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Middle East
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The idea of "the Middle East" is an American invention. US Navy admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840–1914) coined the term in a 1902 article arguing for British domination of the Persian Gulf in order to secure the land and sea routes to "India and the Farther East." The region and peoples subsumed by the term, then as now, was indeterminate and contingent on imperial interests (Khalil 2014). US relations with the Middle East have been shaped by ever-increasing American interventionism in, and Orientalism about, the region. These interventions were first defined in civilizational, religious, and missionary terms; then secularized in the language of humanitarianism, development, oil extraction, and Cold War strategy; and culminated in outright invasion and occupation of key Middle Eastern states and the open-ended "war on terror."

Islamic Despotism, American Benevolence

American representations of "Muslim despotism," "Islamic fanaticism," and a stagnant "Orient" have provided foils from which to define American identity from the late eighteenth century to the present. Already in *Common Sense* (1776), Thomas Paine (1737–1809) contrasted republican government with "popery" and the "superstitious tale" of "Mahomet" (Kidd 2009; Marr 2006). Among the most significant challenges faced by the newly founded United States were the so-called Barbary Wars. Encouraged by the British, French, and Dutch empires, who paid North African principalities to attack their weaker competitors in the Mediterranean, North African pirates challenged American shipping in the Mediterranean from 1785 until the United States

defeated Tripoli in 1815. This extended confrontation produced an American fascination with Islam and its alleged despotism, evidenced by the proliferation of lurid captivity narratives and anti-Islamic polemics. "Holy Land" travel narratives were also important in forming a distinctive tradition of American Orientalism.

Missionary Movements

The most lasting contributions of nineteenth-century America's Middle Eastern encounter were the Protestant missionary attempts to convert the inhabitants of the region. Arriving on the scene with no indigenous language skills, the American missionary community formed an influential presence encompassing schools, presses, hospitals, churches, commerce, and diplomacy. As William Appleman Williams reminds readers, "Americans founded schools in the Eastern Mediterranean before they did in Montana" (1958, 1). These institutions, especially Robert College in Istanbul (now Boğaziçi University), the Syrian Protestant College (now the American University of Beirut), and the American University in Cairo, have played an important role in the social and cultural history of the region. Missionaries were crucial in shaping both American ideas about the Middle East and local conceptions of Americans and their purposes in the region. Estimations of their contributions range from self-serving and often ethnocentric accounts by the missionaries themselves (Jessup 2002), to the idea that the American missionary presence spurred on an Arabic intellectual revival followed by the Arab nationalist movement (Antonius 1938), to criticism of the missionaries' exceptionalist claims to benevolence and innovation (Tibawi 1966; Makdisi 2008). The classic missionary era was brought to a close by the advent of nationalism and decolonization in the Middle East (Sharkey 2008).

Arab American Circuits of Migration

In the first wave of Arab American migration, as many as two hundred thousand migrants from Ottoman Mount Lebanon—a third of its population—emigrated during the 1890–1915 period. Predominantly Christian peasants, most of these migrants sailed to the United States with hopes of satisfying their rising expectations. Early interpretations emphasized the relatively quick path "Syrians"—their prevailing designation at the time—took in becoming "assimilated" Americans. However, more recent studies have complicated this picture. Arab Americans founded a number of Arabic-language periodicals that were pivotal in forming early-twentieth-century nationalist ideologies, whether Syrian, Pan-Arab, or Lebanese. Many did not permanently settle, but returned to Mount Lebanon as a new, self-consciously "modern," middle class (Khater 2001). The Syrians that stayed encountered a new guiding principle of social order—race. Immigrants from *bilad al-sham* (present-day Lebanon, Syria, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan) often tried to prove that they were "white" and thus eligible for US citizenship (Gualtieri 2009). To do so, early Syrian Americans marshaled their economic success and Christian religion as arguments for whiteness. Later waves of Arab immigrants faced a tougher challenge maintaining social acceptance, particularly as the proportion of Muslim migrants grew, as Arab American identity was paradoxically developed and stigmatized, and as US intervention in the region increased.

Fall of the Ottoman Empire, Rise of Western Colonialism

World War I (1914–1918) took a massive toll on the civilian populations of the defeated Ottoman Empire due to wartime violence, famine, ethnic cleansing, conscription, and genocide. The empire itself shattered into a number of nation-states. American missionaries were

instrumental in producing the first American humanitarian movement for a foreign population by publicizing the genocide of Ottoman Armenians (Kieser 2010; Watenpaugh 2015). Talaat Bey (1874–1921), the Ottoman minister of interior, emphasized that the Ottomans were dealing with the Armenians as the Americans had done with its indigenous population (Grabill 1971, 63). The humanitarian campaigns during World War I effectively secularized the missionary ideal of converting the region to Protestant Christianity into an alleged civilizing mission for freedom and democracy.

American solicitude to the Armenians reached a fever pitch, only to be abandoned in the postwar settlement. Prewar British and French imperial designs on the region, embodied by the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, were confirmed by the League of Nations, which granted France "Mandatory" power over Syria and Lebanon, while Britain was given Iraq and Palestine—with the latter declared to be a Jewish national home. On every point, the postwar regime was a refutation of the professed ideals of Wilsonian self-determination and the American-led King-Crane Commission (1919), which consulted the population of Ottoman Syria as to their political future. Their findings were resoundingly clear: the majority wanted a single, independent state; democracy; an end to Zionist colonization of Palestine; and—only if absolutely necessary—an American mandate over Syria as opposed to Britain or France. The report was suppressed. Despite having no formal League of Nations mandate, American political and economic involvement in the region steadily escalated during the interwar colonial period. American financial missions to Iran backed the shah's centralization programs and consolidation of power with dollar diplomacy. Oil extraction, however, was the most enduring product of this period. The Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia claimed to

represent generosity and modernization, in contrast to the rapacious colonialism of Britain's Iraq Petroleum Company and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now British Petroleum). Instead, recent scholarship emphasizes ARAMCO's Jim Crow racial hierarchy, fierce antilabor policies, obstruction of political reform, and the numerous American (and other foreign) engineers, scientists, accountants, social scientists, and propagandists who played indispensable roles in forming the Saudi state and the hegemony of the ruling family (Citino 2010; Vitalis 2009; Jones 2010; Mitchell 2013).

Cold War: Oil, Israel, and Counterrevolution

Unlike the other major belligerents, the United States emerged from World War II (1939–1945) not only virtually unscathed, but stronger than ever. US policy after the war aimed to maintain, strengthen, and lead the capitalist world order. Despite anticolonial rhetoric, waging the Cold War required the reconstruction of Europe under American hegemony, which necessitated the continued subordination of the resource-rich Middle East. The delivery of Middle East oil to Europe was a key premise of the Marshall Plan, and US military intervention in the Third World also required the availability of Middle East oil (Painter 2009). Furthermore, the region's position at the southern rim of the Soviet Union compelled the United States to attempt to construct pro-Western military alliances in the 1950s. At the end of World War II, the United States appeared poised to achieve these objectives, as Arab esteem for the United States was high, the British and French were despised, and the Soviet Union's appeal limited.

The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 was the decisive turning point in both modern Arab history and Arab American relations. The Israelis expelled nearly eight hundred thousand Palestinians, and razed over four hundred villages in what a range of historians now agree was

ethnic cleansing (Khalidi 1988, 1992; Pappé 2006; Morris 2004). Both the United States and the Soviet Union quickly recognized the new state of Israel. American policy makers and missionaries on the ground were well aware of Zionist military superiority over the Arabs, as well as the paramount role of violence in imposing a Jewish state in a land whose clear majority had consisted of Arab Muslims and Christians. But US policy was also shaped by decades of Zionist activism in the United States, as well as liberal sympathy for Europe's Jews in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide (Christison 1999; Davidson 2001; Mart 2006). As the Israeli military began to emerge as the clear victors in the 1948 war, US planners were encouraged to incorporate Israeli power into the regional strategy of securing oil and military alliances while denying them to the Soviet Union (Gendzier 2015).

American support for Israel galvanized the antagonistic relationship between the United States and Arabs. Arab nationalist agitation targeted the neocolonial regimes they held culpable in the *nakba* (disaster) of 1948, as well as in the obstruction of modern socioeconomic development and political liberty: Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and Lebanon experienced major revolutions, attempted insurrections, or civil wars within a decade of 1948. The most significant of these upheavals was the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 in which nationalist military officers overthrew the pro-British Egyptian monarchy. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's (1918–1970) nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 prompted a joint Israeli, British, and French invasion of Egypt, which an embarrassed Dwight Eisenhower (1890–1969) administration strongly repudiated. Nasser's success in pushing through nationalization of a strategic resource catapulted him to Pan-Arab and global anti-imperialist leadership.

The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957 sought to reinforce US backing of pro-US Arab governments and to intimidate those seeking a pro-Soviet, or even neutralist, path (Yaqub 2004). By mid-1958, the attempt to contain Arab nationalism backfired: Egypt and Syria united to form the United Arab Republic; the pro-British Iraqi monarchy was overthrown by nationalist military officers; and Lebanon broke out in its first civil war. In response, the United States sent fifteen thousand marines to Lebanon, while the British sent troops in support of the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan (Gendzier 2006; Louis and Owen 2002).

US concerns about the destabilizing effect of the Palestinian refugee crisis and Arab nationalist agitation waned over the course of the 1960s to 1980s, as Arab nationalism was defeated as a viable alternative by American containment policy, Israeli military power, and the strength of Arab conservatism. US support for the Israeli victories in 1967, 1973, and 1982 reaped dividends, as Soviet allies were consistently defeated and American allies bolstered. From the mid-1970s, Americans have overseen a "peace process" between the Arabs and Israel that has consistently favored Israel (Yaqub 2008). For both liberal and conservative Americans, Israel appeared to fight the Cold War and, later, the war against terrorism more effectively than the United States itself (McAlister 2005). Scholars dispute the nature of the US-Israeli relationship as to whether it is driven by a powerful lobby that sometimes distorts American "national interests" (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007) or by the imperatives of a broader strategy (Chomsky 2006; Plitnick and Toensing 2007).

Islam as the Solution

Islamists exploited the massive legitimacy crisis facing the Arab governments for their stagnant economies, authoritarianism, and continuous military defeats. This process was aided directly and indirectly by the United States. In the 1950s, Eisenhower promoted Saudi Arabia and pro-Western Islamic movements as counterweights to the secular nationalism and communism then in ascendancy (Jacobs 2011). In Iran, CIA agents helped to depose the democratically elected, secular prime minister Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882–1967) after he nationalized Iranian oil in 1951 (Abrahamian 2013). The coup reconstituted the shah's monarchy, which was overthrown by a popular revolution in 1979 that gave rise to the Islamic Republic.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which sought to shore up a brittle domestic communist regime, US, Saudi, and Pakistani intelligence assembled jihadists from around the world to fight the Soviets and communism in Afghanistan. This support for the *mujahideen*, including Osama bin Laden (1957–2011), eventually produced the Taliban and al-Qaeda. US support for militant Sunni jihadism began to boomerang in the 1990s, leading to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (Mamdani 2005; Atwan 2006; Cockburn 2015).

Pax Americana and the Wars on Terror

The fall of the USSR in 1991 did not end American ambition to be the final arbiter of world politics. In fact, US intervention in the Middle East only increased at the turn of the twenty-first century. Iraqi president Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait provided an opportunity to demonstrate the power of the United States in the immediate post–Cold War era. The United

States invaded Iraq in Operation Desert Storm in January 1991, quickly repelling Hussein's invasion and defeating his military. The US administration opted to not attempt regime change due to the likelihood of indefinite US occupation. Instead, the United States pushed the United Nations to impose its harshest sanctions regime, estimated to have resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of children (Gordon 2010). Broad Arab official (but certainly not popular) support for the Gulf War announced a new era of American hegemony.

The September 11, 2001, attacks escalated US intervention into the "global war on terror." The US administration of George W. Bush invaded and occupied Afghanistan and Iraq in response. The war on terror legitimized an extensive global surveillance apparatus, torture, assassinations, secret prisons, rendition, and drone strikes that have killed hundreds of civilians. As during the Cold War, undemocratic Arab governments were key partners in this campaign. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 shattered not only Saddam Hussein's grip on power, but the entire Iraqi state. This sent Iraqi society into a protracted spiral of civil war under occupation, forced displacement, sectarianism, separatism, and foreign intervention. These conditions facilitated the rise of the Islamic State organization, which controlled significant territory in Iraq and Syria by mid-2015. Afghanistan, too, remained at war. The Arab uprisings of 2011, which demanded comprehensive yet largely undefined changes to the US-dominated regional order, have renewed US commitment to the regimes in Egypt, Israel, and the Gulf, and have provoked further interventions in the protracted conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.

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