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End of an era in the Middle East and North Africa: Collapse of Pan-Arab nationalism project and the subsequent rise of political Islam

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Abstract
The struggle for power between Arab, Western and other regional players has taken a major toll in the Middle East which is highlighted via the plight of the Arab region in contemporary times. Large external influence exists in the region as a consequence of the abundance of natural resources such as oil and gas and its geostrategic location. Various international interventions and Western sponsored proxy wars based on religion, ethnicity and sectarian identities have dented ethos of the Arab identity as seeds of hatred have been sowed between the people. The policies adopted by America and its allies in the MENA region have a particular course of action which more often than not create instability in the targeted region. Power vacuums are artificially created by external actors to unleash violence and bloodshed between two or more communities in a nation that legitimizes western intervention on the basis of protection of human rights which leads to imposition of Western values and extermination of the cultural history of the nation.

Keywords: Struggle, Middle East, western powers, geostrategic location, resources instability

Introduction
The plight of the Middle East in contemporary times illustrated by internal fissures and perpetual state of conflict makes the phenomena of Pan Arabism seem like a utopian concept. However contrary to the current state of the Arab World, the Pan Arab nationalist project approximately a century ago was an upcoming force to be reckoned with. Ever since the collapse of the Ottoman empire after the First World war, the phenomena of a singular Arab identity gained significant traction amongst the masses of the middle east. The Pan Arab Nationalism project refers to an umbrella movement which is inclusive of all religious, tribal ethnic identities existing in the Arab region. This movement which gave projected a unified Arab identity posed a grave threat to Western imperial interests in the region.

To counter the growing wave of Arab Nationalism, western states have sought to infect the region by sponsoring political Islam. Political Islam seeks to introduce religious orthodoxy in political, social and economic spheres of a nation. The rationale behind political Islam stems from establishing horizontal relation between man and god reflecting governance as per a unified state law based on religion. The introduction of such policies in the MENA region has made a significant dent on the Arab populations aspirations for prosperity and development. Thus, serving self interest has taken precedence over the cost of inconceivable damage in the region in terms of human cost and restricting self determination which is indicative of the current state of international politics.

Resource curse
The revelation of presence of oil in Persia (i.e. Modern day Iran) by British geologist George Reynolds in 1908 made jurisdiction over the region imperative to the Western powers. The discovery of oil has led to the region being a victim of the phenomena 'resource curse' [1], wherein the abundance of oil has led major players doing everything in their ability to limit the economic growth and development of a Pan-Arab state which would act as a major hurdle against western actors to pursue their interests in the region.

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1 Ross, Michael L. "Will Oil Drown the Arab Spring? Democracy and the Resource Curse." *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 90, no. 5, Council on Foreign Relations, 2011, pp. 2–7, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23041770

With oil replacing coal as the major energy source during the Early 20th Century, oil politics became fiercer with regulation over oil being widely considered an essential component to dominate world politics.

The Anglo-American interests in the MENA region can be categorically interpreted via rhetoric, with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously claiming ""He who controls oil will win the next World war [2]" and Henry Kissinger insisting "control food and you control people, Control oil and you control nations [3]". Consequently, since the beginning of the 20th century various policies have been implemented by global powers to divide the Arab region as means to serve their geostrategic interests in the Middle east region which are still evident in the last few decades.

Advent of oil politics in the Mena region
The fall of the Ottoman Empire after World War 1 led to the establishment of the British and French Mandates in the Arab region via the Sykes Picot Agreement of 1916, which marked the foundation stone of Western intervention in the politics of the MENA region. The region suffered from unfair and negligent partition implemented to divide the Arab community and establish artificial states. The rationale behind dissecting Arab land was to assist colonial administration and monitor transport of oil to the Near East and Far East regions respectively [4]. Subsequent to Sykes Picot, was the Balfour Declaration of 1917 by the British empire which supported the Zionist cause and promoted the establishment of a Jewish state in Mandate Palestine. British policy makers asserted that the establishment of an alien state in the Arab heartland would be of vital importance to pursue Western interests in the region even during the post colonial era.

Trajectory of the pan Arab nationalism project
The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the first world war created an identity vacuum in the Arab world. Given the wide range of tribal, ethnic and religious diversity within the population, the task at hand was complex. However, the Nahda movement under the leadership of Jurji Zaydan led to the formation of a Pan Arab nationalist project which was based on a common culture. The region encapsulated between the Maghreb and the Persian Gulf was perceived to share a common Arab identity. These were factors which led to the development of a unified Arab identity. The movement reached the peak of its influence after the second world war. The imposition of a Zionist state in the heart of the Middle East in 1948 and the Suez Canal crisis of 1956 were events which strengthened Arab solidarity. Additionally, nationalism movements in Egypt and Iraq in 1952 and 1958 respectively further boosted the Pan Arab project. At the centre of the movement was Gamal Abdel Nasser, the highly proactive leader from Egypt. The above mentioned circumstances provided a firm platform for the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958. The Republic was imperative for the growth development of the region and population as a whole.

The growth of Pan Arabism was of great concern to Western powers, therefore they backed a military coup by Jordanian, Syrian and Saudi entities which brought an end to the UAR movement. In the subsequent aftermath of the collapse of UAR, the term Syrian Arab Republic was introduced which was a catastrophe for the Kurdish aspirations for equal recognition in a highly diverse region. Therefore, the Kurdish region have ever since not been in compliance with a Pan Arab project. To reinvigorate Arab nationalism in the region, the Union for Arab Republics was established in 1970. However, the movement failed to make a significant impact. Post the agreement of Camp David between Egypt and Israel various multilateral regional organizations such as GCC and the Arab Maghreb Union were formed in the Middle East region but none similar to the influence of the United Arab Republic.

Potential of a secular Arab state
The abundance of natural resources such as oil and energy in the Middle East region, the geographical location and the large Arab population are pillars which provide a robust foundation for an influential Arab state. A cohesive Arab identity was the glue which could have held all these pillars in unison to create a dominant Arab nation in world politics. The Pan Arab Nationalist project reflected this secular movement based on protecting the Arab identity. The movement was based on the vertical theological relation between man and god which encouraged freedom of choice amongst the masses. It mirrored the common culture of the Arab population which harboured political and social unity. The Pan Arabism project was inclusive of all the diverse identities in the Middle East region which was in stark contrast to the Kurdish and Islamic movements. This cohesive nature of the movement threatened western imperialist forces the most.

The political capabilities of a unified Arab state were illustrated post the October Liberation War of 1973. As a counter to the western support to Zionist forces, the Arab states made a pragmatic decision to use oil as a weapon. The policy encapsulated the potential of cohesive Arab action to re-attain occupied territories and recuperate their usurped rights. The consequences of the 1973 Arab Israel War were disastrous for Western powers as it highlighted the military and political strength of a single Arab entity. In light of the economic and military cost suffered by European powers, the Arab-Euro dialogue was established to conclude the war which was a huge setback for American interests. America responded by establishing the International Energy Agency in 1974 which coerced European powers to notify Washington prior to establishing such forms of communication in the future. The establishment of Israel in the heart of Middle East, promoting Political Islam and the adoption of Shock doctrine were western policies implemented in the Middle East region to deter the growth of Pan Arab Nationalism.

Colonial divisions
Political Islam was the form of governance applied by the Ottoman Empire during their rule. However, after their collapse, the Arab Levant was administrated by the French and British Empire as per the Sykes Picot Agreement of 1916 which was rejected by the Arab population. This began the phase of Divide and rule as the region was

[2] Reguer, Sara. "Persian Oil and the First Lord: A Chapter in the Career of Winston Churchill." *Military Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 3, 1982, pp. 134–38,https://doi.org/10.2307/1987894

[3] Stork, Joe. "Oil and the International Crisis." *MERIP Reports*, no. 32, Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP), 1974, pp. 3–34, https://doi.org/10.2307/3011736.

[4] Mejcher, Helmut. "Oil and British Policy towards Mesopotamia, 1914-1918." *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 8, no. 3, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1972, pp. 377–91, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4282437.

divided among ethnic, religious and cultural identities. The Arab Levant was dissected into Transjordan, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The modus operandi behind the colonial policy of Divide and Rule was to prevent the region from forming a cohesive Arab identity. Moreover, the concept of Political Islam was propagated during the colonial era as the Muslim Brotherhood Movement was created in 1928 to counter Pan Arab nationalism. The divisions established by the Imperialist powers led to different nations within the Arab Levant gain sovereignty after the withdrawal of the British and French empires. These newly formed autonomous nations went a series of interstate conflict during the cold war against Israel and its western allies. The Arab countries were supported by the Soviet Union and the conflicts at the time set the ball rolling in a certain direction in the Middle East which was instrumental in shaping the current state of affairs in the region.

The Israeli dagger
The first major policy implemented towards distorting a cohesive Arab identity was thrusting a Jewish nation in the Middle East. The formation of a Jewish state came under controversial circumstances as the British during their occupation of the region passed the Balfour Declaration which supported the cause of Zionism as first stated by Theodore Herzl. The British crown publically stated their conformity with the establishment of Israel in the former UN established Mandate Palestine. The rights of the Palestinians were usurped which led to a mass exodus to neighbouring countries termed as Al Nakba which created a refugee crisis in the Middle East. The modus operand behind enforcing Israel was to exterminate the Arab lineage of the population of Palestine.

The Zionist strategy of countering their Arab enemy primarily focussed on inciting hatred amongst the nations and states in the Arab mainland. The Zionists along with their western allies intended to establish a "Druze country in the Sahara region, A Shiite state that includes a part of Lebanon, An Alawite state in Latakia up till Turkish borders, A Kurdish state in northern Iraq, an autonomous state for the Copts [5]." The Jewish objective of creating sectarian, ethnic and tribal fissures attributed to the failure of Arab states to remain cohesive in their conflict against Israel and formulate a joint action. As mentioned earlier after, regional bodies such as GCC, Arab Maghreb Union were formed after the dissolution of the United Arab Republic in 1961 however these organizations lacked the influence and volume of Arab representation as the UAR. Furthermore, Israel with Western support played an avid role in propagating Shia-Sunni resentment, Kurdish movement for autonomy (highly concerning for Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq) and sponsored the Civil war in Lebanon based on religious and tribal identity which caused fragmentation within the Arab identity.

Political Islam vs pan Arabism
Political Islam refers to the functioning of a sovereign state as per the teachings, values and principles of Islam. The concept has been advocated by western states as a mechanism to spread religious fundamentalism in the

Middle East region to deter social, economic and political growth of the Arab nation. Charles Habib Malik argues that Political Islam "adheres to extreme religious positions, provide ideological discourse, and will not be able to provide any real political, social or economic achievements. Being conservative, it does not have a pragmatic program in the political or economic sense [6]." The policy of introducing religious extremism sponsored by western forces is tarnishing the social fabric of the Middle East by decimating the plurality of the region. The strategy of Political Islam is an existential threat to the Middle East region highlighted by the impact of ISIS on the socio-political landscape in Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq. As mentioned earlier, the 1973 October Liberation war illustrated to the western powers the influence a cohesive Arab body can have on the region which posed a significant threat to Israel and western interests in the region. This prompted Western powers to divide the Arab unity along religious, ethnic and tribal identities. Various events unfolded in the latter half of the twentieth century in the broader Middle East region which demonstrate western strategies to divide the region on sectarian and interfaith grounds.

United States of America played a crucial role in the establishment of Taliban during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. The Taliban movement stemmed from a threat exaggeration created by Washington. The tribal population of Afghanistan were projected that Soviet occupation on their land would exterminate the existence of Islam from Afghanistan. As the puppet regime of Shah Pahlavi was removed from power during the Iranian Revolution of 1979, American control over the region was jeopardised. Washington prompted the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussain to pick up arms against the Iranian nation. The Saddam Hussain regime which was militarily and financially backed by America and invaded Iran under the pretext of Sacred Jihad. Saddam Hussain invaded Kuwait which led to an internal divide within the Arab states whether to liberate Kuwait or support Iraq in its endeavours.

Syria and other Arab states participated in the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi forces under the guarantee that an international conference would be convened to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Madrid Peace Conference was held in 1991 as promised, however the conference had an effect opposite to what was imagined. The Conference was envisioned to have a multilateral nature however America and Israel simultaneously engaged in separate bilateral talks with Jordan and the PLO which deepened fissures amongst the Arab nations. Tensions increased as inter state relations became hostile. Thus seeds of Arab feud were sown to serve western interests. Further fuel to the fire was added by Washington when it declared Iran and Iraq as axis of evil to infuse a Shia and Sunni divide in the region. The EU and the Arab nations attempted to establish the Euro-Mediterranean partnership however failed in their attempts there was an internal divide amongst the Arab states regarding the inclusion of Israel. The increasing differences amongst the Arab states was followed by the American intervention of Iraq and Israeli invasion of Lebanon and Gaza strip to adopt a new mechanism in the region termed

[5] Karanja, N.K. (2005). The Dagger of Israel. Orient Publishing House, p. 55

[6] C. Habib. (2017). *'The Changes in the Middle East and The New Phenomenon of Terrorism"* paper presented to Religion and Terrorism, Bulgaria, 16-18 May 2017. pp. 3

as shock doctrine. The goal of this policy was to inculcate Israel amongst the Middle East to serve Western interests and to sustain the inter-religious and sectarian divide created in the region.

Trauma doctrine

The 9/11 attacks on American soil changed the nature of strategies being implemented in the Middle East region. As a response to the 9/11 terrorist attack, Washington launched its War on Terror campaign in Afghanistan considered to be the hotbed for Al Qaeda terrorism, who claimed to be the perpetrators behind the gruesome act of terror. America launched an unprecedented military campaign in Afghanistan in tandem with NATO forces. This campaign became the blueprint for the Anglo American intervention in Iraq, 2003. The intervention was projected under the guise of humanitarian abuses by the Saddam Hussain regime and the possible presence of Weapons of Mass Destruction. However, the actual modus operandi behind the intervention was to install a Western political system in Iraq which would gradually replace the historical culture, beliefs and values of the Iraqi population. The strategy further aimed to sustain sectarian and ethnic dispute within the nation to reduce the probability of revolution. Further, the various local militias and extremist factions sponsored by Washington were used to further American interests. This model of intervening under humanitarian grounds was extensively abused by Anglo-American forces in the Middle East region to impose a western socio-political structure and decimate the Arab identity.

The mechanism which the Anglo-American forces implemented in Iraq is termed as Trauma Doctrine. The policy aims to target the cultural heritage of a society by coercing a foreign culture of beliefs and ideals. Naomi Klein has dissected the approach as "a military doctrine that boasts to not target the military forces of the enemy and the adversary, but rather, as its founders affirm, aims to erase the entire society by terrorizing society and uprooting its culture with the aim to cultivate and create a new culture [7]." The American action in Iraq involved using violent measures such as military action to threaten the people, burn the cultural heritage and reestablish a new western liberal Iraq by installing puppet regimes. The political vacuum in Iraq has caused an increased Al-Qaeda presence in the country advocating religious extremism in the form of terrorism. The Anglo-American actions led to a spill-over effect with violence form Iraq further spreading to different parts of the Middle East Region as extremist factions emerged across the whole region. As per the Iraqi approach, the Middle East became a victim of Trauma doctrine and the actions in Iraq became the blueprint for further intervention. A Similar approach was implemented in Yemen, Libya, Syria causing sectarian and religious divide as these countries faced the brunt of extreme violence which hampered their aspects for development. Even though the Arab Springs broke out in Northern Africa as a result of Western incitement, the final goal was to create political instability which tremble the Middle East region via instigating religious, tribal and ethnic violence amongst the Arab population.

7 Klein, N. (2007). *The Shock Doctrine*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company. pp 43

Regional instability and demise of peace

As a consequence of Western powers across different world orders along with Israel utilizing mechanisms such as Divide and Rule, Political Islam, Trauma Doctrine has led to the Middle East become a victim of constant instability. Religious, interfaith and tribal conflict has created a disjointed Arab region. The region has been plagued by the spread of extremist terrorist factions engaging in continuous violence. Various interstate proxy wars have been a dominant presence in the current state of politics in the region. These wars are sponsored by western actors pursuing their own vested interests as a result of which those opposing Western intervention are exterminated by military action under humanitarian grounds or the seeds of hatred and resentment are sowed amongst communities to create instability. The instability in the region leaves room for terrorist and extremist factions to develop. This division has resulted in constant conflict in the Middle East which has caused catastrophic Arab decline.

The loss of life and destruction of property in the region has been unsurmountable. Middle East being centric to western foreign policy has led to the rise of fundamentalist religious, ethnic and sectarian factions who have caused significant harm not only inside the region but also world peace in whole. Islamist extremism, Kurdish fundamentalist factions, mercenary groups funded by America and Israel, Militias sponsored by regional players such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar are root causes which have caused the demise of peace in the Middle East region. The above mentioned entities have been created and sustained to serve each states vested interests which has caused the state of modern middle east to achieve levels of anarchy. Further, unrest and instability has infected the security of the region as a result of which fundamental rights are constantly violated making the status quo in the region extremely catastrophic for the people of Middle East.

Conclusion

The modern Middle East remains in a perpetual state of violence as a consequence of western powers such as America and regional players such as Israel and Turkey implementing different mechanisms to influence the region. Irrespective of the strategies adopted, the Middle East has been a victim of violence and brutality. The region has been a priority for superpowers across different world orders as a consequence of its geo-strategic location and the rich presence of oil. Such factors in addition to the large numbers of the collective Arab population provide strong pillars to form an unprecedented Arab state. However, the prospects of forming an Arab nation have historically been cut at source by Anglo-American forces as the unique diversity of the region has been used against the population itself.

Seeds of resentment have been sowed on sectarian, tribal, ethnic and religious grounds to divide the people which makes them easier to control. Such divisions have led to the growth of numerous extremist factions which has caused instability in the region. The involvement of militias and terrorist groups complicates the prospect for achieving peace in the region as unlike conventional wars which are fought between armies, extremist entities target civilians and state institutions on arbitrary rationale making the task for achieving peace in the region extremely complex and the future prospects for development, gloomy.

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