

CHAPTER 14

FUTURE OF THE ARAB WORLD

“It is not in the stars to hold our destiny but in ourselves”

William Shakespeare

“He said that if Wahhab (the founder of Islamic ideology) had been alive now, he would be the first to object to people “committed blindly to his texts” and closing their minds to interpretation and jurisprudence.

“We should engage in continuous interpretation of Quranic texts,” he said. “All fatwas should be based on the time, place and mindset in which they are issued.”

Mohammed bin Salman,
Saudi Crown Prince

The establishment of the Arab states following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI was a transient strategic phase conducted out of necessity to find a way to govern several Arabic-speaking provinces previously part of the vast Ottoman Empire. The victorious powers, particularly Britain and France, envisaged an administrative and political system to provide a foundation towards a functional democracy, tied to the interests of the West. Despite a promising start, the political dynamics soon crumbled and with their demise came failure of the major powers’ gamble. Local cliques were interested only in taking and retaining power. Corruption flourished and rivalries increased. Authoritarianism became the order of the day, denying people their civil liberties, including freedom of expression, of assembly, of association and of the press.

A recent Freedom House report concludes that almost all Arab

peoples are today not free and that in press and internet freedom ratings not a single Arab state is considered free. There has been no meaningful development in the rule of law and no Arab state has succeeded in establishing a mechanism to restrict unlawful retention of power. The authoritarian system faces practical challenges, with increasing populations, a scarcity of resources and fast spread of news via the internet. Propaganda is no longer an effective tool of disinformation in an interconnected world.

The Arab public do not any more trust their media, which they see as a fully co-opted mouthpiece for regimes. The public has become smart at accessing alternative sources of information.

Across the region, a number of Arab rulers are considered violent tyrants whose absolute hold on power is unchecked. The rulers have promoted the myth of wild conspiracy theories to deflect public attention from their corrupt and poor governance. Many people in the region still blame their political misfortune on outside conspiracies from America, Britain and Israel, rather than looking inward at their inadequate systems.

The uprisings of 2011 presented a unique opportunity for the advent of the world's fourth wave of democracy but they failed to materialise into a constructive movement. The Arab League has played a largely subversive role to undermine democratic change. The region had already missed the third wave of democratic change which had taken root in many Asian states and elsewhere, including Turkey, Eastern Europe and South America. In reality the Arab populations are not as homogeneous as traditionally perceived, especially on a linguistic, cultural and ethnic level. The Arab umma is an historical misconception. There are no strong bonding factors. The rule of law for the region is traditionally beset by the idea that Islam is a reason for some form of exceptionalism, set apart from other major religions, so the internationally established concepts of social justice and ethics do not need to apply.

The Standard Islamic Narrative (SIN) and Standard Political Narrative (SPN) has never been the focus of meaningful debate. The SIN derives its legitimacy from copies of copies of the Quran and biographies of the Life of Prophet Mohammed, which have become distorted over the centuries to suit the rulers of the age. This has been mirrored in the deep schisms of the political system of today.

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Egypt's Encounter with Democracy: 1922-1952 – King Fu'ad's Bid to build a State

As Egypt gained independence from Turkey and Britain in 1922, the British administration supported, from the outset, a constitutional, liberal multi-party democracy. When Fu'ad was crowned first King of Egypt, he had lived in Europe and grown to appreciate the European system of governance. The State economy thrived with new education and health system in place. He was the only Egyptian leader to receive full state honours on his visit to Britain and King George V paid him a visit at his residence in Mayfair, London – the current residence of the Egyptian ambassador.

King Fu'ad's reign saw a level of democracy in Egypt that to this day remains the only brief democratic experience in the whole Arab world. The country saw property rights established, the creation of a full-fledged modern secular university in Cairo and the provision of high quality primary and secondary school education.

A European legal system was adopted and the Islam-based Sharia courts abolished. The King sought European expertise to build a modern infrastructure, as well as to help in reforming the creaking bureaucracy. Books were printed and translated at all levels and in abundance. The Egyptian University in 1925 possessed a European liberal focus, offering courses in economics, philosophy, history and literature, mainly taught by European

professors. Promising students were sent abroad to train for teaching positions, and a French woman headed the short-lived women's section. There was a broader interest in re-examining Egypt's past, leading to the rise of Pharaonism with many intellectuals rediscovering their pre-Islamic roots.

The new constitution of 1922 established a representative parliamentary system – ensuring that the relationship between the executive and the legislature was based on the principle of a balance of powers, making ministers accountable to parliament.

Some of the points enshrined in the 1922 constitution were:

- Article 2: Egyptian nationality is prescribed by the law.
- Article 3: All Egyptians are equal before the law.
- Article 4: Personal freedom is guaranteed.
- Article 5: No one shall be arrested nor imprisoned except in accordance with law.
- Article 8: Home sanctity must not be encroached upon except in the circumstances set out in the law.
- Article 12: Freedom of belief is absolute.
- Article 14: Freedom of opinion is guaranteed and everyone has the right to express their views in speech or in writing.
- Article 19: Obligatory and free of charge primary education for Egyptian boys and girls

Questions about the ethnic and national identity of Egyptians were raised by intellectuals of all stripes and debated about whether they were Mediterranean, Africans or Arabs. Following the formal dissolution of the Ottoman Empire there were two competing movements. Islamism, on the one hand, which arose as a cultural Islamist movement to counter political narrative, and, on the other hand, modern secular Egyptians who were inspired by Europe.

The core of this first constitution enshrined the right of the citizen, This was abolished in 1952 by the leaders of the military

coup and that is still the position today with General Sisi after the removal of President Morsi, the first civilian elected leader.

The Future as an Expression of the Past

The old proverb that the present is the product of the past is true when examining the story of Arab states. Over the past several decades, there has been a structural shift in the region, as the Middle East is fast losing its strategic value. The Suez Canal is no longer a strategic asset for the West, and flights do not need to stop for refuelling in the way they did before. With the advances of huge aircraft carriers, European military bases are no longer required. Cold War stand-offs are a thing of the past.

Dependence on Middle East oil is dropping fast. By the year 2034 the industrial world will not need Middle East oil (motor-vehicles consume 40% of oil produced in the world – currently 50% of all oil produced in the Middle East). Hydrocarbons are 70% of the revenue for oil producing countries and, according to the IMF, the international two trillion dollar reserve will be massively reduced as motor vehicles decline in numbers. The financial loss to oil-producing Gulf countries will be felt by the immigrant workforce from poorer Arab countries. The West is slowly reducing its involvement in the region as President Obama signalled the end of America's forever wars in the Middle East.

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Against all odds, the population of Arab countries is set to increase by 50% over the coming 30 years. It is likely to double in Iraq, Sudan and the Palestinian territories. Egypt alone will reach staggering 160 million. With water resources scarce, the small habitable area available (6 million acres under cultivation) will decrease, which will bring more challenges to regional stability and ultimately world peace.

The Arab world with its endemic conflicts has been bypassed

by many developing countries, such as Bangladesh, South Korea, India, the Philippines or Malaysia. Astonishingly Nigeria and Ethiopia which were in far worse political and economic shape during the middle of the last century, are today increasingly strong economies and have reasonably stable governance. Many African ambassadors, including the newly born South Sudan are now women, serving their country in Europe, reflecting improved equality and evolved governance.

The future political development of the Arab region – with the burden of adding 150 million people – is deeply worrying. The agricultural acreage is rapidly shrinking for many reasons. Egypt's cultivatable land will diminish by more than 20% because of the Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, and Saudi Arabia has failed to cultivate the vast tracts it had hoped to bring under the plough.

The GCC aside, the Arab region's crumbling infrastructure will require hundreds of billions of hard currency investment. Corruption and political repression in the region will increasingly make the states fragile, with diminishing scope for achieving non-violent change in governance.

The recently established structure of nation-states continues to be under threat of breakdown, leading to the emergence of non-state hybrid actors, as already demonstrated in Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Iraq, Sudan and Yemen. Ultimately, long-term dictatorships lead to greater violence and the intensification of conflicts.

The eminent historian Professor Bernard Lewis, who has written extensively about the Arab region, highlighted that the Arab World cannot unite under one rule because of its diverse ethnic and sectarian divisions. Lewis proposed in an article from 1992 that the region would witness Lebanisation-style civil wars and communal divisions:

“The eclipse of pan-Arabism has left Islamic fundamentalism as the most attractive alternative to all those who felt there has to be

something better, truer and more hopeful than the inept tyrannies of their rulers and the bankrupt ideologies foisted on them from outside... The more oppressive the regimes, the greater the help it gives to fundamentalists by eliminating competing liberals.

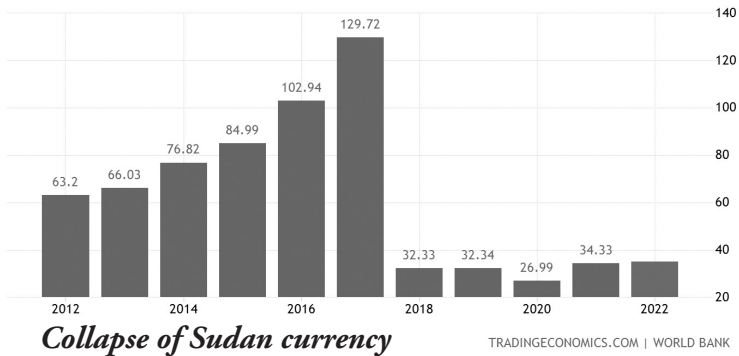
“...If the central power is sufficiently weakened, there is no real civil society to hold the polity together.”

It must be stated here that this term “Lebanisation” is different from the much-discussed Balkanisation model. With its historically largely roving tribes, the Middle East does not have historical smaller principalities to fall back on, nor the established educational systems. As for Israel, Professor Lewis predicted it would be playing a major role in the Middle East. Lewis’s prophecy proved true following the Abraham accords with the major Arab oil-producing countries. It is also notable that Israel is developing economic bonds with rising superpowers India and China.

The future reconstruction of the Middle East into new boundaries and building state institutions needs to be a bottom-up process in order to ensure legitimacy.



The collapse of the Egyptian Pound and other Arab State currency collapse bringing country near bankruptcy.



Challenges and Opportunities

The Arab world represents 5.8% percent of the world’s population and produces 4.5% percent of the planet’s GDP, yet its universities account for only 0.08% percent of the top 500 institutions in the Shanghai ranking. Climate change will likely intensify water scarcity in an already water-poor region, triggering a food crisis, and possibly make some areas in the Arab Gulf and Egypt uninhabitable by 2050.

The Arab world is in some way divided on cultural, religious, linguistic and economic variations into five different groups: the Levant and Iraq that include Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestinians and Jordan. Groups that includes GCC countries. Egypt forms one entity. North Africa another. The last group is Sudan, Somalia and Yemen. There is little or no common ground between any two groups, there being gaps in language, values and economic experiences.

The cash rich GCC countries have already begun to tap into \$2 trillion in financial assets amassed over decades and invested in sovereign wealth funds for future generations. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicted that unless GCC countries implemented significant fiscal and economic reforms, their conserved wealth would be depleted by 2034.

The poor results of a large country like Egypt — a classic example of a dysfunctional administration in the 15th most

populated nation of the world – are striking in contrast to the impressive performance of a smaller country such as the Netherlands, which places four universities in the top 100 of the Shanghai ranking. The tiny territory of Hong Kong has more universities in the Shanghai ranking than all Arab countries put together. Of the 22 Arab States, 18 face serious levels of water scarcity and the average person receives just one-eighth of the global average renewable water per person.

The United States is the only superpower that has the leverage and is able to control the political order when the region descends into crisis. The Arab states, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia, keep huge military resources. Egypt's military stands at about half-a-million unpaid conscripts, indeed on paper larger than the Russian army. It is four times the size of that of Ethiopia, stifles growth and undermines establishing civil infrastructure.

Egypt is home to a population estimated at more than 120 million people, over half of whom are facing dire economic conditions. The Egyptian pound has lost more than half its value in less than a year, reaching an historic low of 35 Egyptian pounds to the dollar from E£6 to the dollar 10 years ago. Annual inflation has soared to more than 20 percent in 2022. Around a third of its people live on less than \$2 a day. Another third are on the brink of joining them. They have been failed by officials who put their own interests above those of their citizens.

The strong medicine advised for Egypt by the IMF is to remove the role of the generals in running the economy, slow down public investment and privatise state assets, as the al-Sisi regime pours billions of dollars into unviable giant construction projects, such as the biggest mosque and cathedral in Africa, as well as huge purchases of weaponry. Meanwhile, Egypt's external debt has quadrupled in the past decade. As the country grapples with one of the worst inflation rates, it is becoming increasingly difficult for Egypt's most vulnerable to put food on the table. The country's debt accounts for 85.6% of the size of its economy.

This has left Egypt in an unsustainable cycle of borrowing. The regime's investments in mega projects such as a new capital city in the desert, housing a defence ministry "bigger than the Pentagon," has hindered private companies from competing and creating new employment opportunities.

Consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine war include prompting investors to withdraw \$20 billion from the country in 2020. Warfare in Ukraine War has increased fuel prices, pushing inflation higher. Many wage earners currently making around \$135 a month are reaching out to charities for financial assistance.

According to a recent UNESCO report (April 23, 2023), in what is known as the World Book Day, many Arabic books have only a few pages and little meaningful content. The report also highlights that book publications in Israel, or by Jewish academics about the region and its conflicts, are unofficially banned from entering most Arab states. Such censorship has created an intellectual barrier with the rest of the world.

Despite the fact that there are more than 300 million Arabic speakers, there are many more publications in Greek than in Arabic. Greece has only 11 million inhabitants. Egypt has a population of 120 million. South Korea has less than half that number, 49 million people, yet outstrips the Arab world in publishing. Iran is ranked seventh in the number of books published per year, far ahead of any Arab country.

Unemployment in 2021 rose to 12.6% in the Arab States, more than double the world average of 6.2%.

Female labour force participation rates were among the lowest in the world, at 20.3% in Arab States in 2019. Women's unemployment rate is 24%, three to four times the world average. The region had the world's highest youth unemployment rate (15-24 years old) at 28.6%, rising steeply from 25.3% in 2019.

The unemployment rate among young women was also the highest in the world, and more than twice the figure among

young men, reaching 49.1% in 2021 from 44.7% in 2019 (compared to 23.8% among young men in 2021 and 20.8% in 2019). The pandemic has led to widening existing inequalities and exacerbated exclusion, particularly from access to healthcare and education. The report points out that prior to the Covid pandemic, inadequate public financing had placed the burden of healthcare on citizens.

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The gap between the GCC and other Arab states is widening fast. The economies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are projected to expand by 6.9 % in 2022 before moderating to 3.7% and 2.4% in 2023 and 2024.

Media curbs vary within the Arab states. Some impose almost total Soviet-style control over media, which parrot official propaganda, the classic case of Egypt and Syria. Others, including Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait and Morocco, permit journalists to operate in relative freedom.

Digital media was the major tool of the Arab spring. The internet became the medium of young activists to mobilize people against autocratic regimes. Mobile phones conveyed messages and captured photos. Where correspondents were banned, young Arab activists were able to by-pass constraints by sending videos shot by mobile phones to widely-viewed satellite stations like Al-Jazeera.

Twitter in the Arab World became a valuable alternative to the state run media. Activists are now able to broadcast second-by-second directly to the world what's happening in their country.

Facebook empowered young people and gave them a sense of solidarity and freedom, to challenge the status-quo. Some of the bloggers like Mohamed Nasser, Mohammad Ali or Dr Alaa Al Aswani have gained more followers than state run media.

The impact of Saudi Islam Revisionism on the Arab World

The French scholar Olivier Roy, during the 1980s presciently predicted the end of Political Islam as a national identity, when the religious revolution was at its peak. It is now falling apart in its most influential bastion, Saudi Arabia. Such transformation will inevitably promote the secularisation of the Sunni Muslim population across the world. Roy observed that political Islam has no answer to the requirements of modernity or for the aspirations of the populace. seeing the number of times the Islamic Republic of Iran has had to use deadly force to put down urban protests over the past two decades.

The MBS (Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman) Induced changes are probably the most comprehensive for more than a thousand years in the history of Islam in the Arab World. Effective decline of political Islam as a national identity in Saudi Arabia has implications for the Arab world, ushering a new dawn in separation of religion from state.

In 2023 the government issued the following decrees that included;

- A ban on donations for mosques
- Prohibition of after-sunset iftar meals in mosques
- Prayers are required to be kept brief
- Children are not allowed to pray in mosques
- Worshippers must bring their ID
- Apart from the main mosques in Mecca and Medina, volume levels must be kept low, and prayers cannot be broadcast.
- No prolonging prayers
- If cameras are used in the mosque, they should not be used to take pictures of the imam or worshippers during prayers.
- No financial donations should be collected for projects to feed people who are fasting.
- If food is provided for people who are fasting, it should be

done in designated areas and cleaned up afterwards.

- No temporary rooms or tents should be set up for iftar, as per the new rules.
- No itikaf (religious sleeping) inside mosques without ID

Religious doctrine is no longer “committed blindly” to the teachings of Muhammad ibn Abd al-Wahhab, or to any “certain school or scholar,” as the man championing these changes, MBS stated on April 27, 2021.

“A combination of procedural shifts, personnel changes, bureaucratic restructuring and changes in jurisdiction are revolutionizing the role of Islam in the Saudi state,” he said.

These reforms are incremental but together represent a systematic restructuring of religion’s role in Saudi politics and society.

Crown Prince Muhammed Bin Salman (MBS), effective leader of Saudi Arabia, has enacted a new measure to reform and modernise interpretations on Islam. Remarkably, this seismic endeavour is something that has been largely lost sight of in the media – both international and Arab – overshadowed by headline grabbing news of dissidents, or of such dazzling landmark projects as the ambitious NEOM project.

MBS went on stress the importance of ijihad – or reasoning – rather than blind faith in unverified articles written more than a thousand years ago.

To a reader not familiar with the Islamic world, this may seem unremarkable. But it is something that sparked a wave of outrage in the large communities of religious traditionalists for whom the hadith, and the ancient edicts, were canon law, immutable and eternal.

Saudi Arabia has effectively embarked on a programme of

rewriting the Standard Islamic Narrative, side-lining the role of Islam as the underpinning of social order and emphasising Saudi nationalism. MBS has been active in broadcasting live his new vision on television. In an interview with Al-Arabiya, the UAE TV channel, the Saudi Crown Prince suggested concentrating the constitution and laws on the Quran, effectively eliminating the majority of the Hadith (sayings of the Prophet) on the basis that they are unreliable and irrelevant to modern way of life. He emphasised the need for a current “interpretation” of the Quran.

This is a dramatic change in ideological direction that effectively cancels a good swath of the fundamentalist Wahhabi thinking espoused by Riyadh for more than a century. Notably – and again not widely reported either in Arab media or internationally – he has decreed a ban on stoning and killing apostates and homosexuals.

French Islam

Europe’s and especially France’s interest in the Middle East goes back to the Crusades. Napoleon introduced printing and *proto-Parliament* for the first time in the Middle East in 1798, which had a similar effect to the Internet today. It was the French enlightenment that induced the initial process of social reform in Egypt by getting rid of the ruling Mamluks, who lived in isolated castles.

Muslim communities migrated or escaped persecution in very large numbers from North Africa and the Levant to France and other European countries. The Islamic political orientation injected the turbulence of social separatism into a proud secular society that cherished personal religious freedom of choice as a fundamental code of living. An attack by a small number of radicalised terrorists on the staff of satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo, the beheading of teacher Samuel Paty and the murder of three people at Notre Dame Basilica in Nice, were, for the French, far more than simple violence. They were considered a betrayal of the French ideals of liberty and freedom of choice.

The French government faced a dilemma in how to deal with the problem of Islamic radicalism. French men and women felt a serious threat to their way of life, and a threat to liberal values and freedom of expression, down to the basic right to believe or not to believe. The government drafted a law to prevent religious separatism. The French Parliament initiated new measures to defend the public order. The measures included placing mosques under greater control and requiring that Imams be trained and certified in France to reflect and conform to the secular charter of France.

To counter the threat of a destabilising fundamentalism, President Macron announced a plan to establish a “French Islam”, regulating the practice of the faith by the state in line with the regulation applied to European Christianity and Judaism.

Arab Exodus to Europe, USA and the beyond

A decades-long string of civil wars erupted throughout the Arab World, especially in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Eritrea, Somalia, Lebanon, Egypt and Sudan. Around 20 million people have fled in an unprecedented scale, running away from tyrannies and war-torn regions. There are a further 30 million internally displaced. The migration of large numbers of the skilled and educated classes had a knock on effect to the functioning stability of the state.

The lands of Libya, Syria and Lebanon provided a major human smuggling route from central Africa and the Levant across the Mediterranean to the shores of Europe. Trafficking and criminal gangs mushroomed and became a multi-billion dollar industry. These gangs and migrants took unimaginable risks, bypassing frontiers and faking documents and identities. The migrants' aspirations are to reach Western Europe as their final destination.

It is estimated that four million refugees have been living in Turkey and Lebanon since 2014. They are also the major destination for millions of Syrian refugees arriving across its long and porous borders. In addition to its humanitarian

aspect, it brought about the challenges of smuggling, trafficking and narcotics gangs. Since the start of the civil war, people in northern Syria, especially the Aleppo region, switched daily financial dealings to Turkish currency, replacing the Syrian Lira, with a majority of them speaking Turkish. Effectively the region has been Turkified.

San Remo Conference & Treaty of Sèvres Conference

Middle East upheavals were a consequence of a sudden dismembering of the Ottoman Empire provinces whilst the victorious powers tried to create states out of these provinces which did not have home grown leadership. There were a number of competing local warlords and tribal chiefs who collaborated with the Ottomans or with the allies with more interest in power for its own sake than in establishing a functional state. Coups and counter coups were the order of the day for many decades.

San Remo Conference 1920 Treaty of Sèvres

The treaty of Lausanne (1923) was the final treaty concluding World War I and it is important to refer to it as the first attempt of the West to establish some sort of nations and boundaries. The allies at San Remo were interested in establishing Mandated States in Middle East and Africa.

It was signed by representatives of Turkey (successor to the Ottoman Empire) on one side and by Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Mandates are essential as it sets out the establishment of Arab states after the formal dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. The conference created mandates in Africa and Europe. Arab Leaders attending the conference had not raised objections to the Balfour Declaration nor to the establishment of the Jewish state in British Mandated Palestine. Arab readers have not been provided the full facts of dissolution of Ottoman Empire, been provided only with the Balfour declaration, thus state controlled

media distort historical facts to bolster their arguments. They are divided in three categories A, B and C as following;

Class A, Mandates in Western Asia:

- Syria
- Lebanon
- Palestine
- Transjordan
- Mesopotamia

Class B, Mandates in Africa:

- British Togoland
- French Togoland
- British Cameroon
- French Cameroon
- Ruanda-Urundi
- Tanganyika

Class C, Mandates in Africa:

- South West Africa

Treaty of Sèvres, (August 10, 1920), post-World War I pact between the victorious Allied powers and representatives of the government of Ottoman Turkey. The treaty abolished the Ottoman Empire and obliged Turkey to renounce all rights over Arab Asia and North Africa.

The pact also provided for an independent Armenia, for an autonomous Kurdistan and for a Greek presence in eastern Thrace and on the Anatolian west coast, as well as Greek control over the Aegean islands commanding the Dardanelles. Rejected by the new Turkish nationalist regime, the Treaty of Sèvres was replaced by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923.

There was an intended misconception from certain political agitators that the Balfour Declaration was just a letter of intent, rather than a binding legal document. Arab leaders at the time were fully aware of the declaration and indeed they had their own agreements with the Zionist authorities at the time. The reason is that most people were not made aware of the San Remo Conference Agreements that took place on April 19th, 1920, and published its resolutions on April 25th, 1920. These seven days laid the boundaries of the new Arab states and political structure for the creation of the Arab League States and also the establishment of the one and only Jewish State of Israel.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Over seventy-five years ago, representatives from the 50 member states of the United Nations came together under the guidance of Eleanor Roosevelt (First Lady of the United States, 1933-1945) to devise a list of all basic human rights that everybody across the world should enjoy.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) has stood as a beacon of hope for the world, sending out an unequivocal message that injustice anywhere is a threat to humanity, and that no abuse of human rights can be allowed to continue without challenge. Across the Arab world, children do not have the freedom to choose their own toys or develop a talent of their choice in music, literature or science. Men and women have no rights to choose their representatives and are not allowed freedom to choose their career or who they marry.

While authoritarianism is on the rise, it is important to recall that the UDHR – and the covenants and conventions it has inspired – champion every person's right to life, liberty and security. The act was incorporated into many countries' constitutions, stipulating that no one should be subjected to torture or to arbitrary arrest or detention. Unfortunately that is not the case in the Arab States.

Following the atrocities of war in the first part of the 20th

century, governments worldwide made a concerted effort to foster international peace and prevent conflict. This resulted in the establishment of the United Nations in June 1945. Some of the key points of its Charter are worth assessing in the context of the Arab World today:

- Article 18: Everyone has the freedom to think or believe what they want, including the right to religious belief. Everyone has the right to change their beliefs or religion at any time, and the right to publicly or privately practise their chosen religion, alone or with others.
- Article 19: Everyone has the right to their own opinions, and to be able to express them freely.
- Article 20: Everyone should all have the right to form groups and organise peaceful meetings. Nobody should be forced to belong to a group if they don't want to.
- Article 21: Everyone has the right to take part in our country's political affairs either by freely choosing politicians to represent us, or by belonging to the government ourselves. Governments should be voted for by the public on a regular basis, and every person's individual vote should be secret. Every individual vote should be worth the same.
- Article 22: The society we live in should help every person develop to their best ability through access to work, involvement in cultural activity, and the right to social welfare. Every person in society should have the freedom to develop their personality with the support of the resources available in that country.
- Article 25: Everyone has the right to enough food, clothing, housing and healthcare for ourselves and our families. We should have access to support if we are out of work, ill, elderly, disabled, widowed, or can't earn a living for reasons outside of our control. An expectant mother and her baby should both receive extra care and support. All children should have the same rights when they are born.

- Article 26: Everyone has the right to education. Primary schooling should be free. We should all be able to continue our studies as far as we wish. At school we should be helped to develop our talents, and be taught an understanding and respect for everyone's human rights. We should also be taught to get on with others whatever their ethnicity, religion, or country they come from. Our parents have the right to choose what kind of school we go to.
- Article 27: We all have the right to get involved in our community's arts, music, literature and sciences, and the benefits they bring. If we are an artist, a musician, a writer or a scientist, our works should be protected and we should be able to benefit from them.
- Article 28: Everyone has the right to live in a peaceful and orderly society so that these rights and freedoms can be protected, and these rights can be enjoyed in all other countries around the world.
- Article 29: We have duties to the community we live in that should allow us to develop as fully as possible. The law should guarantee human rights and should allow everyone to enjoy the same mutual respect.
- Article 30: No government, group or individual should act in a way that would destroy the rights and freedoms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Bernard Lewis Vision

Perhaps the world's most eminent modern scholar of the Middle East was the British American historian Bernard Lewis. His writings drew on archival research and a deep grounding from working in the Middle East during the middle of the 20th century. His projections were measured and his conclusions were remarkably accurate.

Lewis observed in many of his writings and lectures that the Arab world is an artificial geopolitical entity, formed by the European Empires' interests as they stood at the turn of

the twentieth century. Arab nationalism is a relatively new phenomenon which was first encouraged by the Germans, as they were the first to realise its importance that encouraging some form of Arab nationalism would be necessary to weaken its arch rival, the British Empire, especially damaging to the Indian link. Following the collapse of the Ottoman empire at the end of WWI, a new political dynamic emerged and took shape in British ideas of empowerment of the Levant and Arabia's Ottoman provinces to break away, as was enshrined by the victorious powers at the San Remo conference in 1920.

The British success was astounding – especially by the work of just two men and one woman – TE Lawrence, Abdullah Philby and Gertrude Bell. The immediate aftermath of WWI produced a new world order. At the time the Ottoman-Arab provinces had no genuine home-grown leadership in the way the Turks had with Atatürk in Istanbul. The Arab local leaders were old hands in plotting.

Such regimes needed huge propaganda and armed security machines. The establishment of Israel was a gradual phenomenon linked to Zionism dating back to around 1860, and in reality pre-dating the Arab nationalist concept. Zionist nationalism had been a European concept for a modern state, built from collective efforts by establishing of institutions and democracy.

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Four major impediments for reform in the Arab World

Several political, social and religious hurdles hinder meaningful reform. These are interlinked to any future institutional change. The long military hegemony, linked with Political Islam, Women Rights and Anti-Semitism sit at the top of many accumulated issues. Arab communities throughout the Middle East and North Africa could sympathise with the Arab spring ideals. However many still find it difficult to live in a society that recognises equal rights of all citizens, regardless of religious, ethnic or gender

orientation, especially the subject of women's equality, which has burdened the social fabric over centuries.

The Arab spring revolution went horribly wrong, as entrenched dictatorships refused to respect the rule of law, by unleashing military violence against their own people, in some cases committing atrocities and massacres.

Implementing a workable reform in governance would require addressing these “four major” impediments in an open debate. An essential step is neutralising dictatorships and reducing military budgets to open the door for establishing a civil democracy. Also by relegating religion to personal space rather than using it as a political weapon, which has been discussed in previous chapters. Second is the pervasive effect of women's subjugation over many centuries, under the influence of political Islam and local traditions which was also discussed in previous chapters. The third is an embedded Anti-Semitism in political and religious teaching. Its elimination is essential for removing inter-regional tension, a sequence of several decades of Anti-Semitism and racial discrimination.

I Women inequality in the Arab World

The widespread acceptance of female apartheid, putting women as inferior to men, is a deep seated concept in the Arab psyche and Islam. The degradation of half the population in the Arab World regarding women as inferior is unacceptable in the modern age. Islamic religious texts considers a mere discussion of women's rights as a stigma. Treatment of women as lesser than a full person is a specific Arab phenomenon. Surprisingly a hardcore of Islamic-women were groomed to support a male dominance. In a few Muslim countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh women attained high political positions. Women in Turkey enjoy much greater independence than in Syria, Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Women in Arab countries have the lowest female employment rates in the world. Paradoxically, the recent increase in education did not lead to an increase in economic participation for women:

This phenomenon is known as the “Middle Eastern Paradox”. Key barriers for equality includes political instability, inept governance, corruption, overly complex bureaucracies, religious control, poor infrastructure, restrictive access to credit.

Gender equality across multiple indicators and indices in the world. MENA and the Arab States region has made the slowest progress.

The family structure in the Arab world is medieval and bizarre. Husbands or any male relative, can use their “cultural veto” to prohibit their female kin from mixing, marrying or entering the workforce, or travel. In general, males are the decision-makers of the household, and within their jurisdiction is the decision to “allow or prohibit” women to be economically active or choose their future.

II Anti-Semitism in the Arab World

For long the Jews were subjected to legal restrictions (living in ghettos), with special taxes for many centuries, segregation, and in some cases even pogroms, such as in Fez in 1033 or Granada in 1066. Similar to medieval Christianity, events produced a rich reservoir of anti-Jewish stereotypes.

Arab regimes come up with narratives that legitimise religious hate through media and school books. A map of Anti-Semitism can be drawn mainly from the Levant to the Nile in northern Egypt, in contrast to other countries of indifferent attitudes like Yemen, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan and GCC states. The Pew Research Centre has also found that negative attitudes toward Jews are the “norm” rather than the exception in many Muslim countries.

The vast majority of people in Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Palestinian territories attest to having a “very unfavourable view” of Jews.

The Anti-Defamation League’s Global 100, an index of Anti-Semitic sentiment worldwide, came to a similar conclusion,

that the overwhelming majority in Muslim countries endorse anti-Semitic statements. Arab regimes live in denial of the past centuries long slave-trade.

The author of this book, born and raised in Cairo, witnessed how the mosques, main media outlets, school books in cities like Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad and Beirut have been the centres of a state-sponsored disinformation, denigration of Israel and the Jews. It is revealing that following a visit by the author and a group of politicians to Israel, he was boycotted and ridiculed by many Arab media outlets within the Arab states and those operating in Europe.

Literature on the Holocaust in Arabic is scarce, although antisemitic articles and hate broadcasts are in abundance. Social media platforms present another moral challenge, without boundaries, given the prevalence of anonymous online hate sites spreading Anti-Jewish propaganda. Studies shown that antisemitic content makes up about 1% of the total number of posts worldwide. The Weissmann Institute examined TikTok's content between February and May of 2020 and 2021. It found a 41% increase in antisemitic posts.

Syrian school textbooks falsely project alleged Zionist control of the global media presented as a fact to the Arab public. The holocaust on the other hand is not mentioned in history textbooks in many parts of Arab world. Hitler and Mussolini are often portrayed as good leaders, who protected Germany against subversive Jews.

Arab media never de-legitimised Nazism. Prominent Nazis, such as Ludwig Heiden (alias Louis al-Hajj) and Johann von Leers (alias Omar Amin) were co-opted for their Anti-Semitism expertise by Arab regimes. Alois Brunner, an SS officer who served as Adolf Eichmann's assistant, advised the Syrian Ba'ath regime on torture of political prisoners. Colonel Anwar el-Sadat, who in the 1970s became the Egyptian president, wrote in 1953 (then a member of a military Junta) a tribute to Hitler.

In the midst of the volatile world of the 1930s, Nazi leaders exploited Arab hostility toward the British and French by widely disseminating radio propaganda co-opting with Ba'ath and Egyptian nationalists. Islamist leaders, notably Hajj Amin Al-Husseini who was discussed in chapter 11. Yet even before the Mufti's collaboration with the Nazis, Al-Husseini introduced an infamous lie, that Jews planned to blow up the Al Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, a false claim that has been used as evidence that the Jews were waging a war against Islam. The late Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, a preacher on Al Jazeera TV, for long time chaired the European Council for Fatwa and Research. During one of his TV religious interviews, he said that Hitler was a divine punishment for the Jews. Moreover he advocated another Holocaust. Al-Qardawi was so revered in Arab circles that he established a faculty for the study of Islamic religious law (Sharia) at the University of Qatar, and also founded an institute for the study of Sunna Islam. Surprisingly he was welcomed at huge celebrations organised by major mosques in Europe and Arab cities (The author witnessed an overcrowded event for men in the Regent Park Mosque in London).

Broadcaster Tim Marshall of Sky News has exposed the subject of Anti-Semitic cartoons in Arab newspapers. It is prompted by cartoons (the French paper cartoon - Charlie Hebdo), which appeared in al Hayat al Jadida, a Palestinian newspaper controlled by President Mahmoud Abbas.

The demonisation of the Jews is not exclusively Muslim. Some Arab Christians were active in hate too. One example of the most infamous claims is the 1840 Damascus blood libel, in which Capuchin monks accused the local Jewish community of murdering a fellow friar and his Muslim servant in order to use their blood for Passover rituals. Despite the absence of frontiers between Iraq and Israel, the Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, firing rockets towards Israel repeatedly during the Gulf War in 1991 which was designated as the "Zionist entity" as his country's worst

enemy, regularly conflated Jews, Zionists and Israelis. “We should reflect on all that we were able to learn from ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,’ and reflect on the nature of discussions that took place,” Hussein told a meeting of Ba’ath Party senior officials of audio-recordings captured by the Americans after the invasion of Iraq in 2003. “We should identify the methods adopted by these hostile Zionist forces. We already know their objectives. I do not believe that there was any falsification with regard to those Zionist objectives.”

Today there is a widespread tendency to manipulate history and misinform unsuspecting listeners by a smart form of biased terminology. The editorial team mostly brought up in the Levant, who may be ideologically tied with certain Arab regimes, plays a censorship role by excluding guests who do not serve the narrative of their masters in Arab World. Several presenters on a German network, BBC Arabic, France 24 as well as a plethora of new Arabic speaking franchises as in the case of Sky Arabia or CNN Arabia, choose commentators from certain backgrounds to emphasise a certain narrative. The social media footprint of many Arab broadcasters especially Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians and Egyptians conceal an embedded antisemitism, some shows on air debates, an open admiration for Hitler, banalization of the Holocaust, glorification of terrorists and justification of violence against Jews.

The stereotypical presentation of the Zionist is one of exaggerated aggression, a classic example is decades of stirring the fear of Zionist expansion, from “the Nile to the Euphrates,” providing fake maps, as in a declaration by Nasser in 1969 which was often quoted in media and political discourse.

As an illustration of Arab journalist reporting bias, Joelle Maroun, Lebanese correspondent for France24, is openly antisemitic.

“Rise, my Master Sir Hitler, rise, there are a few people that need to be burned ... If only Hitler was Lebanese ... He

should have been cloned for a time of need ... It is up to every Palestinian to kill one Jew and the case will be closed.

“I hate you, you Jew.” Speaking of a US peace proposal, she lamented *“the tyranny of the Jew and his filth.”*

Ms Maroun on another occasion praised the *“martyr”* Samir Quntar, a Hezbollah terrorist responsible for the brutal kidnapping and murder of a four-year old Jewish girl. Another was a Ms Laila Odeh (who was suspended in March 2023), Jerusalem correspondent for France24. She consistently used loaded antisemitic language that glorifies terrorists, banalizing the targeted victims, for example:

“Death of one of the settlers in a stabbing attack, carried out by a Palestinian outlaw who was portrayed as martyred after getting shot ... Martyrdom of seven Palestinians in Gaza ... death of an Israeli settler in Ashkelon.”

The German tax payer funded TV has sacked five Arab broadcasters from Deutsche Welle’s Arabic service on charges of antisemitism. The background to the firings highlighted how a few broadcasters were able to hijack the media outlet’s narrative by doctoring words to criticise Israel and to invoke prejudice and hatred of the Jewish people.

The five employees of the German international broadcaster – all Palestinian or Lebanese – were investigated after an article published by Sueddeutsche Zeitung last November “exposed” social media posts and articles they had written for outside publications that expressed antisemitic and anti-Israeli discourse. Basil al-Aridi, Murhaf Mahmoud, Maram Salem, Farah Maraqa and Dawood Ibrahim were fired following an eight week external inquiry report was released.

The authors of the investigation called for clearer guidelines for staff and broadcasting partners. DW’s director-general Peter

Limbourg apologised and promised to vet journalist candidates more rigorously in future. Part of Arab reform education is to reverse antisemitic stereotypes by stipulating Arab countries should include mandatory courses on Holocaust education and invest in museums to enlighten the public about genocide and mass atrocity.

In line with the Abraham Accords, the UAE formed a committee reviewing the history of the Holocaust in school curricula. The government has also planned conferences where the Holocaust's few remaining survivors can share their experiences with Arabs. Such a brave idea can help officials and citizens owning the narrative of friendship and raise awareness among a younger generation that is open to inclusive peace and understanding. UN members and major donor states should condition AID to Arab states on reviews of its state-controlled media's anti-Jewish narrative. They should also demand the removal of disinformation in education curricula.

III Reviewing military spending and military and its role in government

The formidable challenge of the Covid pandemic and the rise in oil prices further unsettled Middle Eastern economies, with the collapse of the monetary system in several countries. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank are providing some Arab governments with billions of dollars in emergency financing packages in the cases of Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon and Sudan. Many Arab states are vulnerable to such external shocks because of long-standing economic mismanagement and civil wars in the region. The poor economic performances are exacerbated by exorbitant military spending.

A recent report on global military expenditures shows it is difficult if not impossible, due to lack of transparency, to discern exactly how much Arab countries spend on their militaries. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

emphasises the dangers of the lack of any semblance of transparency in Arab states military budgets, making it impossible to know or even estimate the region's defence expenditures. Among other problems, the lack of transparency makes it difficult for international financial institutions (IFIs) to factor Arab defence budgets into the nations public spending. According to SIPRI's data, only four Arab countries; Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco and Tunisia have made their military spending data public.

It is known that Arab regimes are among the world's biggest in purchasing arms, an industry rife with corruption and back handers. Countries like Egypt are the largest recipients of military aid.

As SIPRI has emphasised, six of the top 10 importers of major arms were Arab countries, totalling nearly one-third of all global imports (\$146 billion) between 2015 and 2019. In 2017, the last year for which full data is available, four of the top 10 purchasers of American arms were Arab countries, and nearly one-third of all US weapons sales (\$36.6 billion), along with roughly \$5 billion in American security aid, went to support Arab regimes.

Lack of transparency in most Arab governments' expenditure of public funds contributes to the very low levels of public trust in government. The recent military mix consists of armies that are complemented by, or coexisting with, militias as is the case in Lebanon and Libya.

Another form exists, especially in countries like Egypt where the military comprises armies complemented by militarized police or elite units. Many fractured Arab states are currently undergoing deep societal divisions and anarchy.

Their armies are either complemented from below by state-sponsored or institutionalized militias (Syria, Libya, Yemen, Iraq) or security coexisting with asymmetric military forces (Lebanon and Sudan). Egypt has a highly centralised, tight top-down structure in military, police and a separate presidential

huge elite army of many thousands.

In the light of such erratic interactions involving civil and military interference in running these countries, new analytical parameters are required to frame the interaction between the military and society, to bring about a new sustainable balance between armies and societies within each country.

IV The eighty year old Arab League have not supported democracy or state institutions

Dissolution of the Arab League with the removal of habitual threats and rivalries been discussed in part two of this book. Most of Arab States have forged political alliances with Israel, thus the Arab League role in whipping up antisemitism and Arab nationalism no longer exists. The League had played an undermining role in the Arab region's stability. South Sudan, the Kurdistan region and to a great extent Morocco turned their back on the Arab body. The Arab League has passed the point of reform and indeed never served a useful function.

Due to a lack of development and the fact that very few books are translated into Arabic, the Standard Arabic Language is an obsolete language. As reported by the New York Times, the dean of Northwestern University's Qatar campus says that the majority of its Arab students don't speak Arabic well enough to appear on Al Jazeera.

In the Emirates, meanwhile, the chairman of UAE University's Arabic department laments that college-bound students can scarcely write a correct sentence in Arabic. Arabic content remains one of the most under-represented languages online in terms of its share of the world's websites. It is clear that the Arabic language is no longer a binding medium between Arab states.

The Arab League was shown in time to be little more than a distasteful dictators' club where local leaders served as proxy representatives of overseas powers rather than serving their

national interests. It is possible the Arab League was perhaps even a hindrance, and disbandment may be an opportunity for Arab states to thrive individually without interference or mutual jealousy. Historically the tendency between the states has been to undermine each other and to form internal mini-blocks. Recently, the Arab League was used as a tool for rival blocs that were squabbling, as in the thwarted blockade of Qatar.

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Uncertain future after failed Arab spring

The initial hopes for the Arab Spring failed badly. However, the great powers bear a moral burden to help these nations as they did in supporting the rehabilitation of Eastern Europe. Having millions intent on escape and illegal migration carry the risk opening a gap for the criminally inclined, drug trafficking and risk takers.

There were very few choices following the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Winston Churchill played a pivotal role as architect of the first state structure of legal and political entities, nation building that formed the modern Arab world in 1922. It might have been surprising if he were alive to see how fully his vision collapsed within a century.

It is becoming clear that the Arab world is, in many aspects, an artificial entity and failed to make modern states with responsible governance. The Arabs are not a homogeneous people and they have different historical milestones, ethnicities, national dress codes, culture and geography. Each country runs within its own unique historical religious practices and cultural cycle. Nor should we underestimate the scale of the expanse of deserts which divide a great many of these communities, barriers sometimes every bit as untraversable as mountain ranges and a major obstacle to community between nations. In addition the nascent railway

network built by the Ottomans and the Germans in the early 20th century was dismantled leaving the region unconnected.

Basic concepts of human rights and freedom of women vary dramatically between the different countries. While some see flogging or the cutting of a hand as an acceptable way to punish a misdemeanour – even execution by sword in public – others, such as Egypt, enjoy a reasonably developed legal system built up over two centuries. Across the board, Arab states tend to feature at the bottom of good governance world indices.

Over the course of the century, leaders of the region generally resisted the modernising social movements sweeping around the globe and instead tended to bow to regressive Islamist groups, harnessing traditional Islam to serve as a tool in repressing their populations. This tension between state and faith ultimately undermined big national social development projects and made them unachievable.

On an economic level there are vast variations in per capita income with Gulf states' per capita income more than thirty-fold that of some poorer states. The Abraham Accords vocalised a taboo that every one had been trying to avoid facing: that the GCC and Israel enjoyed some of the highest GDP figures per capita in the world – something that unified them and set them apart from the rest of the region, which is plagued by low GDP figures and far more densely packed communities.

For the future, this shared economic strength, with a lifting of barriers, will forge further links and development. Syria, in the new order where Russia, distracted by the lingering war in Ukraine, is looking to redraw its sphere of influence but seems likely to tumble into further disarray. Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and North Africa will probably continue to suffer economic travails. Increasingly these countries are likely to look to the stronger economies of their neighbours to take the lead on the major regional decisions.

The change and decline of energy needs 2034

Many states are directly or indirectly dependent on huge oil and gas revenues. However, the world's dependence on Arab oil will decline sharply in around another decade and the year 2034 is nearing fast. Millions of people in many parts of the Middle East have homes, jobs and education as a direct result of its energy resources. The IMF fears the Middle East's \$2 trillion wealth could be gone by 2034.

The impact on countries would be catastrophic. The Ukraine war led to an increase in Arab oil revenues but that will be a temporary international situation.

For the future, economic forces will hopefully drive stronger ties between nations and encourage leaders to resist indulging in the tensions which have undermined development for too long.



Hitler receiving the Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini of Jerusalem, October 1941 in Berlin, the Mufti miscalculated Nazi victory over Britain, he called for installing Gas chambers in Palestine for the Jews after visiting concentration camps in Germany.