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PS 1351

March 13, 2017

### Colonial and Post-Colonial Development in Egypt, Iran, and Syria

Western colonialism throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century is undoubtedly one of the most prominent cornerstones in modern Middle Eastern politics—with colonialism and Western economic dependence on the region putting international players at the forefront of directing the relations among states as well as directing domestic relationships within states. That said, as Western colonial powers became more dependent on the economic and political aspects of the Middle East, these powers began shaping the region by tying their own interests with those of the various territories in the region. Thus, in shaping the political direction of these states, their influence culminated into both the domestic underlay of society as well as regional relationships throughout the twentieth century and leading into the modern era.

Egypt—a country that has long been one of the West's primary Middle Eastern interests—is a prime example of a country whose development can be traced, partially, to the influence of foreign powers. The introduction of colonial powers to what was then territory of the Ottoman Empire saw the rise of Muhammad Ali as an important moment in Egyptian history. Ali used the presence of Western powers to develop a base for the rise of Egyptian nationalism, modernize a country with very little political awareness, and create an Egyptian identity to oppose the presence of these colonial powers (Long, 2007, p. 405). By stressing education, improving and solidifying relations with mosques as anti-colonial institutions, and creating a national army that

would become the vanguard for nationalism in the years to come, he was able to put Egypt on a track to modernity under the guise of a European oriented reform as well as create a national identity that would, in later years, become both the vehicle of growing nationalism and the framework of mass mobilization of society.

Thus, the anti-colonial motivations behind Ali's modernization projects reverberated both along the international level as well as the state. As the effects of colonialism—among which included heavy taxation and financial oversight by British and French economic interests—stimulated political awareness among the populace and stimulated a growing sense of nationalism in the face of British political control, one can see the effects culminate in what can be called an uprising from the apex of society. In 1882, the citizens of Alexandria spearheaded an uprising to protest the removal of Muhammad Ali's successor, Ismail Pasha, which had been carried out under the directive of Great Britain to the Ottoman Sultan—a clear violation of Egyptian sovereignty (Long, 2007, p. 406). As there was relatively little political awareness at this point, the uprising was led by landowners, students, the military, and mosques—all of which were direct results in Ali's domestic investment in these sectors of society. Be as it may, this uprising, however well it shows the effects of growing political efficacy in the increasingly aware population, was quickly dismantled and led to direct military rule in Egypt by the British—a clear lack of legitimacy in the eyes of Egyptian citizens and a conduit for increasing political awareness among the populace.

A similar situation can be seen in Iran. The discovery of oil in 1908 and the subsequent creation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1909 led to several decades of growing anti-colonial resentment as Great Britain attempted to ensure oil security in the country by interfering

with the legitimate authority of the Iranian government (Kinzer, 2003, p. 49). As the British Empire reaped the profits from Iranian oil, however, laborers were forced into primitive, unsanitary living conditions that culminated into rioting in 1946. In an attempt to both repress opposition and remind Iranian laborers of their power, British warships were brought in view of oil extraction sites to resolve both the ongoing crisis as well as discourage future dissent (Kinzer, 2003, p. 50-52). Not unlike the Egyptian response to the repression of their own uprising and the subsequent military rule, this hostile reaction from British colonial powers only served as a conduit for growing dissent among the population. Leading into the 1940's, domestic political activity began to flourish in opposition to the neocolonial presence of foreign oil companies in the country; nationalist, leftist, and Islamic forces agitated increasingly against British influences in Iran. "In 1949, several moderate nationalist parties and assorted individuals created an umbrella organization called the National Front to promote nationalization of the oil industry. Most National Front leaders also wanted to establish democracy in Iran, which entailed wresting power from the pro-British traditional upper class and weakening the monarchy (Long, 2007, p. 49)." The National Front was led by a well renowned politician named Mohammad Mosaddeq, who succeeded in the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry with massive support from the Iranian population, using the normative symbol of Iranian identity to establish a nationalist movement against British intervention. The British government, however, considered this theft of British property and imposed a crushing embargo on the Iranian economy as well as began covert operations to undermine Mosaddeq's government and nationalist movement. With the election of Dwight Eisenhower in 1952, help came in the form of the United States, which worried about the influence of the communist Tudeh party and possibility of Iran aligning with

the Soviet bloc. By August 1953, a coup d'état was successfully undertaken by the joint efforts of Great Britain and the United States (Long, 2007, p. 49). Mosaddeq, a leader who had retained his legitimacy throughout the continuous smear campaigns funded and organized by non-Iranian powers, was replaced with a successor lenient and subservient to Western powers. As such, much of legitimacy of the Iranian government was dismantled in the eyes of the Iranian people and caused the Iranian government to shift to a more dictatorial form in which coercion and force acted as the government's primary control systems.

In Syria, much like Egypt and Iran, the introduction of international influence shaped the country both regionally and on a state level for decades to come. With the decline of Ottoman power and the increasing influence of Western colonial powers, land that for centuries had been deemed Greater Syria under the Ottoman Empire was divided in 1920 by a European agreement in which Syria, including Lebanon, would become a French mandate, while the British were assigned Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine as mandates (Long, 2007, p. 265). "With the opposition of the majority Sunni Muslim population in Syria to French rule, mandatory authorities adopted a policy of "divide and rule" tactics... In this sense the French could utilize the fissiparous ethnic and religious nature of Syria against itself in order to prevent any coherent opposition from forming (Long, 2007, p. 266)." In this way, France created a fractured society whose identity, which had been aligned with the idea of a Greater Syria before European intervention, was split into ethnic and religious fissures as well as created the growing perspective of French rule as an oppressive force to both society and culture—with the same resentment seen in both Egypt and Iran against colonial powers spurring political awareness.

With awareness in colonized states stemming from anti-colonial resentment and growing nationalism throughout the Middle East, citizens of these countries saw very low political efficacy, as their government's often remained in the stronghold of Western influence. Thus, as these countries began gaining independence in the decade after World War II, the previous multipolar system that had dominated colonization in the Middle East essentially ceased to exist, changing the way international powers interacted within the Middle East. "[T]he entire concept of Great Powers was completely obliterated by the emergence of the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, each declaring a vital interest in the Middle East... within the next two years Iraq, Libya, and Syria had joined Egypt as Soviet clients. (Wright, 2014, p. 175)." As there were only two powers that had any significant power within the Middle East, and many Arab countries aligned within the Soviet orbit, Israel turned to the United States as an ally in the increasingly hostile environment growing throughout the region.

In Egypt, President Gamal Abdel Nasser stood at the helm of an Arab nationalist movement, and a unified, Arab front was created against the state of Israel. Thus, a stagnant proxy warfare was introduced, with Egypt and Syria as the main adversaries against Israel and the superpowers wary of the introduction of regional armed conflict due to how it would reverberate on the international scale. This, however, did not eliminate regional hostility—culminating in the 1967 Six Day War, which was a crushing defeat for Arab powers and saw the rise of political Islam in the state setting. "Radical Islam blamed the crushing defeat on the moral decay of modern, secular Arab society... The only remedy was to embrace the pure Islam embodied in the times of the Prophet, which meant a return to Islamic law, jihad... Other Muslims decried the corruption and backwardness of Arab governments, all of them—excepting

the fractured Lebanon—in the hands of kings, sheikhs, sultans, generals, dictators, and presidents-for-life, where the voices of democracy and modernism were effectively silenced (Wright, 2014, p. 187).” As the ideas of politicized Islam began to spread throughout the region, many countries saw an identity shift as people aligned themselves on a more religious basis than nationalist.

In Nasser’s rise to power in 1952, for example, he attempted to integrate his own nationalist based government with the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, the epitome of politicized Islam in the country. However, the Brothers and Nasser’s government had practically nothing in common—where Nasser’s dream was to the unite the Arabs in a nationalist front against Western interference and the state of Israel, the Brothers wanted to recreate a caliphate, an idea that had been dormant since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (Wright, 2014, p. 253). In later years, even as secular, democratically leaning groups were eviscerated under the reign of Hosni Mubarak, the Muslim Brotherhood was never able to be completely suppressed and retained popular support throughout the country—and thus, the Brotherhood had a head start in directing the country in the direction of political Islam as the country emerged from the Mubarak period (Harrison, 2013b).

In Iran, the undermining of legitimacy of the Iranian government paved the way for anti-Western, radical sentiment. With Mosaddeq overthrown at the cusp of the acceleration of political awareness in society, the Shah could not compete with the influence Mosaddeq had possessed due to lack of legitimacy. With a void in legitimate leadership in the country, mosques filled this void under the leadership of the Grand Ayatollah. As the decades progressed, an identity shift in Iranian society moved from Mosaddeq’s nationalist, democratically leaning

approach to that of a more radical, political Islam—with the Ayatollah as the legitimate leader in opposition the Shah. Throughout 1979, decades after the removal of Mosaddeq, radical Islamists subverted the U.S. backed provisional government after the ousting of Mohammad Reza Shah and, in a referendum in late March, gained official legitimacy for a new radical Islamist government under the leadership Ayatollah Khomeini with resounding support from the populace for an Islamic regime that continues to exist in today's Iran (Long, 2007, p. 55).

In Syria, looking back to the tactic of French colonists to fracture the territory based on ethnic and religious identity, one can argue the state never fully recovered from this structurally fractured model. Shortly after the state gained independence, the Ba'th party entered the spotlight of Syrian politics as an ardently nationalistic group operating under the ideas of neutralist and largely anti-West foreign policy (Long, 2007, p. 270). Under the reign of Hafiz Al Assad and with emergence of Islamic Revolution in Iran, Syria found ally in Ayatollah Khomeini's anti-Israel, anti-United States regime (Long, 2007, p. 282). This anti-Israel, anti-American sentiment continued in the country's strategic regional positions well into the reign of Hafiz Al Assad's son, Bashar Al Assad, with Syria continuing to present itself as the center of Arab resistance to American hegemony in the Middle East (Lynch, 2016, p. 106). However, the maintenance of these anti-Western sentiments ultimately backfired, with numerous international powers attempting to lure Assad away from the long held Iranian alliance—and eventually, with numerous international power supporting different factions of the Syrian population in opposition to Assad as uprisings swept the Middle East. “When protests first broke out in the southern Syrian town of Dera'a in 2011, the legitimacy of the Assad regime was in fact the core issue. As divided as the various rebel groups were on tactics, they coalesced around the view that

Assad had lost his legitimacy to govern (Harrison, 2016).” As Assad cracked down on protests, exemplifying late twentieth century views that Arab governments were unaccountable to their citizens and existed solely in illegitimate dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, opposition forces fractured into the quagmire the state is today. With Assad’s government facing organized opposition forces under the Syrian National Coalition, Kurdish forces in the north, the Islamic State of Iraq and al Sham (ISIS), the complete lack of legitimacy of the regime combined with the interests of both regional and international powers created a devastating civil war in which the relations Syria holds with Egypt and Iran became significant in the weight they hold for the prospect of peace in both the country and region, something reflective of the history of both countries.

Egypt, as the largest Arab country, is the natural counterweight to Iran, a non-Arab state whose rising regional power could be perceived as threatening to already feeble Assad government. “Iran's influence in the Arab world, and its success in playing a spoiler role through its proxies Hezbollah and Syria, was in large part due to a leadership vacuum in the Arab world. A restoration of Egyptian leadership could crowd out Iran’s influence on Arab issues and make it more difficult for Iran to play the spoiler role on Arab-Israeli issues (Harrison, 2013a).” That said, the central role created by Egyptian leaders throughout the twentieth century as heads of Arab identity politics is reflective of regional and domestic powers overshadowing that of international. Despite the alliance Iran cultivated with Syria following the Islamic Revolution as a beacon of anti-Western partnership, the role Egypt has potential to fill as a regional leader dominates that of Iran as a beacon of anti-Western powers.



Essentially, the combined roles of early colonial and neocolonial powers in the Middle East helped shape the way countries developed as states as well as how they interacted as a region. That said, however, the anti-colonial, anti-Western sentiment that was perpetuated by regimes in the post-colonial era as well as continued intervention by international powers created an environment for radicalism to spread on both a domestic and regional level. As the Arab Spring swept through the region in the years following 2011, populations were forced to confront the consequences of colonialism that for years had been dormant—despite the best efforts of domestic players, the influence of international and regional players was and is pivotal both in the past and future of Middle Eastern States.

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