

Jonathan Lam

Mrs. Pollack

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The U.S. as a More Moderate Moderator for the Middle East

With the current chaos and conflict of so many countries in the Middle East, it seems reasonable that the U.S. should act, being the most influential and powerful country in a number of ways. However, looking at past involvements and criticism of the U.S. “sticking their nose in everything” also shows the valid point that we do not benefit many of the situations that we engage in in the troublesome Middle East. After WWI, after European colonialism and exploitation, after the indifferent-to-culture splitting of territory, and after U.S.-aided violence in anti-Arab countries, it becomes apparent that the majority of our actions are actually *harming* that fragile area. It is still working to steady itself from European colonialism following the war to end all wars, its people still figuring out how “to regroup to create new political identities for themselves after the collapse of an ages-old imperial order” (Roberts). The U.S. (and also the U.N. and other western countries) should not play a significant role in the Middle East: they should not meddle at all with smaller, regional conflicts regarding political disagreements, but instead only get involved with issues concerning international peace, security, and law-breaking.

Iran, with its enrichment of uranium, has posed the threat of developing its own atomic bombs — a problem when their views are currently very anti-western, a situation we caused by our own mistakes. The Allies, including the U.S. put into power the son of a Nazi sympathizer shah, Mohammed Reza, who in return pledged allegiance. To stay in power, many of his decisions were biased towards Allied wants: when the Iranian people wanted to nationalize the hated British-owned Iran-based oil company AIOC, he disagreed; when he came into a power struggle with a prime minister, secret services between the U.S. and Britain took him out of office; and in a time when the people wanted to maintain their conservative values and resist the wave of “Westernization,” the shah created reforms that promote Western values. Although these

were helpful and beneficial in the eyes of the Americans and the British, such as making education more available, increasing women's rights, and redistributing land to the poor, this was the last straw for the Iranian people: the Iranian Revolution took place, replacing the U.S.-backed monarchy with a very anti-American theocracy. The resentment and lack of trust carries on to this day, as Iran is building up its stores of enriched uranium and posing a threat to the U.S. and its ally Israel with its potential to create a nuclear bomb. Only recently has there been an advancement in the conflict (the signing of the nuclear deal to remove barriers in exchange for giving up uranium and allowing inspections), but this may also have hurt relations by forcing Iranian compliance.

One of the most complex and obfuscated conflicts of the modern day is the Syrian civil war, in part because of U.S. participation. Originally another simple democratic revolution sparked by the Arab Spring movement, it quickly escalated into a situation of a harsh government, an extreme military group, the same two world powers of the Cold War opposing each other, and no end in sight. It started when President Assad of Syria cracked down on peaceful democratic-advocates. As the government started getting harsher, so did the civilians, eventually forming the Free Syrian Army (FSA) and joining with extremists. After the use of chemical weapons (which was a violation of the Geneva Convention) and brutal killing by a new extremist group ISIL, the U.S. officially provided air support to the FSA. With the Russian backing of Assad and the military extremism of the newly formed ISIS, our limited involvement did not help the rebels as intended, nor did it lessen the terrorist situation by much. Instead, it added to the chaos and suffering of the civilians, contributing to the most epic migratory crisis since WWII.

Another major conflict that was unnecessarily worsened by U.S. intervention was the Israeli-Palestinian violence. The conflict began with the U.N. division of primarily-Arab territory into Israel and Palestine; although they were equal in area, borders were indifferent of cultural differences and sparked fighting immediately. Because it was established as a democracy, and because the U.S. strongly supported Zionism movement following the Holocaust, Israel became

a strong ally and became heavily tied into their conflict with the U.S.. Even though Israel is militarily superior, with its advanced Western technologies and nuclear bombs, the U.S. has still supported Israel in times of war, such as the October War of 1973, promoting their military conquests. Furthermore, Israel is breaking international law by altering conquered land by building settlements and barrier walls in the previously-Palestinian lands of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. To counter this, U.S. presidents have tried to initiate peace treaties, such as with the Camp David Accords and Oslo Accords, but Israel insists that our resolutions do not benefit the situation, instead wanting negotiations between countries of conflict, which often also do not follow through to help the situation.

The current refugee crisis, on the other hand, is becoming an international problem that the U.S. should attend to. No longer involving a particular country, nor just the Middle East, the effects of the violence in the Middle East are reflected in the sheer numbers that are fleeing their countries, where war and terrorism reign. Palestine and Syria are major sources of these émigrés, without a home and perhaps a family, with over six million combined, as well as the millions from the Iranian Revolution (Malek). Many of them are forced out of their countries into neighboring countries, but millions are also fleeing to the relative peace and security in Europe, a maneuver risky and expensive but better than staying. This has caused a massive and steady influx of refugees into southern European countries, such as Greece and Italy, some of them migrating north to countries like Germany. Being smaller countries, many European countries simply cannot support and feed all these extra people, and it is becoming a humanitarian crisis. The U.S. has done little for the refugees, having taken in only 1,500 this year; this is tiny compared to the 800,000 that Germany is estimated to take in by the end of this year (Dreyfuss).

The breaking of international law should be another aspect that should be more strongly supported by U.S. policy in the Middle East. Israel, one of our strongest allies, has broken international law by altering conquered land, creating settlements in Palestinian territory. There has been international pressure on Israel to stop, but no action. Similarly, Assad used chemical weapons, which were banned by the international community following WWII. We backed down

on our initial solution of airstrikes against the Syrian government in retaliation, instead launching a program to train Syrian rebels. However, in other cases it may be necessary be more strict.

Finally, terrorism is the greatest threat to international peace and security, and needs to be addressed as fiercely as possible. With all of the fighting and confusion in the Middle East, people have turned to terrorism as a means of forcing a message when diplomacy fails (and it did many times). The Palestinian Liberation Organization began as a militant organization to fight Israel; now, Hamas is trying to do the same after the PLO turned to diplomacy and became the PA. Hezbollah formed as an extremist organization after Israel invaded Lebanon, and they participated in the Syrian civil war as well. Al Qaeda carried out the infamous 9/11 attacks, killing thousands of Americans and provoking fifteen years (and counting) of U.S. military engagement in the Middle East. Just outside of the region, the Taliban gained power in Afghanistan, and was severely weakened by the U.S. invasion. In Iraq and Syria, ISIS has used extreme violence and wrecked havoc throughout much of Syria and Iraq. They have been identified as a major threat, but there has been no significant progress towards stopping them.

What was once the great, unified Ottoman Empire now seems to be a lost cause, with many of its territories not true states, but “neighboring countries that have not become nations even today” according to historian David Fromkin (Roberts). To add the least harm to this perilous situation, we must not attempt to get too involved with many smaller conflicts that we risk escalating or complicating, mostly because we have a vastly different value system and cultural background. American democracy is not so easily spread. Instead, we must offer help where we can for humanitarian reasons, to help those who are involved with political struggles and need help. In addition, as a nation with unmatched military power, the U.S. should strike when international laws are clearly violated, but not where smaller skirmishes (in relation to the global community) erupt that don’t concern us. It is essential that we keep our stance in the Middle East as a moderator, but more moderate and less willing to “help” everyone.

Works Cited

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