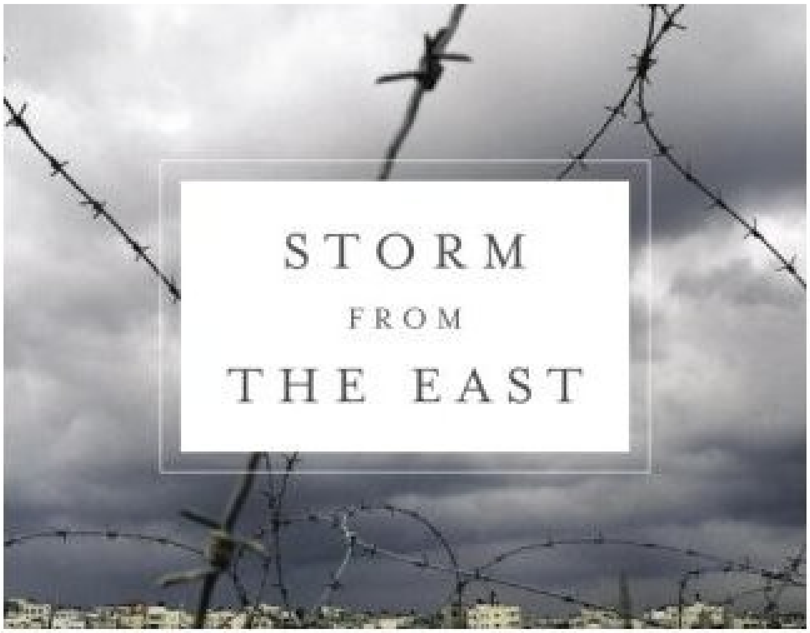

STORM FROM THE EAST

THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE ARAB WORLD AND THE CHRISTIAN WEST

MILTON VIORST

The Struggle Between the Arab World and the Christian West.

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Viorst was schooled at Columbia, Lyon and Harvard. He hoped to profess French history, and went so far as to publish a book on De Gaulle. However, he found the Middle East more challenging and exciting in that time still so near the French-Algerian troubles. He has spent some 40 years working the Middle East as a journalist, and written many books on the area. He has freelanced for the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*, served as correspondent for the *New Yorker* magazine, and taught at Princeton.

Preface

The book is about the centuries-long struggle between the Christian West and the Islamic East that started in the 7th century, when Muhammad's armies came out of Arabia and fought their way west to the Pyrenees and east to the Bosporus. Viorst traces the ebb and flow with a few key dates: The Crusaders take Jerusalem in 1099; the Muslims get it back 100 years later and keep the West out for 600 years; in the 15th century the Christians throw the Muslims out of Spain, then turn to face the Ottomans on the other flank. The Ottomans take Constantinople, but are stopped twice at Vienna, in 1529 and 1683. The conflict resumes in the 19th century when the West, now with superior technology and organization, starts to nibble again. The East loses its defender when the Ottomans fall after WW1. The West comes in, dominates politically as an incidental feature of its quest for oil, and the domination sparks Arab nationalism. The present war in Iraq is just the latest chapter in a very long story, except that the hands on the Islamic tar baby are now American, not French or British. Neither side is willing to give, but both sides need to back off.

Chapter 1: Memory, 622-1900.

After we beat them in 2003, why did the Iraqis treat us so mean? Our false expectations were based on miscalculations about Iraq and the Arabs. Foremost was Arab nationalism, which bonded Arab factions against all outsiders, even virtuous ones like us. Our leaders chose to ignore that bond. French President Jacques Chirac, an old Algerian hand, warned Bush about Arab nationalism, but Bush dismissed the warning: Iraqis love us because we liberated them from Saddam, etc.

How does Arab nationalism differ from the German-Japanese nationalism of WW 2? Germans and Japanese thought our motives were benign. But in Arab eyes we were just the latest invaders from the Christian West, the 1400-year-old enemy. All of this history was available to our leaders, but they chose not to crack the books or consult genuine experts. The Bush men disdained the study of history; they were the bully boys who would make the history that lesser mortals would study. They chose ideology over reality, and now we pay the price.

Viorst views nationalism as a bond that comes from a community's shared memory that may or may not be accurate or verifiable. For Arabs, the community includes the Arabic language and attachment to the Koran. The bonding took place in the mashreq: Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Linked but apart is the maghreb: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Mauritania and Libya. Viorst will focus on the mashreq. He thinks the Arab nationalism is unique, less akin to the nationalism of the French Revolution and more akin to the ancestral one of the Chinese, the tribal one of the Jews, the federal one of the Swiss and the multicultural one of the Americans. Nasser's Arab nationalism tried to unify Arabs into one state. Viorst prefers to call Nasser's attempt Pan-Arabism, because Arab nationalism makes room for loyalty to individual states. And there has never been an Arab nation, except perhaps for a brief spell under Muhammad. Whatever it is, Arab nationalism is real, and it drives Arab politics. Viorst thinks Muhammad was more interested in society, and the politics of reform, than theology. The nation he forged from the hostile tribes was based on the shari'a, the body of law that fused secularism with religion. Arab nationhood ebbs and flows, but the shari'a remains at the heart of Arab community. Muslims are expected to live by the shari'a within the bounds of umma, the religious community. Jews and Christians can follow their faith under any national flag, but for Muslims the only true flag is the flag of Islam--except for tactical purposes that may justify a temporary truce.

Islam has some respect for Christians and Jews as fellow monotheists, and some respect for the Bible, but Islam claims superiority. It is more hostile to Christianity than to Judaism as a competitor for global hegemony. Relative to Christianity, Judaism is more tribal and less evangelical. Viorst notes that our stiffest opposition in Saddam's secular Iraq comes from Islamic militants. He also notes President Bush's flaunting of his Christianity, and the Pentagon's analysis of the war as a clash of Christian and Islamic civilizations.

As the Muslim conquerors moved west they spread their culture in their wake. Political fragmentation ensued, but Arab nationalism remained. Viorst attributes its staying power to the dominance of the Arabic language--the language of the Koran and daily prayer. He notes that the Koran proscribes aggression, but balances that by jihad, which includes the duty to spread God's truth among nonbelievers, by force or otherwise. The rocky barriers were Rome and Byzantium, both Christian. Still, the Muslim conquerors rarely forced conversion or punished non-converters.

During the hundreds of years of war and Muslim-style truces the two sides had little cultural contact, and the West developed a memory of its own, a memory of siege by Muslims. When Islam was stopped at the gates the Arabs thought, correctly, that the result was barbarian Europe's loss. It was Islam that had the science, the mathematics and the art, and Europe that had the Dark Ages. Islam soon fell as Europe rose toward its Renaissance, leaving bitter Islamic memories of past glory. Muslims closed their doors and produced a coherent but stagnant society that may or not be resurrectable.

Over several hundred years the Arabs gradually lost their grip on the mashreq to a succession of Turkish tribes that started with the Mamluks and ended with the 400-year Ottoman reign. The Arabs did not think of those as years of occupation, but steadily viewed the Christians as irredeemable enemies--as Crusaders, like the state of Israel. However, under Ottoman rule the Arabs lost their role and their consciousness as players on the world stage.

Christendom started another assault around the turn of the 19th century: Napoleon took Egypt, then the Brits swept out the French, but a few decades later both had returned to nibble at the Mediterranean chunk of the Ottoman Empire: Algeria, Tunisia, Aden, Egypt, Sudan and the Persian Gulf. By the start of WW 1 the French had Morocco, the Italians Libya. The Europeans occupied those lands, but

European culture failed to leave the deep impact that Arab culture had done, with its language and its religion. They changed Arab technology and institutions, but not Arab life. There have been few Arab converts, modernism has little traction, and the Arabs steadfastly reject Western values. Ours is the latest attempt to transplant those values.

With the end of WW 1 the demise of the Ottoman Empire offered the Arabs a chance to reclaim their big role among the nations of the world. The next chapter tells the story of that opportunity.

Chapter 2: Revolt 1901-1918.

With the Ottoman Empire dead and the Arab threat forgotten, Western missionaries began to dispense their charity among the apparently harmless Arabs. This resulted in few conversions, but fueled the growth of an Arab Christian elite, educated in or about the West and exposed to Western values, including nationalism. It also nurtured Arab nationalism, much of it fostered by what is now the American University of Beirut.

The Turks also gave a boost to Arab nationalism by unintentional example. Young Ottoman officers (the "Young Turks") formed a cabal to save the empire by adopting Western reforms. After their coup the Arab majority found themselves ruled by a despotic Turkish minority that was none too religious. So the Arabs thought they would have their own nationalist movement if they could only find a leader, who soon appeared in the form of Hussein Ibn Ali, the ruler of Western Arabia and a descendant of the Prophet. His province happened to include Mecca and Medina. Behind the Ottoman backs he began to scheme with the British for control of all Arabia. His true goal was a Turk-free Arab nation that he would rule as Caliph of Islam.

As WW 1 progressed Arab society came to a choice point. Arabs could stay with the brutal Ottomans, or go with Hussein as independent Arabs linked uneasily to the Brits.

The McMahon letters of 1915 weighed much in this decision. The meaning of these letters, between the Brit High Commissioner in Cairo and Hussein, remains controversial. In Arab memory, in return for their joining Britain in the war the Brits would establish a sovereign state ruled by Hussein. It would cover Arabia and most of the mashreq. In British memory, all Britain promised was a swath of Syrian desert that became Transjordan. You, reader, may choose as you wish in this land of cultural memory, between the perfidious Brits and the wishful Arabs.

However Hussein might interpret the McMahon letters, he had a hard time selling his case against the Ottomans. The Sauds in Arabia were unmoved, and the Arabs hated the British more than they hated the Turks. But his son, Faisal, was a good military leader, and in 1917 the Brits sent Faisal many qualified officers, among them a great Arab enthusiast, Lawrence of Arabia. Faisal's forces hit the

Turks hard, and military success helped Hussein's recruiting in the cause of Arab independence. By the fall of 1917 Faisal's forces, with General Allenby's Brits, were marching together toward Jerusalem.

About the time they reached Jerusalem, Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Arthur Balfour, sent a letter to Britain's Jewish community that promised the Jews a homeland in Palestine. Hussein indicated his acceptance of a Jewish homeland within the Arab nation. The Arab army swelled. When the British-Arab forces entered Jerusalem they were welcomed by the Palestinians. Things were different in Mesopotamia, whose Arabs, known today as Iraqis, supported the Turks and mistrusted the Brits from first to last.

Right after the fall of Jerusalem the Bolshevik Revolution brought to light the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, which showed Britain and France in their true colonialist colors. After the war there would be no strong Islamic state in the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire would be divided and shared out in a way that preserved European power. France would get most of Syria, a piece of Turkish Anatolia and the Mosul district of Iraq. Britain would get a big chunk of land from the Mediterranean in Palestine to the Mesopotamian shore on the Persian Gulf. The Russians were to get a big piece too, but when the Bolsheviks took over they surrendered their claims.

The Turks tried to profit from this shocking revelation, but it was too late. Hussein thought the Turks, already nearly beaten, were no more trustworthy than the Brits, so he stuck with the Brits. The Brits resorted to a lie, calling the Sykes-Picot business "provisional discussions" rather than an actual agreement, and offering other empty assurances to a group of alarmed Arab leaders.

Back on the battlefield, Allenby used Faisal's Arabs as the spearhead in the attack on Damascus, and let the Arabs enter the defeated city first. Contrary to Lawrence of Arabia, their welcome probably owed less to Arab patriotism than dissatisfaction with Ottoman rule. Faisal claimed leadership of the independent Arab nation, but Britain and France demurred, correctly, because there was no such nation. However, the Arabs were loath to accept Western hegemony in place of Ottoman rule. Therein lay the rub, even as it lies today.

Chapter 3: Disillusion, 1919-1939.

The Arabs could see U.S. power after WW1. They could hear President Wilson's idealistic talk of democracy, stability and international justice. Maybe the Paris peace conference would scrap Sykes-Picot and grant Arab independence. Hadn't the Arabs fought for the victors? Wilson even had the Germans thinking they might be partners in the peace settlement, and not the hapless losers the vanquished had always been. As it turned out, both the Arabs and the Germans felt betrayed. The British and French Prime Ministers, George and Clemenceau, outmaneuvered Wilson and trashed his ideals. This happened partly because Wilson showed up with no real commitment from his allies or his Congress, and no real plan derived from his lofty principles.

The goals differed. The British and the French wanted to expand their own empires and hold the Germans down. Wilson wanted to promote peace through a League of Nations. His allies belittled the League, but humored him to further their own goals. Wilson rejected annexation in favor of the mandate, a high-minded concept whereby the strong would protect the weak and nurse them to nationhood. The allies accepted the mandate concept on their own terms, a handy cover for the usual imperial exploitation.

But the Arabs did not want to be European mandates. When Faisal's Syria rejected the French overture, France and Britain got together and denied his credentials as Syria's representative: Faisal would have to attend as the delegate from the Hejaz, his father's kingdom. They pressured him intensely on Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, but he insisted on full Arab sovereignty. He trusted the Americans, whom he did not see as an imperial power. But as Wilson knew his hostile Congress would never approve, Wilson failed even to propose an American mandate. The closest the conference came to a mandate was the King-Crane Commission. Wilson appointed that commission to poll the people of Syria, Lebanon and Palestine--who said they wanted the British and the French out of their affairs. The commission recommended a constitutional monarchy for Iraq, a Syria that included Lebanon and Palestine, and limits on Zionism. Failing that, the commission recommended an American mandate, not a European one, with a 20-year limit. The recommendations came too late. By 1919 Wilson was back home, on his pro-League speaking tour and headed for the stroke that would finish his health and knock America out of the game.

Faisal, back in Damascus, found himself marginalized by radical Arab nationalists who ran the assembly. There would be no compromise between Europe and the Arabs. Britain, weakened by the war, pulled out of Syria. That left Faisal alone against the French, who soon put troops in Lebanon with designs on Syria. In 1920 the great powers signed the Treaty of Sevres, which tore up the Ottoman empire and put it back together pretty much in accordance with Sykes-Picot. In the new states Britain and France set up parliaments that were mere colonial puppets, and the Arab insurrections soon began.

They started with the Egyptians, who had always clung to their nationalist identity under the rule of Islam, whether Arab or Ottoman. Napoleonic occupation had kindled their interest in the West, but the British left them cold and rebellious. In WW1 they favored the Turks over the Christian imperialists, despite British promises of postwar freedom. When the Brits reneged on those promises the Egyptians' Wilsonian hopes left them all the more furious.

The British struck the spark in 1919, when they refused to seat Egypt's parliamentary leader at the Paris conference. Egyptians hit the streets with big, lethal demonstrations. The Brits exiled the leader, and finally decided to declare Egypt independent--a false declaration, as the Egyptians knew. It was a democracy run by an Ottoman king and a parliament of the wealthy, all beholden to Brits who themselves were immune to local law--typical Western colonialism. When independence finally came, after decades of strife, there was no residue of democracy, and no good will toward the old colonial rulers.

Turkey took a much different course under Mustafa Kemal, the general later known as "Ataturk." Trained in secular schools, he rose to prominence in WW1 through military successes, most famously the defeat of the British at Gallipoli.

In 1920 the British occupiers got the sultan to send Kaman to Ankara, to quell popular unrest. When the Italians made a surprise appearance in Turkey, looking for territorial spoils, the furious Brits persuaded Wilson to chase the Italians out. Wilson chose Greeks for the job. Unfortunately, the Greek presence in Greece's ancient Anatolian territory made the Turks very nervous and very nationalistic. Kemal swore to eject all foreign intruders, and did just that from his Anatolian base: first the French, then the Italians. Britain, with its army in Constantinople, was tougher. It dissolved the Turkish parliament and arrested many officials. It also made the sultan denounce Kemal, an act that destroyed the sultan's national credibility. This made it easy for Kemal to unite Anatolian leaders and form a renegade parliament. Britain responded with an army of Kurds and pro-sultan Turks, which Kemal crushed. Turning to the Greeks, he crushed them once and then again, just to drive the lesson home.

With the intruders gone, Turkey was a power once again. Kemal negotiated new international agreements that by 1922 had dropped all references to Kurdish or Armenian states. He abolished the sultanate, exiled the sultan, abolished the caliphate, made Turkey a secular state and began to Westernize. Arabs admired the self liberation, but not the social revolution. Although Turk and Arab nationalism had similar origins, the Turks softened toward the West as the Arabs grew more hostile. And the Arabs have never matched Turkish success on the battlefield.

The Treaty of Sevres abrogated Faisal's claim by making Syria a French mandate. Faisal fought the French with guerrillas, but finally conceded. The concession sparked a Syrian insurgency whose defeat by the French inflated Syrian legend nevertheless. In 1920 the French exiled Faisal to London. They tried to defuse Syria by splitting it up: a Lebanese state dominated by Maronite Christians, and several autonomous states for deviant Muslim sects. The arrangement blew up in 1925 when one of those sects, the Druzes, led what Syrians call the Great Revolt. This two-year insurgency, defeated by France, gave Arab nationalism yet another boost. France proposed a settlement in 1927 that looked too much like Britain's phony offer to the Egyptians. Parliaments and riots came and went until 1936, when a liberal French government agreed to Syrian independence in exchange for Lebanon and Palestine. However, the treaty never took effect. For one thing, the next French government had colonial sympathies. Then, with WW2 on the horizon the French tried to secure their Mediterranean defenses by suppressing all independence movements. Syrian nationalists decided to hold off until the end of the war.

Iraq too was unruly. Having fought the British in WW1, Iraq came to a boil when the land became a British mandate. The British tried ruthless suppression, found it too costly, fetched Faisal from London and declared him king in 1921. It was another phony puppet government that fooled nobody. Faisal became a full-time mollifier: of the British, of Kurds resentful of Arabs, of a Shia majority resentful of the preeminent Sunni, and of Iraqis who saw him as a British creation. But the violence receded, and in 1932 the Brits ended the mandate in theory and reduced their forces.

As Faisal's descendants proved less capable than he, the Iraqi army emerged as a political force and tried its first coup in 1936. At the start of WW2 nationalist army officers staged another coup and formed a pro-German cabinet. Eventually the Brits sent Jordan's Arab Legion to occupy Iraq and restored their man, Abd al-Ilah, to the throne. He reconstituted a pro-British government and began to handle his opponents very harshly, a policy that created still more ill-feeling toward the constitutional monarchy. The army nationalists nursed their wounds and prepared their counterattack.

The West faced different problems in Palestine. In 1922 the League of Nations told Britain to implement the Balfour Declaration, a national home for Jews in Palestine. This mandate essentially ignored the Arabs, who composed 90% of the Palestine population. It did declare Arabic an official language, along with Hebrew and English, but said nothing of Arab political rights or self-determination. Nationalism there was only nascent, but not for long. Brits who served in Palestine understood their fate between two irreconcilable interests, Arab and Jewish. Britain would be a grain between two millstones. It had on one side mostly European Jews equipped with diplomacy, economics, arts and organization. It had on the other side hosts of nationalistic Arabs accustomed to Turkish rule, with almost no trained leaders, no diplomacy, no organization and no strategy.

The violence started small in 1920 with a bloody skirmish in Galilee between Jewish farmers and Arab villagers. It soon erupted in Jerusalem during a Muslim feast that got out of hand, with days of looting, vandalism and lethal rioting. A year later hundreds died in riots that started in Jaffa and spread through Palestine. The British high commissioner tried to mollify the Arabs, who rejected all compromise. Viorst is worth quoting here: "The Jews . . . breathed a sigh of relief as the Arabs made diplomatic intransigence the companion of their violence. Principled though the Arabs may have been, the rejection of any compromise arrangement with the Jews led them down a blind alley, from which they have not yet exited." (p. 74.)

One notable Arab leader was Hajj Amin al-Husseini. The Brits made him a mufti (a professional jurist who interprets Muslim law), and later the spiritual leader of Palestinian Muslims. Still later he headed a Muslim parliament created by the Brits, as well as an Arab political committee. He kept relatively quiet until 1929, when he endorsed a protest against Jewish worship at the Wailing Wall that left hundreds dead. With the rise of Hitler, Jewish refugees poured into Palestine by the thousands. The influx frightened the Arabs. In 1936 Hajj Amin demanded restrictions on Jewish immigration and land transfers. He then led a big revolt against the Jews and the Brits that left thousands of Arabs dead, mostly at British hands. He asked for a truce, whereupon the British Peel Commission heard both sides.

In 1937 the Peel Commission dropped its bombshell: Palestine should be divided between autonomous Arab and Jewish entities. The division would include population transfer and partition. That concept remains to this day the center of the Palestine debate. London accepted the Peel report right away, but the Arabs and the Jews balked at this novel idea: Each side understood and wanted an undivided Palestine ruled by it alone. The Arabs rejected the proposal flatly, a decision that took the equally dubious Jews off the hook, and soon emphasized their reaction by assassinating a British police commissioner. Arab volunteers joined their Palestinian brothers, and Hajj Amin fled to Baghdad. Trained Jewish units took to the field, and the Brits brought in men, armor and aircraft. The death toll at the start of WW2 was three thousand Arabs, two thousand Jews and 600 Brits. Nothing was settled, but WW2 created a momentary lull during which Britain retreated from both the Peel recommendations and the Balfour Declaration. Everybody thought the struggle would resume after WW2.

Transjordan was more placid. The League of Nations had included it in the Palestine mandate, but the Brits chose to treat it as a buffer between Palestine, Syria and the Sauds on the south. They also thought it might be useful as a corridor between the Mediterranean and the Gulf. Their problem was how to hold it.

They gave the job to Abdullah, King Faisal's older brother--no great shakes, but a sop to Faisal's feeling that the Brits had betrayed him. Abdullah's mission was to keep the Bedouins from bothering the neighboring French (in Syria), the Wahabis (in Arabia) and the Zionists.

Abdullah had other ideas. He saw himself as the leader of a great Arab state, and made some expansionist trouble in Syria and Arabia. But as he liked being king, when the Brits told him to cool down, he obeyed. The Brits gave him money and made him emir (prince) in return for military bases and the services of Abdullah's army--the Arab Legion--in the newly independent state of Transjordan. The subsequent service of the Arab Legion against Arabs explains Jordan's still strained relations with other Arabs.

Abdullah's father, Hussein, still ruled the Hejaz. Abdullah helped him in his struggle against the encroaching Sauds, who struck Abdullah in 1922 with Wahabi camel troops sent to Transjordan. The Brits came to the rescue with airplanes and armor. Two years later the Sauds attacked Hussein directly in the Hejaz. Hussein had lost popularity through his own bad stewardship, and this time the Brits ignored his plea for help. He abdicated and became an unwilling exile in Amman, Abdullah's capital. Another son, Ali, took Hussein's throne. When the Turks abolished the caliphate Hussein came forward to accept the office, but nobody took him seriously. Abdullah threw him out. He went to Aqaba, a shining place in the memory of the Arab Revolt, but could not stay there. The Sauds wanted the port, and took his presence as a pretext for seizure. But the Brits wanted it too, so they blocked the Saud forces, took Aqaba themselves and transferred it to Transjordan and the care of their friend Abdullah, where it remains today.

The Sauds proceeded to the Hejaz, where in 1925 they took Mecca and Medina and chased Ali, Hussein's son, into exile in Iraq. Arabia became Wahhabi heaven under the House of Saud, and Hussein's dream of Arab nationhood was dead. He spent his last years as a lonely Arab in Cyprus, and finally in Amman as the forgotten father of the Arab Revolt and modern Arab nationalism. In 1931 Arabs ignored his funeral in Jerusalem, where British soldiers escorted his coffin.

Chapter 4: Emancipation, 1940-1956.

Between the two world wars Arab nationalism was essentially secular, but Islamic doctrine began to fill the void left by the Ottoman caliphate. Religious nationalism began to compete with secular nationalism, and still does.

Viorst traces its modern roots to 1928, when Hassan al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. A teacher among the poor laborers who maintained the Suez Canal, he became deeply committed to social reform. He thought political emancipation necessary, but not enough: It had to be linked with the rigorous practice of Islam. He recruited the poor by preaching social reform, but also appealed to the middle classes adrift in the Ottoman wreckage. When he moved to Cairo in 1932 the brotherhood numbered in the tens of thousands; it soon spread throughout the Arab world to number in the millions. His goal was to liberate the umma from foreign rule and establish a pan-Muslim state governed by the shari'a: rigorous Islamic puritans, free of Western corruption.

Hassan al-Banna would start by getting the British out of Egypt. His jihad led the brotherhood to set up a secret network of assassins, ready by WW2 to target both British officials and their Egyptian collaborators. These plans went on hold during WW2, when the Egyptian regime supported Britain. Nevertheless, al-Banna proclaimed the need to replace the monarchy with an Islamic state. His campaign climaxed in 1948, in the Arab-Jewish struggle in Palestine. He promoted Egypt's entry into the struggle, sent brotherhood contingents to fight, and stepped up the assaults on Egyptian officials, including the murder of the prime minister. A few weeks later al-Banna himself was murdered, perhaps by the police, but his now thriving movement continued without him.

Another world war came and went, and colonial rule was still in place. Maybe the brotherhood was right: Maybe force was necessary. The Brits and the French seemed unaware that their own rule had fanned the flames of Arab nationalism.

The fight resumed where it had ended. In Syria France had reneged on its promise of independence for Syria and Lebanon, and ceded a port to Turkey in exchange for Turkish neutrality. The Germans had permitted Vichy control of Lebanon and Syria. De Gaulle's Free French and the British had invaded

Syria to thwart its use by the Germans. As heirs to Vichy rule, the Free French declared Syria and Lebanon independent, but when their nationalist parliaments voted to sever their ties with France, the French balked. As the war was ending in Europe Arab riots flared up throughout the mandate. The French were ready to fight, but the stronger Brits made them back off. A month later France handed its Syrian mandate to the U.N. and said it was pulling out of the Middle East.

The Brits were more stubborn. In Iraq they kept the lid on with a strong military presence. The monarchy had cooperated with the British during the war and expected postwar independence, but received no such thing. After much bargaining they wangled a new treaty in 1948 that provided marginal improvements for Iraqis, but left Britain in control of military installations and foreign policy. That treaty was the monarchy's last hurrah. Its disclosure resulted in riots, hundreds of Iraqi dead, the death of the treaty and a mortal blow to the monarchy.

Life was sweeter in Transjordan, which the British subsidized after having created both the state and its ruling Hashemite monarchy. The happy tribesmen appreciated British support. Abdullah was an outsider, but a member of the Prophet's family. There was no lost Arab glory to gall them, as the nation's entire history was linked to Britain. They did not dispute the things that so annoyed the Iraqis, Britain's bases and its control of the local military. These things let Britain rule gently. Abdullah had his dreams as ruler of an Arab nation; in 1941 he even announced unification with Lebanon and Syria, but the British soon persuaded him to cool that kind of talk. Later, in 1947, the U.N. plan to partition Palestine rekindled his thoughts of expansion.

Early in WW2 the Jews in Palestine almost had to support the British, but when the Nazis were chased out of the Middle East the Zionists were back in business. They knew they would have to fight the Brits, who had backed away from both Balfour (a Jewish home in Palestine) and the Peel partition idea. After the war, with Jewish refugees a major problem, the Brits bucked world opinion by setting a naval blockade against the refugees. Zionists attacked the blockade with their quasi-secret army, the Haganah, which soon expanded its operations with attacks on British bases, radar stations, rail facilities, officials, cafes and buses. The British responded in kind, with roundups, imprisonments, executions and exile of Jewish leaders. They reinforced their army and summoned Abdullah's Arab Legion. Britain hoped to sit at the hub of the new Middle East, with emancipated Arab states clustered around it. It took her a while to understand the intensity of Arab hostility. In the meantime, the Arabs sought what help the Brits might offer in the coming struggle with Zionism.

In 1944 Britain and seven Arab states founded the Arab League, an association of sovereign states united by mutual distrust. While the Zionists trained men, the Arabs quarreled. They counted on the British, but demanded that the British leave the Middle East. Under incessant Zionist attack, in 1947 the British finally threw in the towel and gave their Palestinian mandate to the U.N. U.S. popular opinion favored a Jewish state, but the government worried about oil supplies. The Arabs failed to take advantage of that opening, and remained aloof as the Jews cultivated political support. Finally the General Assembly voted to partition Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. The Arabs rejected the resolution and blamed the Americans, targets of Arab hostility ever since. The Jews were also disappointed, but accepted the resolution with gusto.

There was immediate resistance in Palestine. Hajj Amin ordered a strike and organized an Army of Jihad; the Arab League and the Muslim Brotherhood joined in. They lacked the Jews' training and leadership, but had similar numbers. The U.S. proposed an international trusteeship for partition, but both sides, confident of victory, rejected that proposal. The Jewish offensive in late 1947 routed the Arab forces, spread panic among Arab civilians and loosed a flood of refugees whose fate has yet to be resolved. In 1948 Britain left without making a formal transfer of power; on the same day Zionists declared a sovereign state of Israel as the Arabs remained silent. With Britain gone, the Arab states entered the war. Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt sent men, tanks and artillery and won some early victories, but Abdullah's Arab Legion, with British officers, had the only real success, holding the West Bank and Jerusalem's Old City. By 1949 Israel had most of Palestine, and the fighting ended with an Arab-Israeli accord under UN sponsorship.

The defeat entered Arab memory as "the catastrophe," attributable to their own faults: disorganization, rivalry, incompetence and corrupt leaders. The Palestinian victims, including 750,000 refugees, were left nursing grievances against both Jews and fellow Arabs, betrayed by their rulers and institutions. They had learned a lesson, but saw no way out.

Maybe Gamal Abdul Nasser was the way out. The young colonel, wounded in the fight, was a puritanical product of the Egyptian military academy who detested both British colonialism and his own government, from king and courtiers to parliament. Having flirted with the right-wing Young Egypt Society, he joined and recruited for the Free Officers, a secret revolutionary society in the Egyptian army. In 1952 he led the army coup in a context of cold-war intrigue. The U.S. had made a cold-war offer to the king to support Egypt in its abrogation of a British treaty. Egypt rejected the U.S. offer because it would have had them join Israel against the Soviets. The U.S. then threw its support to the British. This turnabout was followed by riots and terrorist agitation across the political spectrum of Egypt.

At first the Free Officers' coup was bloodless. They exiled the king, dissolved parliament and enacted populist reforms. But they soon suppressed the opposition, especially the Muslim Brotherhood.

Nasser became a ruthless despot, but got the British out of Suez and opened new relations with the U.S. that might have borne fruit except for the Cold War. The U.S. wanted him to join the Baghdad Pact, an anti-Soviet bloc composed of Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Nasser declined, as he had no dog in our fight with the Russians. John Foster Dulles chose to treat him as an enemy when in 1955, at Bandung, Nasser adopted "nonalignment" as he joined India's Nehru and China's Cho En-lai in a neutralist bloc. The Dulles policy poisoned U.S. relations with the nonaligned states.

It was conflict with Israel that truly united Nasser with the Soviets. Egypt ruled Gaza, from which Palestinian fedayeen (self-sacrificers) staged raids on Israeli settlements that resulted in Israeli retaliation. Nasser, wanting to counter, asked London and Washington for arms, but turned to Moscow when they refused. Soviet planes, tanks and ships arrived in Egypt in 1956, marking the end of Nasser's opening to the West. When the U.S. withdrew its offer of help in building the Aswan Dam Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, a move that hurt Britain and France more than the U.S. The Israelis joined Britain and France in their military attack on Egypt in 1956. At the U.N. the U.S. surprised the world by joining the Soviets in a demand for immediate cease-fire. Britain and France vetoed the proposal. As usual, no Arab state came to Egypt's defense. When Russia threatened to intervene the U.S. promised war in return, but soon compelled its allies to withdraw in favor of a U.N. Emergency Force.

That put an end to British and French colonialism in the region. Paradoxically, our good deed did us little good in our competition with the Soviets for the hearts of the Arabs. Somehow Suez confirmed America as the new Western imperialists, and somehow the Arabs saw the withdrawal of Britain, France and Israel as Nasser's triumph. Arab reaction fed Nasser's ambition. He resurrected Hussein's Pan-Arab dream, and promoted it with charisma and modern communications. He detracted attention from the real Arab problems and did nothing to solve them: poverty, illiteracy, religiosity, chronic corruption and misrule. And it worked well enough, until it all came apart in 1967.

Chapter 5: Unity and Disunity, 1957-1967.

When Britain and France left Suez the U.S. moved in. The Soviets had crushed the Hungarian revolt, Sputnik was in space, and the Middle East was inching away from the West--a drift the Eisenhower doctrine would blame on the pull of International Communism rather than an aversion to Zionism and Western imperialism. When 56 Syrian soldiers died in a border skirmish with Israel, Moscow sent money and arms while the U.S. did nothing.

Syria's bungling of the 1948 war had brought discredit to its leaders and its democracy. This paved the way for a series of military coups and restorations, many swings between military dictatorship and parliamentary government. Between 1949 and 1957 the Syrians had a heady mix of Communists, the Muslim Brotherhood and Pan-Arabists (including Muslim-Christian Ba'thists). They saw their chief threat as Cold War America. Nasser's anti-American Arab unity was just the ticket to solve their problems. After a brief courtship, in 1958 Egypt and Syria amalgamated into the United Arab Republic, supposedly as two equals.

During the three-year marriage Syrians learned the difference between Arab unity and Nasserism. The latter was a military despotism where Nasser ran Syria as a private province, complete with land confiscation, socialized commerce and Egyptian loyalists running the government and the schools. Nasser's insistence on total power betrayed his Ba'thist supporters, and led to the collapse of the U.A.R. Another counter to Arab unity was the historic political conflict among Cairo, Baghdad and Damascus. In 1961 Syrian army officers overthrew Egyptian rule, declared Syrian independence, arrested the Egyptian chiefs and sent them home. After a brief fight, Nasser conceded.

Syria rejoined the Arab League as the Syrian Arab Republic. A civilian cabinet repealed some of Nasser's measures, but another coup soon reinstated them. Pan-Arabism was riding high in the Ba'ath Party. Hafez al-Assad, the future dictator, was a young Ba'athist son of peasants and a military pilot when he and four other officers staged their coup in 1963. Three years later they eliminated the party's liberals and ended genuine elections. Under Assad Ba'athism became military, radical and authoritarian.

Meanwhile the Iraqi Ba'ath Party seized power in Baghdad, but this did not mean unification with Syria. It meant permanent confrontation between the two countries, as of old, and the iron fist in each one. Ba'athist rule brought stability to the mashreq, but not unity.

Lebanon was another story. The French founded it in the 1920's as a Christian enclave carved out of Ottoman Syria. They tried to beef it up by adding a few Syrian Muslims, but ended up with two antagonistic fragments, European and Arab. The situation seemed perilous in WW2, but in 1943 the Lebanese created the National Pact, a non-democratic election system that conceded Christian dominance but shared power among sectarian subgroups. No faction was completely satisfied, but the system worked.

When Lebanon survived the Palestine war of 1948 it seemed robust, but had serious problems. It was run by elite families, Christian and Muslim, whose often selfish decisions accompanied a widening gap between rich and poor. The insurrection of 1952 achieved little reform. As the Muslim masses grew poorer and more resentful, the Cold War and Nasserism fed the unrest.

In 1955 a Christian initiative accepted a U.S. invitation to join the Baghdad Pact in return for economic aid. The Arab League objected. Syria threatened. Throughout it all, Lebanon stood firm with the West and the Eisenhower doctrine, which promised arms to secure Lebanese independence. But the Muslim population embraced Nasser and Pan-Arabism, and in 1958 demanded that Lebanon join the United Arab Republic with Egypt and Syria. Reconciliation was in trouble. A Christian-Muslim civil war broke out about the same time as a rebellion in Jordan and the Iraquis' overthrow of their monarchy. Washington, fearful of a general Nasserist blowup, landed 3,600 Marines in Beirut in July, 1958. They were welcomed ashore by Christian girls in bikinis. The Marines left in October, after American diplomats helped to reconcile the rebels and the regime. The new agreement restored the National Pact of 1943, but solved no basic problems in Lebanon. The trouble in Jordan raged on, and Iraq now had a radical military government.

Jordan's King Abdullah was the only Arab leader who succeeded in the Palestine war, having seized East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Ironically, in 1951 his annexation of the West Bank led to his assassination by an angry Palestinian nationalist. In 1953 he was followed by his eighteen-year-old grandson Hussein, educated in Britain and pro-Western. Nasser pressured him to abrogate Jordan's treaty with Britain; Hussein's refusal put Jordan on the tightrope, in precarious balance between the Arabs and the West. Hussein dissolved the parliament, which had become a talk-shop against the throne, and relied more on Britain and the Bedouin tribes. During the crisis created by the U.S. proposal of the Baghdad Pact, when riots broke out he vacillated between the two sides. At first he rejected the Pact and fired his British commander of the Arab Legion, General Glubb ("Glubb Pasha"). Then he spurned Nasser's money and re-embraced Britain. Finally he took command of the Bedouin army, suppressed the riots and restored order. During the Suez attack in 1956 he broke with France but not Britain, a half-measure that irked his Nasserists. The following year army Nasserists tried two coups against the king, but Hussein rallied his Bedouins against them.

In 1958, when Egypt and Syria joined together, Jordan's King Hussein and his cousin, Faisal of Iraq, saw this new group, the U.A.R., as a threat. This inspired them to form the Arab Federation, a defensive alliance against Nasser, Communists and Muslim Brothers. Before the alliance could get organized the civil war broke out in Lebanon, and the Brits sent paratroopers to Jordan. Jordan and Lebanon survived, but the Iraqi monarchy, too far from the reach of the West, fell to an army revolt whose ripples are still evident today.

Before the revolt sectarianism had seemed no threat in Iraq. The Shia majority seemed content with their lot under the Sunni ruling elite. The rebellious Kurds, exhausted from earlier uprisings, were ready to live and let live. Parliament settled most disputes. Thanks to Moscow's anti-imperialism and Nasser's pro-Soviet tilt, the Communist party was legitimate. However, it was too secular for the masses, and felt the heavy hand of the government when it got too frisky.

Nuri Said was a pro-Western Ottoman officer with Prince Faisal in the Arab Revolt. He led the conservative bloc that governed Iraq after Faisal became king. His position grew shaky as the army's ex-Ottoman officers gave way to the new generation of anti-Western Arab nationalists. When Faisal II took the throne in 1953 Nuri continued to serve an apparently secure monarchy. He played a leading pro-Western role in the negotiations over the Baghdad Pact, which Arabs condemned as an invitation to the return of British colonialism. It was the Suez attack in 1956 that brought him down. Unable to defend the Anglo-French invasion, he declared solidarity with Egypt, broke ties with France and barred

Britain from Baghdad Pact meetings. But it was too late: He was marked as a Western collaborator, easy prey for Nasser's antigovernment propaganda.

In 1958 Nuri and Faisal II died in a coup carried out by Iraqi army commanders who legitimized themselves by means of Rashid Ali, the anti-British rebel returned from exile. The leader, Abdul Karim Kassim, named himself head of the junta and the army. The government remained Sunni but espoused Pan-Arabism, received Nasser's blessing, got out of the Baghdad Pact, embraced the Soviet Union, expelled Western companies and decreed Nasserist economic reforms. However, neither Kassim nor the Iraqi public was inclined to submit to Nasser's rule. Iraqi nationalism was the thing. Kassim's Ba'athist collaborators, a Pan-Arabist faction, disagreed. At the other extreme, the Communists feared Nasser as an ardent suppressor of their kind. Kassim sealed his own fate by choosing the Communists, who allied themselves with the Kurds--a combination guaranteed to kill popular support. The reckoning came in 1959, when a Ba'athi hit squad led by Saddam Hussein shot and wounded Kassim. Kassim tried to regain the initiative in 1961 with a strike against newly independent Kuwait, which he claimed belonged to Iraq as a former Ottoman province within Basra. He was beaten back by the Brits, who had granted Kuwait's independence, and the Arab League. Kassim and his entourage died in the Ba'athi coup of 1963.

Prospects looked bright for Pan-Arabism, with the three most powerful Arab states ruled by Ba'athis: Egypt, Syria and Iraq. But there was no unification, because neither Syria nor Iraq could stomach the submission that Nasser required. National identity, as mapped out by the Western powers after WW1, trumped Pan-Arabism, and continues to do so.

As it turned out, Nasser's intoxicating oratory was his best shot. Having drawn a blank on Syria and Iraq, in 1962 he turned to Yemen, where army officers, supposedly Nasserists, had overthrown the imam and declared a republic. When Bedouin tribesmen struck back, Nasser sent help to the rebels. This inspired the Brits, who had a naval base in neighboring Aden, and the Saudis, who feared the spread of secular Nasserism to the Arabian peninsula, to send money and arms to Yemen's tribesmen. Nasser had his Yemeni friends sign a treaty with the Soviet bloc, and President Kennedy pressed the U.N. to intervene. Egyptian civilians paid heavy costs for the Egyptian forces, which took a heavy beating in Yemen. Britain and the U.S. sent the Yemeni forces more weapons. The revolutionaries turned on one another.

The end came in 1967 when Nasser, bogged down in Yemen and stung by his defeats, demanded that U.N. forces get out of Egypt. Nasser positioned troops to blockade the Israeli port of Elath. Syria and Jordan put their armies under Nasser's command, and Iraq and the Saudis sent help. Arabs cheered the impending liberation of Palestine. In a flash of insight Nasser tried to backtrack, but it was too late. Israel launched preemptive air and infantry attacks, defeated the opposing forces in six days and occupied much new territory: Egypt's Sinai and the Gaza Strip, Syria's Golan Heights and Jordan's West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Stunned Arabs beheld another catastrophe, al-nakba. Nasser offered to resign, consented to stay, and saw his kind of Arab nationhood die. Again the Arabs knew not where to turn.

Chapter 6: Theocrats-Autocrats, 1968-2005.

Many Arabs blamed the defeat on the West, and few sought the cause in Arab culture. Egypt, Syria and Iraq broke relations with the U.S. Syria and Iraq cracked down on the internal opposition. In Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood pinned the blame on Nasser's secularism, and advocated a strict religious nationalism. The Palestinians, now contemptuous of Arab power, sought independence through the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Nasser had created the P.L.O. in 1964 as his way to control the Palestinian cause. When he lost power in 1967 young Palestinian nationalists, led by Yasser Arafat, stepped in to control the P.L.O. As a young student of civil engineering in Cairo, Arafat became loyal to Hajj Amin, the Palestinian leader. He supported the Egyptian revolution, but was often jailed for his Brotherhood ties. In Gaza he took part in fedayeen raids across the border, and broke with Egypt in 1957 when Nasser, dealing with the U.N. to end the Suez crisis, agreed to stop those raids.

The break with Nasser prompted Arafat to move to Kuwait. With friends in Palestine he formed Fatah, an organization independent of all Arab regimes and devoted strictly to liberation. It drew recruits and money from Palestinian refugees in the Gulf. After the 1967 catastrophe Fatah took over the P.L.O. from the enfeebled Nasser and made it an instrument of Palestinian nationalism. Its first model was Algeria's liberation from France through the barrel of a gun. When that failed for lack of a big popular uprising the P.L.O. adopted the global guerilla warfare that drew much attention from anti-western hijackings, bombings and assassinations. This warfare won a few friends but no territory, and provoked worldwide disgust, even in Palestine, over the murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympic Games in 1972.

At the same time, the P.L.O. seized control of refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, where it mounted border provocations that served the interests of the P.L.O. rather than the host countries. It even threatened their sovereignty. In Jordan the Black September hijackings in 1970 prompted King Hussein to mount a stiff military defense against the P.L.O. The Ba'ath regimes in Syria and Iraq threatened to move in on Jordan in support of the P.L.O., but were discouraged by the U.S. Mediterranean fleet and the Israeli air force.

In Lebanon the P.L.O. used the refugee camps as bases for attacks on Israel, whose indiscriminate retaliation split Lebanon into P.L.O. sympathizers, mainly Muslim, and antagonists, mainly Christian. Civil war broke out in 1975, a war in which the P.L.O. had little stake but much responsibility. The civil war killed tens of thousands: Lebanese Christians, Druzes and Muslims, and Palestinians caught in the crossfire. It upset the equilibrium of the Arab world, and ended in 1989 when the Arab League brought the belligerents together and restored the prewar status quo.

In 1982 Israel moved from retaliation to a full-scale invasion of Lebanon. The intent was to crush the P.L.O. military once and for all. Israel drove beyond the camps in the south and cornered the P.L.O. forces in Beirut. In a deal negotiated by U.S. diplomats between Palestinians and Israelis the P.L.O. forces sailed to Tunis, which became Arafat's new headquarters.

This defeat revealed the limits of P.L.O. military power, but failed to crush the resistance, which burst out in 1987 in an intifada led by stone-throwing boys in the occupied West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli response was divided. Settlers in the occupied territories wanted the military to suppress the locals, but many Israelis thought it was time to negotiate. Palestinians talked of reexamining the Peel partition of 1937. After the 1967 war the U.N. rewrote the Peel formula as Security Council Resolution 242, which called for an exchange of land for peace. At the General Assembly in 1974 Arafat himself said the P.L.O. would settle in Palestine for a little homeland of their own. Inside the P.L.O., factions fought about goals. Hamas, the heirs of the Muslim Brothers, wanted no Jewish state. An exile group, the Palestine National Council, favored a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

As the 1990s progressed both sides in the Arab-Israeli debate seemed to move toward a two-state solution. The latter proposal gained ground in the Oslo Accord of 1993, when President Clinton saw Arafat and Israeli prime minister Rabin shake hands on the White House lawn: Israel would allow limited self-rule in the occupied territories in return for an end to violence. Implementation ended when an ultra-orthodox Israeli zealot assassinated Rabin in 1995. Clinton restarted the negotiations in 2000 with Arafat and Ehud Barak, but the Camp David talks collapsed with each side blaming the other. Successors Bush and Sharon showed no real interest in bargaining with the Arabs.

The breakdown at Camp David sparked another intifada. Israel responded by reoccupying the cities vacated under the Oslo Accord and isolating Arafat in the West Bank town of Ramallah. The weapons of choice were suicide bombs, tanks and planes. The conflict killed about one thousand Israelis and three thousand Palestinians between 2000 and 2005. Arafat, who died following an illness in 2004, was succeeded by Mahmoud Abbas, an advocate of negotiation. The Palestinian Authority, successor to the P.L.O., joined both Israel and the U.S. in endorsing the two-state solution, but the two sides set terms that seemed uncongenial to a settlement in light of the passive role adopted by President Bush.

When Nasser died in 1970 he was succeeded by his vice president, Anwar Sadat, another Free Officer who had climbed the social ladder in the military. As president, Sadat rejected Nasser's Pan-Arabism as a negation of Egypt's unique pharaonic nationhood. He thought it more important to regain the Sinai than to retain a spiritual bond with the umma. He made overtures to Israel that broke the united front and made him despised among Arabs.

In 1972 Sadat made a splash when he expelled the 15,000 Russians at the backbone of Egypt's military. However, such overtures made little impression on Israel or President Nixon. He made a bigger splash on Yom Kippur in 1973. The Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal and advanced into the Sinai. The Syrians mounted a coordinated attack from the north that many thought beyond Arab capabilities, and struck the Israelis with a big tank offensive across the Golan Heights. The Israeli state was imperiled.

In concert with the Saudis, Sadat had arranged a powerful oil embargo on the West at a time when American oil production had fallen and Arabs could reduce their deliveries without reducing their income. Washington had to reconsider its support of Israel.

Sadat called the embargo off because he thought it less important for Arabs to gain power than to end Egypt's wars. To end those wars would require that Washington intervene diplomatically. On the battlefield the U.S. helped the Israelis turn the tide of war, and the Russians helped the other side. However, the two superpowers, anxious to avoid a conflict with each other, imposed a cease-fire and took the matter to the U.N., which reaffirmed (Resolution 338) the principle of land for peace first proposed in 1967. Both sides took heavy losses. Israel won, but Sadat achieved his goal: American commitment to a political settlement between Egypt and Israel.

In 1974 Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy separated the two hostile armies in the Sinai and provided two firsts: Israel's evacuation, and the Arabs' reoccupation of land taken in 1967. Egypt would reopen the canal and rebuild its riparian cities. More difficult were the Golan Heights, which Israel wanted as a buffer and Syria wanted as historic farmland. But the diplomats kept at it for 34 days, and finally arrived at an acceptable agreement that has kept the frontier peaceful ever since. Kissinger tried to encourage further negotiations among Israel, Jordan and Syria but got nowhere, perhaps because of rising pressure from settlers to keep the occupied territories. Sadat's persistence brought a second agreement: Israel would withdraw further into the Sinai, and Sadat would demilitarize the vacated area. From the U.S. Israel got Sinai II, an accord that assured Israel's status as the region's strongest military power, with no need to concede additional territory. Because Israel had no further incentive to bargain, Sadat tried to break the stalemate with a visit to Jerusalem in 1977 where he told the Israeli Knesset that his goal was a comprehensive peace. In 1979, after two years of bargaining led by President Carter, Israel and Egypt signed a far from comprehensive treaty that brought peace to Egypt but left the Palestinians under Israeli rule. Israel and the Arabs remained at war. Two years later Sadat was killed by Islamic nationalists in the Egyptian army. His crimes were apostasy and the peace he had made with Israel. The assassins were legatees of the Muslim Brotherhood, which Sadat had tried to restore to the political mainstream of Egypt. The Egyptian masses welcomed peace while feeling remorse over an immoral bargain that had brought reconciliation with Israel but no freedom to Palestine.

Sadat's murder in 1981 coincided with a big jump in radical Islamic nationalism throughout the Middle East. It began with Iran in 1979, when Ayatollah Khomenei returned from exile and seized control of the revolution that had overthrown the shah. Khomenei's intent was to found a Shi'a state, but the revolutionary motive was anti colonial.

The popular aversion to the West came from the British, whose protectorate after WW1 controlled the treasury, the army and the oil. In 1951 a democratic government under Muhammad Mosaddiq tried to nationalize the oil company, but Britain and the U.S., with major help from the C.I.A., conspired to frustrate Mosadiqq and replace him with the shah, Pahlavi. Oil wealth motivated the British, and the

Cold War fear of Soviet influence motivated the U.S. The increasingly despotic shah was despised by liberals and democrats, but Khomenei, with his secret network of agents and propagandists, was his worst foe. Exiled first to Iraq and then Paris, Khomenei on his return alarmed both moderate and secular Iranians, but a referendum overwhelmingly endorsed his Islamic constitution.

The revolution repudiated both the shah and his protector, America. That "great satan" received a humiliating defeat when Khomenei incited students to capture a "nest of spies," the American Embassy, and held its personnel hostage for 444 days. The example of Iran showed Arabs that a shari'a state was possible, American power notwithstanding. It showed too that Khomenei could equal or exceed the brutality of the shah as he executed thousands of Iranians for allegedly pro-shah or pro-Communist tendencies, and killed foreigners without limit in his effort to export his revolution.

In Iraq, Saddam called the revolution a Persian plot against Arab nationalism and a Shi'ite attack on Sunnis, his ruling minority. It was a clash of two nationalistic countries, Saddam's secular Western model against Khomenei's worldwide Islamic model.

Khomenei started the conflict between the two countries by repudiating their 1975 noninterference treaty. Saddam upped the ante in 1980 by invading Iran. Successful at first, the Iraqi army soon came to a halt. Iran drove them out with a counterattack, and seemed to outmatch the enemy, but also bogged down. Iraqi Shi'ites declined to join Khomenei as his allies.

The war went on for eight years, sometimes with chemical weapons, with as many as a million dead on the battlefield. The U.S. judged Khomeinei the more dangerous of the two leaders and provided major help to Iraq, but hedged with its scandalous "Irangate" shipments of arms to Iran. In 1988, with Iraq at the the end of its tether U.S. naval forces intervened against Iran in the waters of the Persian Gulf. The naval intervention, in combination with an international boycott, forced Khomenei to give in. He died a year later. His Islamic state survives, but has probably lost popularity. Outside Iran his Islamic nationalism has surged, and provides the edge of Arab hostility toward the West.

Afghanistan's turn came soon after Khomenei's triumphant return to Iran, at the end of a troubled decade when one Kabul regime had followed another. The country was thoroughly Islamic, but the countryside was ruled by an ethnic mix of hostile warlords with militias, spiced with pro-Communists and Islamic nationalists. In 1979 Russia invaded Afghanistan to prop up a pro-Soviet military junta that had seized power in 1978. The invasion forged the mutually hostile sects into a stronger force than the Russians had expected, and put the country on the Cold War map. The U.S. sent money and arms to the mujahadin, the holy warriors, who flocked in to fight the atheistic Russians. The aid briefly muted the anti-American vituperation then intrinsic to Arab nationalism.

Because Washington had expected only to hamper the Russians, their defeat and retreat in 1989 came as a surprise, as did the collapse of the Moscow regime a few months later. With the end of the Cold War the animosity between Arabs and the West reappeared, perhaps more intense than before and in direct confrontation with America, which had replaced Britain and France as the object of hate.

When the Russians left Afghanistan and the U.S. lost interest in it, the door opened wide to Islamic radicalism. The old militias, although flush with U.S. arms, were no match for the military offensive of the new radical army, the Taliban ("students"). The recruits came from the madrassas, the Islamic academies supported by the Saudis, of the wartime training camps. Under the Taliban rule of the 1990s men had to wear turbans and beards, pray five times a day, and keep the women indoors and covered with burqas. Afghans, grateful for peace, made no popular protest. Other veterans of the Afghan resistance spread through the Muslim world with their missionary message of Arab militance against the West. They were the heirs of the Muslim Brotherhood, messengers of the violence that marked the death of Anwar Sadat. One of them was Osama bin Laden, scion of a prominent Saudi family. Inside Afghanistan he organized and trained al-Qaeda to take on global missions in combative jihad against Christian power.

With the Cold War finished, Washington had a free hand in the Gulf, the world's greatest oil reservoir. But in the time between the fall of the shah and the Soviet collapse, Saudi Arabia was America's surrogate power in the Gulf. It was a friendly relation that Roosevelt had cultivated in WW2, to safeguard Saudi oil and provide a strategic air base at Dahran. Truman continued with military aid, and the Saudi government stood firm against Nasserism, partly out of inter-Arab rivalry, and partly out of aversion to Soviet atheism. The U.S. itself had reason to fear the roots of that aversion, a puritanical Wahabi Islam hostile to the West. In their turn, many Saudis were uneasy to be so intimate with infidels. Such imperfections were often set aside under Cold War pressures.

In 1979 Islamic warriors, Saudi fanatics inspired by Khomenei, seized the Great Mosque in Mecca and thousands of pilgrims, and denounced the royal family for religious laxity, high living and its relations with America. Weeks later the Sauds finished the bloody combat with public beheadings of 63 rebels, but emerged more attentive to Islamic piety. They also emerged unwilling to develop a standing army for the vacancy left by the shah, as such an army might turn on them. Let America provide our security. Mindful of the oil fields, America did just that.

In the 1990s the demise of the Soviet Union left Saddam Hussein as the only threat to American hegemony in the Gulf. After the Iraq-Iran war the U.S. and Iraq replaced their friendly demeanors with a mutual testiness that came to a head over Saddam's refusal to pay a war debt to Kuwait. Saddam thought the Iraqi blood spilled in the war should count against its monetary debt to Kuwait, but Kuwait disagreed. The U.S. had pledged to protect Kuwait, presumably against Khomenei, but Saddam thought the pledge was now void. His army seized Kuwait in August 1990 and may or may not have been poised to invade Saudi Arabia, which chose not to take a chance. President Bush proceeded to demonize Saddam and organized a Western coalition, plus Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia, to combat the transgression against a sovereign state. Some reports have it that Osama bin Laden offered 100,000 holy warriors so as to keep the infidel armies out, an offer the Saudi royals declined.

In February 1991 the coalition army, with U.N. endorsement, attacked Kuwait and soon routed the Iraqi forces. Washington decided not to bring Saddam down; he stayed in power for another decade. Under American cover, the Kurds set up an autonomous regime in the north. The Americans also encouraged a Shia uprising in the south, then let Saddam crush it. All during the 1990s American planes bombed Iraqi cities and military targets, and with U.N. approval enforced an economic embargo that caused much misery to Iraqis without jeopardizing Saddam, who grew more despotic, less popular and finally much detested. Then came 2001, with the second President Bush and his vow of regime change.

Saddam and bin Laden had a common enemy, the U.S., but the secular despot received no help from the theocrat, who made his feelings plain in a famous fatwa: "The ruling to kill Americans and their allies--civilian and military--is an individual duty for every Muslim, in order to liberate the al-Aqsa Mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Holy Mosque [in Mecca] from their grip and in order for their armies, defeated, to move out of all the lands of Islam." (Pp. 160-161.) The homeland must be cleared of Americans, the Saud rulers replaced with pure Islamists. His offensive included the bombing of New York's World Trade Center in 1993, American military installations in Saudi Arabia, embassies in Kenya and Tanzania, and a destroyer docked in Yemen--attacks that killed Christians, Jews and Muslims. The U.S. retaliated with missile attacks on targets in Afghanistan and Sudan that did little damage, but raised bin Laden's prestige and encouraged Islamic radicalization.

The al-Qaeda suicide attacks on September 11, 2001, were brilliantly organized and executed strikes at symbols of American civilization and military power, but did little long-term damage to the U.S. Aside from historic revenge, their service to Arabs or Islam remains a puzzle. President Bush and other Western leaders insist that the war is with terrorism, not Islam. Nevertheless, the breach between the Arab world and the West grew much wider with the 9/11 attacks, and now seems unlikely to narrow. Unable to find bin Laden in Afghanistan, U.S. forces leveled the Taliban regime and replaced it with a Western-style parliamentary state that has made little impression on the country's intrinsic divisions. Not satisfied there, Bush turned to Iraq as a dangerous possessor of weapons of mass destruction and collaborator with bin Laden as a spreader of terror. "Regime change" was the ticket, said Bush, whose claims received a skeptical hearing not only from Iraq's neighbors, but all traditional allies save Kuwait. Bush remained resolute. The Arab states saw the 1991 war as a defense of Arab sovereignty against an Arab aggressor, but the war of 2003 as old-style Western imperialism. And it was only Britain, the old imperialist foe, that lent major support in both wars.

Just before the American attack Iraqis viewed Saddam as their scoundrel to deal with, not America's. Many, both Arabs and non-Arabs, thought our real purpose was not to remove Saddam, but to safeguard oil, project global power and put an American face on the Middle East. Highly successful in the early battles, where technology prevailed, the American forces soon faced a guerrilla insurgency at which the Arabs have long excelled. Examples of Arab prowess include Faisal's defeat of the Turks in WW1, the French loss of Algeria in 1962, and the Afghan defeat of the Soviets.

The opposition has become a puzzle, with no central leadership and ambiguous goals. As the war progressed and American casualties rose, so did the mutual targeting of Sunnis and Shia. The common characteristic is Arab nationalism. Arabs themselves have delivered most of the punishment to innocent Iraqi civilians, but Arab nationalism continues to feed on reports of American abuses.

Yet, on the 2005 anniversary of the fall of the old regime, thousands marched in Baghdad with an eloquent shout: “No Saddam, no America.” Could any message be plainer?

Epilogue.

America's attempt to export her brand of democracy has been stymied by cultural barriers exemplified by the 2005 elections, where Iraqis voted mostly as Shia, Sunnis and Kurds, and not as individuals. It was a sectarian triumph in a democratic system, not unlike the American election of 1860, a triumph of regionalism followed by civil war. As Shia formed 60% of the population, Shia parties won overwhelmingly.

The Iraqi elections brought more instability, not less. The Kurds, sensing a chance to leave the Iraqi state the Allies had forced upon them after WW1, used their militia units inside the new Iraqi army to help establish a Kurdish sovereignty. Sunnis, the relatively secular minority that had long dominated Iraqi politics, were unwilling to accept their consignment to political irrelevance. The Shia, relatively disposed to theocratic rule, saw the election as a long awaited way to settle old scores. Both opposed the invasion, but the Shia, appreciating a political opportunity not available under Saddam, allowed the Sunnis to take the lead in anti-American resistance. As 2006 began it appeared that the Sunnis were rising to challenge the Americans, the Shia were applauding, and the Kurds were walking away. The main resistance, formerly al-Qaeda or Saddam diehards, was now the Sunni faction fighting for a place in the emerging political structure. Without a Sunni-Shia settlement, the conflict would only worsen.

President Bush seemed unaware of the strategic implications of a new Iraqi army: dominant Shia militias, commanded by clerics, in a disturbing similarity to Khomenei's Iran, with clerical rulers indifferent to political freedoms and women's rights. When the president told his fellow Americans that the elections signified a new sharing of American values, the alleged Iraqi values seemed as vaporous as the alleged weapons of mass destruction. Three years of war have shown that American leaders, often ignorant amateurs, have had no more success than their more professional British predecessors at spreading Western values among the Arabs. Large numbers of Iraqis denounce the Americans as crusaders, and the invasion has only widened the values gap.

The U.S. has had to learn that a colossus, even one without rival, has inherent limitations. In ignoring those limitations, the Bush administration has inflicted great wounds on America's interests. Many friends deplore our invasion of Iraq as a rejection of U.N. authority. Many deplore our self-exemption from international war crimes tribunals; our demand for special privileges in dealing with the environment; and our invocation of the war on terror as license for secret seizures of individuals within foreign borders.

After 9/11, our overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had widespread support. The White House, distracted by its designs on Iraq, allowed the Taliban to regroup, lost the chance to catch bin Laden and left the wobbly new Afghan democracy to its own fate. We filled Iraq with troops to fight an insurgency in which the enemy held the upper hand, a costly guerrilla war designed for the long bloody grind. On the positive side, this blunder may cost enough to discourage similar adventures in Syria and Iran. The blunders fill a dreary page of occupation blues: massive destruction of the infrastructure; shortfalls in food, medical care, fuel, water and electric power; recruiting for the insurgency by our disbanding of army and police forces; rescinding the new press freedom when the press proved too critical; and our call for human rights followed by abuse of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The occupation was neither competent nor the necessary tool against terror that President Bush claimed. As evidence, witness the subsequent terrorist attacks in London, Madrid, Amman and Bali, and a declining sense of security among Americans at home. Religious extremism surged as Iran replaced a moderate president with a militant Islamist. Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood became the major opposition in parliament. Hezbollah, a party of anti-Western Shia, gained two cabinet seats in Lebanon. American-led elections encouraged Shia extremists to demand an Islamic state of Iraq.
Washington might have slowed the momentum by moving to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon had seemed to endorse a "road map" to old-style partition and an independent Palestinian state. But Israel continued to rule Palestinians, the conflict raged on, and Arabs held America responsible. Palestine became more ominous with the advent of Hamas, a descendant of the Muslim Brothers, which rejected the existence of Israel. Hamas gained even more traction with Palestinian voters when the U.S. placed it on the terrorist boycott list and Israel tried to bar it from politics.

Hindsight shows that Bush would have served both the U.S. and her standing among Arabs had he limited his retaliation to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Instead, he chose to attack

Iraq and threaten Syria with no credible evidence of either nation's link to 9/11. Now he threatens Iran. He may deny any quarrel with Islam, but Arabs necessarily see our attack as part of the old Islamic conflict with the West.

Viorst sees no quick way to excise the old antagonism. He thinks the schism has little to do with worship, but much to do with slow cultural drift, as one side moved toward humanism, secularism and materialism and the other stayed fixed on community, worship and the hereafter. And superior Western arms served an imperial exploitation that peaked in the twentieth century and continues today. Each side can deeply harm the other. However, as both sides have suffered greatly since the Twin Towers fell, clearly both should profit from a mutual effort to bridge their divide.

The American overreaction in Iraq has not made us safer. Research indicates that al-Qaeda terrorism aims less to spread fundamentalism than to drive American forces from Arab land, the current host of bases in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Yemen and Egypt--all sources of incitement. But whatever the American public might desire, President Bush intends no reduction, but further global expansion of our military reach. Americans will find peace a long time coming if Bush must have his viable democratic regime in Iraq: They must first defeat the insurgency, then clear the political mess the invasion created. And Americans dislike recurrent war.

As 2006 begins the greatest danger is a full-scale civil war even bloodier than now, with Sunnis fighting Shia and maybe Kurds. Such a war could spread beyond the borders of Iraq, destabilize the region and engage Muslim nations that truly have weapons of mass destruction. The president's strategy, uninformed by the dynamics of Iraq and the Arab world, has little prospect of success. The Iraqi leaders ignore our pleas to resolve their differences. Unable to control the disorder, Americans can kill but cannot stop the killing, and can neither win nor withdraw.

A solution might come if the president turned to the Arabs for help. Arab states understand the reverberations of a shattered Iraq. The Arab League, often weak, has risen before to pull one of theirs from the brink. The state was Lebanon, where Christians, Druzes, Sunnis, Shia and Palestinian refugees had butchered one another since the civil war began in 1975. In 1983 President Reagan sent both a peace plan and a contingent of Marines, but the Lebanese, fearful of imperialism, rejected the president--who brought the Marines home after 241 died in a suicide bombing. At times it seemed that partition was the only way out, but the factions' common vision of a unified nation always trumped their factionalism.

In 1989 the Arab League appointed six foreign ministers to devise an accord, which an Arab League summit endorsed. The summit gave the task of forging an agreement among the Lebanese to the Saudi and Moroccan kings and the president of Algeria. This troika put Lakhdar Ibrahimi, an Algerian diplomat, in charge. The Lebanese welcomed him, and listened Arab to Arab. The first results were a cease-fire among the warring factions, and a Lebanese parliament meeting in a Saudi town sponsored by the troika, with the Saudi foreign minister (Saud al-Faisal) presiding. Within three weeks all factions had deserted the positions they had sworn never to surrender, and signed an accord based on the summit's draft. There was no perfect ending, but Lebanon has returned to parliamentary government and a relatively normal daily life.

There could be a lesson here for President Bush. At a 2005 meeting in Cairo the Arab League made appropriate overtures, and insurgent voices in Iraq have indicated interest. Sunni insurgents have clashed over the issue with foreign insurgents, mostly al-Qaeda. Some of Bush's officers have indicated that they would prefer a negotiated political settlement to a long, unwinnable fight.
Foreigners stayed out of the negotiations over Lebanon; the end of the civil war was an Arab triumph.
The choice is up to the president. Will he defer to the Arabs in exchange for peace in Iraq and a stable Middle East? Will he pour more fuel on the fire?