muslim governments in Turkey, Egypt, and Iran made great efforts to modernize and equip their armed forces. However, when defeats on the battlefield were matched by defeats in the marketplace, governments tried to identify the causes of Western economic success and to emulate them by establishing industries of their own.[32]

Most attempts at reform ended badly. The modernization of the armed forces accelerated the process of defeat and withdrawal, culminating in the humiliating failure of five Arab states and armies to prevent Israel from building a new state in Palestine in 1948.[33] With rare exceptions, the economic reforms, capitalist and socialist alike, fared no better. The Middle East lags far behind the West in job creation, education, technology, and productivity. This is due primarily because of their combination of unemployment and a high birth rate. Dr. Ghabra perceives the Middle East as a hot spot for revolution based on the unemployment rate of the youth. He indicates that unemployment has soared to 50% among the young 25 years of age and younger.[34]

Many Arab nations also lag behind the more recent recruits to Western-style modernization such as Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. Out of 155 countries ranked for economic freedom in 2001, the highest-ranking Muslim states are Bahrain # 9, the United Arab Emirates # 14, and Kuwait # 42. According to the World Bank in 2000, the average annual income in the Muslim countries from Morocco to Bangladesh was only half the world average, and in the1990s, the combined gross national products of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon were considerably smaller than that of Israel alone. The per-capita figures are worse. According to

United Nations statistics, Israel's per-capita GDP was three and one-half times greater than that of Lebanon and Syria, twelve times that of Jordan, and thirteen and one-half times greater than that of Egypt. Dr. Ghabra indicates that the combined GDP of the 22 countries comprising the Arabian Peninsula is only 50% of that of Italy. The contrast of many Middle Eastern Arab Nations with the West, and now with the Far East, is an extremely distressing situation.[35]

Modification in politics has also failed in the aspect of governments with ability to demonstrate democratic principles. Many Islamic countries have experimented with democratic institutions of one kind or another. History has shown that the record, with the possible exception of Turkey, is one of constant failure. Western-style parties and parliaments almost invariably ended in corrupt governments, maintained by repression and indoctrination. Samuel P. Huntington is quoted as saying:

> "Among Islamic countries, particularly those of the Middle East, the prospects for democratic development seem low. The Islamic revival... would seem to reduce even further the likelihood of democratic development, particularly since democracy is often identified with the very Western influences the revival strongly opposes. In addition many of the Islamic states are very poor. Those that are rich, on the other hand, are so because of oil, which is controlled by the state and hence enhances the power of the state in general and of the bureaucracy in particular. Saudi Arabia and some of the smaller Arab oil-rich Gulf countries have from time to time made some modest gestures toward the introduction of democratic institutions, but these have not gone far and have often been reversed."[36]

Many Muslims speak of the failure of modernization. The rejection of modernization in favor of a return to the sacred past has a varied and ramified history in the region; it also has given rise to a number of fundamental movements. Muslim fundamentalists feel that the troubles within the Muslim world are the result of excessive modernization, not because of insufficient modernization.

From the Muslim fundamentalist's point of view, the primary struggle is not against a Western enemy, but against the Westernizing enemies at home who have imported and imposed infidel ways on Muslim peoples. The task of Muslim fundamentalists is to depose and remove infidel rulers, sometimes by defeating or expelling their foreign patrons and protectors. They also feel they must destroy the laws, institutions, and social customs that infidels have introduced so they can return to a pure Islamic way of life. However, Dr. Ghabra states that intellectuals and groups who feel governmental policies are corrupt or suppressive must be extremely watchful and guarded, expressions or public speaking of this type can led to imprisonment, expulsion, or execution.[37]

## THE RISE OF TERRORISM

Members of the eleventh-to-thirteenth-century Muslim sect known as the Assassins, which was based in Iran and Syria, seem to have been the first to transform the act that was named after them into a system and an ideology. Their efforts were primarily directed against their own leaders whom they saw as corrupt, and not against their Christian rivals, the Crusaders. In this sense, the Assassins are the predecessors of many of the so-called Islamic terrorists of today, some of whom explicitly make this point.

Followers of many faiths have, at one time or another, called upon religion to justify their actions. The Twentieth Century brought a renewal of such actions in the Middle East, and terrorism has evolved through several phases. During the last years of the British Empire 1830-1960, Britain faced terrorist movements in three different cultures, the Greeks in Cyprus, Jews in Palestine, and Arabs in Aden. All three acted from nationalist, rather than religious motives. Though very different in their backgrounds and political circumstances, the three were substantially alike in their tactics. Their purpose was to persuade the British that staying in the region was not worth the cost in blood. Their method was to attack the military, administrative personnel, and installations. All three operated only within their own territory and generally avoided collateral damage. However, all three succeeded in their endeavors, which unfortunately has provided motivation for present day terrorists to wage war against the U.S.

Due to the rapid development of the media, especially television, new forms of terrorism are not merely targeted at specific or limited enemy objectives but at world opinion. The primary purpose is not to defeat or even to weaken the enemy militarily but to gain publicity and psychological victory.

The most successful group has been the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO was founded in 1964 but became important in 1967, after the defeat of the combined Arab armies in the Six-Day War. The PLO had failed at conventional warfare and developed a strategy of asymmetric warfare, terrorism. The targets in this form of armed struggle were not military or other government establishments, but public places and gatherings of any kind, which are overwhelmingly civilian, and in which the victims do not necessarily need to have a connection to the declared enemy. Examples of this ideology include:

- 1970 the hijacking of three aircraft, one Swiss, one British, and one American, which were all taken to Amman.
- 1972 the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.
- 1973 the seizure of the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum.

- 1985 the murder of two Americans and a Belgian diplomat and the takeover of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro.

Other attacks were directed against schools, shopping malls, discothèques, pizzerias, and passengers waiting in line at European airports. These and other attacks by the PLO were immediately successful in attaining their objectives of capturing newspaper headlines and worldwide television news broadcasts. The PLO achieved a great deal of financial support from Arab governments and because of their struggles against Israel they were considered heroes to the Arab world.[38]

The Arab terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s were waging a war for an Arab or Palestinian cause, not for Islam. A significant proportion of the PLO leaders and activists were Christian. Unlike socialism, which failed, nationalism was discredited by its success. In every Arab land but Palestine, the nationalists achieved their purposes and defeated imperialist rulers, and the establishment of national sovereignty under national leaders. For a while, freedom and independence were used as synonymous and interchangeable terms. The early experience of independence, however, revealed that this was an error. Independence and freedom are very different, but for the most part, attainment of independence did not guarantee individual freedoms.

Both in defeat and in victory, the Arab nationalists of the Twentieth Century pioneered the methods that were later adopted by religious terrorists: the slaughter of innocent bystanders. Lack of concern for human life reached new proportions in the terror campaign launched by Osama bin Laden in the early 1990s. The first major example was the bombing of two American embassies in East Africa in 1998. In order to kill twelve American diplomats, the terrorists were willing to slaughter more than two hundred Africans, many of them Muslims, who happened to be in the vicinity. The same disregard for human life, on a vastly greater scale, lie behind the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania on September 11th 2001.[39]

The establishment of Al Qaeda and the declarations of war by Osama bin Laden have marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of both Islam and terrorism. The triggers for bin Laden's actions were U.S. presence in Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War, continued bombing of Iraq, U.S. support for regimes such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the existence of Israel.[40] Osama bin Laden's statement to the American people is expressed in his video taped interview aired on October 7, 2001:

> "As to America, I say to it and its people a few words: I swear to God that America will not live in peace before peace reigns in Palestine, and before all the army of infidels depart the land of Muhammad, peace be upon him."[41]

Eleven years ago, Al Qaeda was created, which included many veterans of the war in Afghanistan and members of many other terrorist groups. Their task might have seemed daunting to anyone else, but they did not see it that way. In their view, they had already driven the Russians out of Afghanistan. Having overcome the superpower that they had always regarded as more formidable, they felt ready to take on the U.S. They were encouraged by the opinion expressed by Osama bin Laden and many others, that America was a paper tiger.[42]

Muslim terrorists had been obsessed by such beliefs before. One of the most surprising revelations in the accounts of those who held the American Embassy in Teheran from 1979 to 1981 was that their original intention had been to hold the building and the hostages for only a few days. They changed their minds when statements from Washington made it clear that there was no danger of serious repercussions planned against them by the United States. They finally released the hostages, they explained, only because they feared that the new President, Ronald Reagan, might approach the problem "like a cowboy."[43]

Bin Laden and his followers do not have such concern, and their hatred is neither constrained by fear nor diluted by respect. Many repeatedly cite the American retreats from Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia as a lack of will on the part of American people to carry through with commitments. As cited by bin Laden's remarks in an interview with John Miller, of ABC News May 28, 1998:

> "We have seen in the last decade the decline of the American government and the weakness of the American soldier, who is ready to wage cold wars and unprepared to fight long wars. This was proven in Beirut when the Marines fled after two explosions. It also proves they can run in less than twenty-four hours, and this was also repeated in Somalia. . . The youth were surprised at the low morale of the American soldiers. . . After a few blows, they ran in defeat. . . They forgot about being the world leader and the leader of the new world order. They left, dragging their corpses and their shameful defeat, and stopped using such titles."[44]

For Osama bin Laden, 2001 marks the resumption of the war for the religious dominance of the world that began in the seventh century. For him and his followers, this is a moment of opportunity. In the eyes of bin Laden and Al Qaeda, America exemplifies the House of War, a nation embodied with leadership that is degenerate and demoralized. Therefore, like the Roman and Byzantine empires, America is ready to be overthrown.

Osama bin Laden and his Al Qaeda followers do not represent Islam. Their statements and their actions directly contradict basic Islamic principles and teachings. However, they do

come from within Muslim civilization and therefore they should be evaluated based on their cultural, religious, and historical background.

From the beginning of the Islamic faith, waging religious war has been an obligation that has been much regulated. Islamic religious law deals in some detail with the initiation, conclusion, and resumption of hostilities, the avoidance of injury to noncombatants, the treatment of prisoners, the division of booty, and even the types of weapons that may be used. Modern Islamic radicals, who support the fundamentalists, and others, such as bin Laden, simply disregard, and rationalized into obscurity some of these rules. U.S. intelligence agencies must be constantly alert for new and innovative terrorist acts. Peter Bergen, in his book Holy War, Inc., indicates that: "Bin Laden's own statements have always been the best predictor of his future actions and on this subject; his words are chilling and unequivocal." Osama Bin Laden states:

> "...we don't consider it a crime if we tried to have nuclear, chemical, biological weapons..."[45]

**MODIFICATIONS TO CURRENT U.S. PRACTICES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

U.S. National Security Strategy is founded on three fundamental goals, enhancing security at home and abroad, promoting prosperity, and promoting democracy and human rights. It is not the intent of this paper to change the goals that have guided our nation for decades, but merely to recommend several modifications to some of the practices that the United States uses to implement the tenets of our National Security Strategy. Policy makers should consider:

- Removal or reduction of ground forces occupying the Arabian Peninsula, particularly Saudi Arabia.
- Use military power to remove Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq.
- Resolve Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Consider religious and ethnic background of personnel assigned to Middle East embassies.
- Provide extensive economic aid for infrastructure and business development for non-oil rich nations.

GROUND FORCES IN THE ARABIAN PENINSULA

The occupation by ground forces on the Arabian Peninsula is no longer necessary to achieve U.S. National Interests. This would not preclude U.S. Naval presence in the Middle East to provide security, however, the absence of ground forces would display the respect the U.S. has for sovereign nations, and U.S. respect for religious practices and views within the region.

History has shown that the occupation of foreigners in the Middle East has usually resulted in conflict and violence. The Saudi Arabian cities of Mecca and Medina are considered the most sacred sites within the Muslim world. Yet the U.S. and other nations continue to occupy Saudi Arabia, giving the perception that Western nations do not value or respect the Muslim religion.

Another region is the Sinai, where approximately 500 U.S. soldiers are part of a multinational task force that has been stationed there since the end of the Israeli-Egyptian war of 1973. The purpose of this task force, known as Task Force Sinai, is to provide a buffer zone between Israel and Egypt and security observation within the region. However, the Task Force is insignificant as a deterrent force in the region. Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty decades ago. Again, the presence of this Task Force in the region does nothing other than create tension and animosity among Arab people.

REMOVE SADDAM HUSSEIN FROM POWER

Saddam Hussein and his regime have been in power for over two decades and he continues to be a threat to peace and stability in the Middle East. He has started two wars, massacred thousands of his own people, and is assumed to be the center of gravity for support of international terrorism. U.S. National security objectives for Iraq are containment of Hussein's power, imposition of trade sanctions and support for those factions seeking a regime change. This policy has been in effect since the end of the Gulf War and has only caused a great deal of suffering for the Iraqi people. U.S. National Security Strategy dated December 2000 states:

> "...we actively support those who seek to bring a new democratic government to power in Baghdad. We recognize that this may be a slow and difficult process, but we believe it is the only solution to the problem of Saddam's regime."[46]

The war on terrorism should be considered a catalyst for redefining U.S. national policy and strategy towards Iraq. The evolution of current U.S. policy toward Iraq should readdress the use of military force to meet national security objectives, and evaluate criteria to influence success once the decision to use force has been made. Because of the ongoing War on Terrorism, a number of strategic factors exist that support the use of military force to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime.

RELIGIOUS AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND OF MIDDLE EAST POLICY MAKERS

The U.S. discrimination laws require us to disregard religious or ethnic background when selecting individuals for any position, including those in government who develop and implement national security goals. The current State Department Official for Middle East policy is William Burns; Burns is Jewish. Some senior officials of Arab Middle Eastern countries see this as an indication that the Jewish community manipulates U.S. policy regarding these Arab countries.

International Fellows attending the U.S. Army War College have reiterated this perception, right or wrong, concerning Burns and others numerous times. This situation, although it may seem insignificant to American politicians, has strong undercurrents that can influence cooperation and impede the peace process. A practical solution would be to reassign Burns to another governmental office of equal stature that could use his expertise and if possible, seek an Arab-American to fill his position in the future.[47]

RESOLUTION TO THE ISRAELI - PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been on going for over fifty years, with blood shed on both sides. Although the U.S. policy is to support and promote democracy, the U.S. must also consider peace and stability as a prime ingredient for the resolution between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The U.S. must become the honest broker, step into this situation, and work with both sides to bring peace to the region. It is time to recognize Palestine as an independent state and bring this issue to closure.

ECONOMIC AID

History has shown that nation-states that are economically stressed are also prone to be prime for revolution and terrorist acts. The U.S. must continue its policy of shared prosperity and develop a system to provide extensive economic aid to those Middle Eastern nations that are economically stressed. This system would channel economic aid through the Gulf Cooperative Council and allow this organization, or similar organizations, to shape and develop the Middle East.[48] This system would also remove the U.S. from direct economic involvement in the region and place the burden of security, stability and economic prosperity in the hands of Middle Eastern nations, were it belongs. Continued efforts in this area could have significant impact on the region and would improve relations with Western nations.[49]

**CONCLUSION**

Throughout history, Western powers have dominated the political and economic regions of the Middle East. These actions, in many cases, have led to distrust, violence, economic inconsistency, and acts of terrorism. Middle Eastern nations have grown to suspect Western values and influence; particularly the U.S. Western powers have cultivated corrupt regimes and have turned a blind eye as long as national interests were served, thus promoting the perception of double standards.

Western colonial powers created Middle Eastern nations with very little participation from the population within the region. This has led to territorial disputes and the division of ethnic cultures. Many times, Western colonial powers have attempted to emplace a type of

government that did not account for the Islamic way of life. As a result, the failure of these governments perpetuates continuous turbulence.

Turbulence within the region has destroyed infrastructure, and caused widespread oppression and poverty. Many of the non-oil rich Middle Eastern nations are among the poorest in the world. It is hard to imagine that these nations were the center of civilization in the past, let alone that they could sustain themselves in the future without economic aid. However, this aid must be tempered with the understanding that the current culture within the Middle East does not lend itself well to Western assistance.

Therefore, a system for economic aid must be developed through oil-rich nations within the region, not only to provide economic aid, but to provide security and stabilization; it must also have the ability to provide good governance. Middle Eastern oil-rich nations must take a more active role in the development and well-being of their neighboring states. Only in this way will the nations of the Middle East ever be able to regain the prestige and prosperity they once enjoyed during the Middle Ages.

U.S. policy must continue to promote democratic principles throughout the world. However, this policy must be flexible and encourage good governance. It is not always necessary for a government to be structured to resemble Western democracies. Israel is a prime example; it is a government that is deeply entrenched with religious factions. History has demonstrated that religious and cultural circumstances play a major role regarding security and stability within the Middle East.

There are many in the Middle East who believe America can offer a better style of life, the promise of human rights, free institutions, and responsible and democratically elected governments. There are also a growing number of individuals and even some movements that have undertaken the complex task of introducing such institutions in their own countries. However, similar attempts have led to many corrupt regimes. Iran is a prime example of a corrupt government that must be eliminated in order to bring stability and security to the region. Saddam Hussein's regime can no longer be tolerated or accepted as a legitimate government. Saddam's regime has brought devastation and oppression to its people and has contributed to terrorism, instability, and unrest within the region.

The U.S. policy for the War on Terrorism must continue to deal with those governments that harbor and provide support to terrorist organizations. Osama bin Laden cannot be allowed to persuade the world of Islam to accept his views or his leadership and hide behind beliefs that were common in the 17th century. If Al Qaeda and related groups clash with other nations, destabilization within the Middle East may occur. U.S. policy must remove terrorist organizations

and activities, in cooperation with those Middle Eastern nations who are most impacted by their presence, especially those nations for whom this has been a fruitless effort in the past.

Religion is a very powerful force. Middle Eastern nations must continue to practice their beliefs, but they must also be able to integrate those beliefs into the 21st century, in order to provide for the political and economic well being of their nation and people. Continued efforts to bring Middle Eastern nations into the 21st century must start from within Islamic governments and be executed by the will of the people, not by Western influence or demands.

The U.S. must also recognize the differences that exist within the Middle East and make efforts to honor those differences, even if it means compromising some of our democratic values. The Middle East has deep religious, ethnic, and cultural heritage, which has governed these nations for centuries, far outdating those of Western nations. Therefore, it is in the best interest of Western nations, particularly the U.S., to leverage those differences and make concessions to a religion and a culture that are significantly different from those of the United States and Western powers.

WORD COUNT = 8686

## ENDNOTES

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