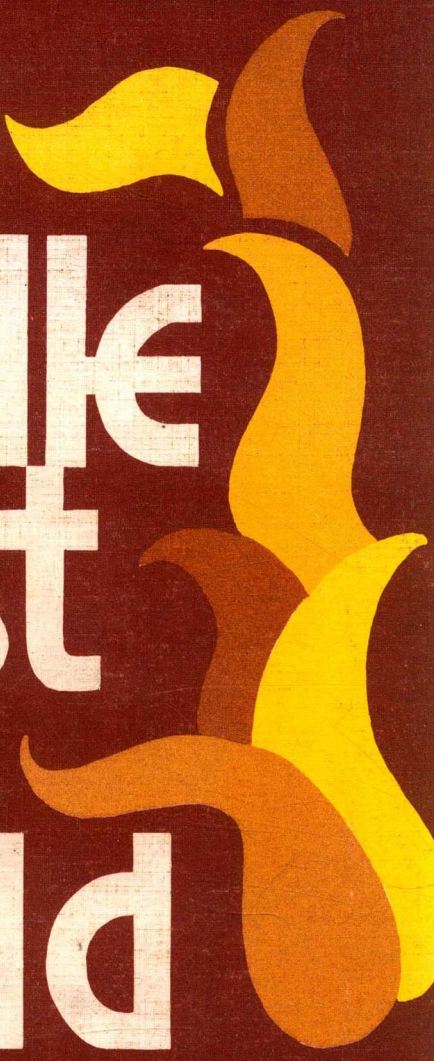


# the Middle East in World Politics

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A STUDY IN CONTEMPORARY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TAREQ Y. ISMAEL

# The Middle East in World Politics

*A Study in Contemporary  
International Relations*



TAREQ Y. ISMAEL

With Contributions  
from

NASEER H. ARURI  
P. EDWARD HALEY  
NATALIE K. HEVENER  
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## Preface

The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War again focussed world attention on the Middle East. Moreover, the war drew in big-power involvement more decisively than any of the past three Arab-Israeli conflicts in the last quarter century, threatening the delicate American-Soviet *détente* and in the words of President Nixon representing "the most difficult crisis we have had since the Cuban confrontation of 1962." While the war clearly identified America as Israel's patron and the Soviet Union as the Arab ally—facts long familiar in the international relations of the area—it also demonstrated how little control either big power has over its Middle East protégés.

The war, in fact, highlighted the importance of the Middle East in international affairs: the area is a focal point of international relations; it is an area that emanates international issues, not an area where they are merely played out. As a bridge between Asia, Africa, and Europe, as the oil-producing center of the world, as a battlefield of opposing nationalisms, as a major area of big-power competition, the Middle East plays a major role in the international system.

Yet, there is no area that is more misunderstood, particularly by the North American public, than the Middle East. North Americans view the Middle East with more myth and emotion than they do any other area of the world. They have little understanding of the forceful events occurring in the area, even as these events threaten to draw them into war. But they do have strong feelings about what is going on in the area. Thus, rather than being apathetic toward the Middle East, North Americans view the area with irrationality—a much more dangerous attitude insofar as foreign policies are concerned.

This book has been prepared for all thoughtful students of international affairs and Middle East studies who seek an objective analysis of the role of the Middle East in world affairs. Whether they be potential scholars in the field, government officials concerned with the Middle East, businessmen with interests in the area, or merely concerned observers who seek to know beyond the headlines, this book will be of interest to them. Because no person is totally free of biases—whether moral, social, or intellectual—the author has attempted to minimize the biases of any one individual, and thereby guarantee greater objectivity,

by having certain chapters contributed by scholars with particular expertise in the areas they treat. The reader will thus benefit from the greater knowledge, objectivity, and diversity of style that is rendered by more than one head.

The first chapter provides an overview of the history of Middle East international relations, identifying the important developments that affect the area's contemporary international affairs. The next seven chapters deal with contemporary Middle Eastern relations to various centers of power in the international system. The emphasis in these chapters has been placed upon analysis rather than survey. Chapter Nine examines domestic influences on Middle East foreign policies to identify persistent domestic forces bearing on foreign relations and patterned foreign policy trends that establish an internal coherence within the region. Chapter Ten examines the most recent and dramatic development in Middle East international relations; the introduction of oil as a foreign-policy tool. And Chapter Eleven is a more specialized chapter addressed specifically to the student of international affairs and/or Middle East studies to introduce him to systems concepts to define the Middle East and establish its analytical basis.

I wish to thank the contributors, whose participation in this project was invaluable. I also wish to acknowledge my appreciation to The University of Calgary for providing research funds for this work to help defray some of the clerical expenses.

Baghdad, Iraq  
Fall 1973

Tareq Y. Ismael

# The Middle East in World Politics





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HARRY N. HOWARD

## Historical Backgrounds

### THE GREAT POWERS AND THE MIDDLE EAST

It has been well and repeatedly observed that the Middle East has been a center of world politics and attention—of international relations—for many centuries, thanks to its location at the intercontinental crossroads of Eurasia and Africa, to the fact that it is a center of land, sea, and now air communications, an area out from which important civilizing influences have radiated over large parts of the globe, and to the fact that the area has resources important to the world, especially oil. It has been argued that the Middle East never quite possessed the significance which former generations assigned to it and that, in any event, it no longer possesses any geographical significance in an age of missiles and instantaneous communication. It is our contention, to the contrary, that the significance of the area cannot be ignored in today's troubled world, more especially with the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, showing an intense interest in its development and destiny within the context of current world politics. This seemed well demonstrated during the fall of 1973, when the Arab-Israel, or Palestine, conflict erupted into open warfare once more.

What's past is prologue, if not always causative in character, and it may be useful, however briefly, to look backward a few centuries for a cursory glance at developments, particularly at the nodal points in the history of international relations concerning the Middle East. One need not indulge in a long disquisition relative to the rise and fall of great kingdoms and empires or the legacies of the past in Greece and Rome, Byzantium, the Arabs, or the Crusades, or even the rise, expansion and decline of the Ottoman Empire, although the reader would do well to bear them in mind as background, as he would the essential facts concerning the great cultural contributions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. For our purposes it would appear sufficient to begin with the eighteenth century and to proceed from that period to the present, for

rather obvious reasons. The eighteenth century was the era of the Enlightenment, of the French Revolution, and the beginnings of the Napoleonic Empire, which, with its doctrines of liberty, equality, and fraternity (nationalism), had a profound impact on the Middle East. It was an era of the rediscovery of Europe on the part of the Middle East and, in a way, of the rediscovery of the Middle East on the part of Europe. It was in this period, too, that, fundamentally, the so-called Eastern Question, the problem of the succession of the declining Ottoman Empire, really began, with the Treaties of Karlowitz (1699) and Kuchuk Kainarji (1774) clearly marking the problem—hence our concentration on the period since that time.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and extending down to the outbreak of World War I in 1914, the major powers interested in the Middle East were France, Great Britain, the Habsburg Empire (Austria-Hungary after 1867), Imperial Russia, and Imperial Germany. As we shall see, even the United States of America developed commercial and cultural, if not enduring politico-strategic, interests, an oft-neglected development reserved for separate treatment. France, even before it became a national entity in the modern sense of the term, had long established commercial and cultural interests in the Middle East (Lebanon and Syria) dating from the Crusades and, under Francis I, signed a famous treaty of amity and commerce (1535) with Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent as an offset to the Holy Roman Empire of Charles V. This treaty enshrined capitulatory or extraterritorial rights and became a model for the rights of other states with developing interests in the Ottoman Empire. (These rights were conceded to Great Britain in 1579, Austria in 1615, the Netherlands in 1680, Sweden in 1737, Sicily in 1740, Denmark in 1746, Prussia in 1761, Spain in 1782, Russia in 1783, Sardinia in 1823, and the United States in 1830, Belgium in 1838, the Hanseatic Cities in 1839, Portugal in 1843, Greece in 1855, Brazil in 1858, and Bavaria in 1870.) For a relatively brief period at the end of the eighteenth century, France may be considered the dominant external influence in the Middle East, through North Africa, into Egypt and Syria, and even at Constantinople. In certain areas, especially Egypt and Syria, its influence remained a very strong force, with commercial and cultural associations, on which political pretensions were based, predominant. France came into possession of Algeria in 1830 and established protectorates in Tunisia (1881) and Morocco (1904), and French *colons* came to dominant positions not only in the commercial and economic life but in the politics of North Africa. After World War I, moreover, France assumed the mandates in Syria and Lebanon. As noted above, the legacy of the French Revolu-

tion, especially in the form of nationalism, was particularly strong; in the end, centering in Cairo and Alexandria, Beirut and Damascus, and Constantinople, as well as in the Balkan Peninsula, it inaugurated a force which was to strike at the edifice of the Ottoman Empire, shatter it to its foundations, and not only free Greece and the Balkan Slav states, but liberate the Arabs and Turks as well, at the end of World War I.

With the defeat of Napoleon (1799) after his ill-fated invasion of Egypt, Great Britain occupied a dominant position in the Ottoman Empire, and it maintained that position—Britain's moment in the Middle East—substantially until after World War II. Essentially, it has been observed with a certain justice, Great Britain was not really interested in the Middle East as such, but in the maintenance of British routes to India, the crown jewel of the British Empire. British policy sought preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, primarily against Imperial Russia. As such, like other powers, it sought to hold Russia at the Turkish Straits and along the Northern Tier of the Middle East. With the advent of Imperial Germany on the Middle Eastern stage, especially in the 1890s, maintenance of the Ottoman Empire as a policy was seriously questioned, and British policy centered on the maintenance of the approaches to the Straits and, after the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), purchase of shares in the Suez Canal Company (1875) and domination over Egypt. Like France, Great Britain was ready to strike bargains when World War I broke out in 1914. After the end of the war, Great Britain clearly dominated the Middle Eastern scene, with mandates in Palestine and Iraq, a protectorate over Egypt, a crown colony in Cyprus, and an assured position in the area of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula.

Austria-Hungary was primarily interested in the Balkan region of the Ottoman Empire in the maintenance of its position in that strategic region and in the prevention of Russian domination. But it was also interested in the wider reaches of the Ottoman Empire as well. Imperial Germany, the senior partner in the Dual Alliance (1879) and Triple Alliance (1882), which came into being only in 1871, became especially interested in the Ottoman Empire with the advent of William II (1888–1918) to the throne. William II was concerned with both economic and political penetration of the empire, which he visited in 1897 (Constantinople and Jerusalem). The basic interest was illustrated in the well-known Baghdad Railway Agreement of 1903. The German company had obtained a concession for the Konia-Basra section in January 1902 and had sought Anglo-French cooperation in the financial arrangements. But, while the British government appeared well-disposed,

the bankers were scared off by a press campaign, and both France and Great Britain ultimately rejected association in the project. Imperial Russia, which was not a party at all, was irreconcilably opposed to the entire project for rather obvious reasons. As the outbreak of World War I approached, Germany appeared to be moving toward a policy of double insurance in the Ottoman Empire, and bargains centering around the network of the Baghdad Railway were struck with Great Britain and France on the eve of the conflict in 1914. If the integrity of the Ottoman Empire were maintained, Germany might well dominate it, despite all the complicated problems involved in such an enterprise. If it were partitioned, the Baghdad enterprise might offer rich politico-economic rewards in the Middle East. The sending of the military mission of General Liman von Sanders (1913–14) to Constantinople offered another prospect for possible control and appeared as a direct threat to vital Russian interests at Constantinople and the Turkish Straits.

During the long history of the Ottoman Empire, Russo-Ottoman relations were often marked by war and hostility, and the fact that some thirteen conflicts had been fought since the seventeenth century left an enduring impress on the relationship. Leaving aside the Slavophile dream of the conquest of Constantinople (Tsargrad), which provided a certain motivation to Imperial Russian secular policy, the Russian Empire appears to have pursued two basic aims relative to the Ottoman Empire: (1) the achievement of a dominant position in the Ottoman Empire through close alliance which would establish a secure and unsailable Russian position or, failing that, the partition of the Ottoman Empire and the acquisition of the necessary strategic positions for the protection of Russian national and imperial interests; and (2) the attainment of a secure commercial and naval passage to and from the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea through the Turkish Straits, while barring that route to the naval forces of nonriparian powers, primarily Great Britain and France, but also Germany in the later years. The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji, July 10/21, 1774, brought Russia permanently to the Black Sea, which was no longer an Ottoman lake, and secured commercial passage. The Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi, July 8, 1833, which has an important bearing on Soviet policy relative to Turkey to this day, is one of the landmarks in Russian policy in the nineteenth century even though it endured for only six years, until 1839. Imperial Russia drove through the Balkans during the Russo-Ottoman conflict of 1877–78, and in the “secret agreements” of 1915 it sought, unsuccessfully, fulfilment of its ambitions relative to Constantinople and the Turkish Straits.



There was a very significant development of Russian commerce through the Straits, especially in the grain trade, which was particularly important in the Russian balance in international trade, during the nineteenth century. During the decade 1830–40, there was a very rapid growth and development in the economy of southern Russia, and the port of Odessa became particularly important in Russian export trade, remaining so to this day. By 1880, for example, it was estimated that some 50 percent of the total Russian export commerce went out of the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits and no less than 80 percent of the grain trade. When the Ottoman government closed the Straits for some six weeks (April–May 1912) during the Italo-Ottoman War, Russian merchants suffered the loss of millions of rubles, a situation which led Russian statesmen to seek solution of the Straits problem through control of the region of the Straits. The Russian Political Conference, composed of unofficial representatives at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, estimated that, by 1914, 40 percent of the total Russian exports, 54 percent of the maritime exports, 74 percent of the cereals, 88 percent of the petroleum, 93 percent of the manganese, and 61 percent of the iron were exported via the Black Sea through the Straits to the outside world. It may be added that, at the close of the nineteenth and the opening of the twentieth century, the Russian government also gave evidence of its interest in the Suez Canal and the right of naval passage during the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905).

#### WORLD WAR I AND ITS AFTERMATH

World War I opened up a new era in the Middle East. For one thing, Imperial Germany and Austria-Hungary went down in defeat in and were eliminated from the Middle East, while Imperial Russia underwent one of the world's great revolutions. The Ottoman Empire, which entered the war on October 28–29, 1914, on the basis of the German-Ottoman alliance of August 2, 1914, ultimately was partitioned along the lines sketched out in the secret inter-Allied agreements of 1915–17. Great Britain and France pressed their claims at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Jews set forth their claims to Palestine, and the Armenians and Kurds to independent states and the Arabs to independence and unity. President Woodrow Wilson sought to base a peaceful settlement in the Middle East on the foundations of self-determination, with a new mandate system under the League of Nations, oriented toward full independence. He despatched to the Middle East, during May–August 1919, the King-Crane Commission, which opposed a