

How Nationalism Helped Development of New States in the Interwar Period

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Introduction

Interwar is known as a period “Between the Wars” from a broad perspective in the history of the 20th century. This period is known as the period of the First World War and the Second World War (1918 to 1939). This era represented a significant amount of changes worldwide. The understandings of this period subsequently were shadowed by the period of the Great Depression, an unparalleled global economic downfall that relentlessly impaired many of the world’s major economies [1].

This period of time occurred with the upsurge of communism. The former German and Ottoman Empires were ripped to shreds, and the German and Ottoman Empire’s colonies were distributed among the Allies. Iraq and Egypt were able to get independence. The contemporary states of the Middle East were built after the enormous downfall of the great Ottoman Empire. The enormous collapse of the Ottoman Empire left the Turks and Arabs ready for government in newly formed states, although they were unrehearsed with the not-so-easy statehood system^[2]. The social and economic improvements of the Ottoman Empire both left a significant heritage of statehood in the Arab world. Arab people were prepared for statehood, but they had insignificant knowledge of diplomacy. In Ottoman times, consensual associations with European countries had been facilitated through Istanbul. Arabs established territory of a shared state instead of states that are distinct with their own boundaries.

Nationalist movements materialized within the boundaries of these new states in disagreement with the unfair colonial rule. This aspect would keep the Arab world stressed between a widely held aspect of Arab unity and an authenticity of nation-state nationalism strengthened by nationalist efforts for an independent state. After independence, they were separated by squabbling and factionalism. The newly formed Arab states of the Middle East have been recognized as extraordinarily stable, but the other aspect of their foundation is the birth of many of the conflicts that have distressed the region for far too long.

Discussion

Nationalism was the key needed to unlock new states in the Middle East. Nationalism was the key driving force behind people. These extreme patriotic feelings enable them to make any kind of sacrifice in order to create their new homeland, where they can live their life according to their own principles. The winds of change have finally hit the Middle East in a big way during the interwar

period, resulting in the making of new states. The Islamic line of thinking in people of the Middle East characterized an effort to settle a sense of eternal Islamic individuality and community. They hoped to finally introduce educational, economic, legal, and political reforms^[3]. Islamists wanted to build their awareness of the major characteristics of modernization. But they also had their focus on their firm obligation to Islam. People of the Middle East openly told the world that Islam had continuously been a religion that perfected reason instead of opposing it. Nationalists in other countries of the Middle East, like Iran, Syria, and Egypt, confronted similar predicaments in various social, sectarian, tribal, and ethnic issues, as tensions among pan-Arabism and Islamism and state patriotism^[4]. Generally, the prospect of nationalism reproduced some of these uncertainties and reservations.

During the 19th century, the intellectual movement labeled as Arabism emerged from the concept of Islamic modernism. Seeds of Islam had been planted among the people of the Middle East, and they are flourishing. This method is alleged to have a likelihood of turning in the direction of Arab nationalism, particularly if the Ottoman Empire remains persistent and incompetent^[5]. The likelihood of substituting the Ottoman Empire with an Arab caliphate undoubtedly remained a huge possibility for early Arabists.

Christian Arab nationalists, Islamic modernists, and Arabists from the Middle East were very critical of the Ottoman government and its inefficiency in tackling various socio-economic problems. They were also very critical of the double-faced character and inconsistency of its modernization determination. Some Arab supporters of Ottomanism were in favor of a decentralized, federal system of government, which would eventually result in an enlightened administrative order. This method of governance would allow the people of the Middle East to enjoy a substantial degree of home rule so that they could run the country the way they wanted to and also gain almost equal authority with Turks^[6].

Arab nationalism started to take form as a broader radical movement after World War I. In competition with Islam and nation-state nationalism as alternative political ideologies, the influence of Arab nationalism slowly spread throughout the Arab world. Aspiring to an independent Arab state or a federation of states from the Arabian Peninsula to the Fertile Crescent, Arabist ambitions conflicted with the postwar policies of France and Great Britain in the Middle East. European powers had divided the region into mandates, protectorates, and nominally independent states, all of which were strongly influenced by their European patrons⁷.

The perpetuation of these artificial political divisions imposed by the European powers encouraged the evolution of nationalism. On the one hand, the inhabitants of the newly created states unsurprisingly initiated to show the interests they represented and started to grow attachments as well. On the other hand, this unrealized, powerful, and ideal ambition for harmony and accord among all of the people in the Middle East remained^[7]. These conflicting nationalist sentiments first surfaced during the interwar years in the newly created nation-states of the Fertile Crescent, namely, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria; however, they were mirrored in later years in other Arab lands of Egypt, Morocco, and Oman, etc.

In the interwar period, Arab nationalism received its first major challenge in the form of Zionism, a competing ethnic nationalism. Created to foster the establishment of a Jewish state, Zionism was based on the idea that Jews, wherever they resided, constituted a single people. The tension between the conflicting sentiments of Arab and nation-state nationalism continued in World War II (1939–1945). On the one hand, there was widespread recognition throughout the Arab world that Arabs shared a culture, history, and language, commonalities that might be used to create a joint political expression and enable them to overcome the fragmentation and weakness that characterized their recent history.

At the same time, the considerable variation in the origins and evolution of nationalism in the widely scattered areas of the Middle East must be acknowledged. The development of Arab nationalism in this area rested less on the revolt itself and more on the subsequent imposition of European mandates. In Iraq, nationalism was more anti-European than anti-Ottoman. In Libya, nationalism, anti-imperialism, and pan-Islamic loyalties were closely associated following the failure in 1923 of efforts to win political autonomy. In Egypt, the nationalist Wafd Party, with a goal of complete and total independence, was the governing party for much of the so-called liberal period, which ended with a military coup in 1952. The interwar period also witnessed the creation of The Society of Muslim Brothers in Egypt ^[8].

As the Ottoman Empire began to be torn into pieces, Turkish nationalists under the prolific leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk fashioned a basis for the newly built state of Thrace and Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk went on board with a confrontational movement of Westernization in Turkey. He altered the script from Arabic to Latin fonts. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk worked on a new law that gave women the basic right to vote. He was so westernized in his approach that he even ordered his men to stop wearing the fez and order them to wear European hats. Generally, Most Turks are very proud of the concept of the Westernizing and nationalist legacy that was introduced by the vision of Atatürk. With time, some amendments have been made to the more extreme aspects of new laws. With the formation of an organized independent state in Anatolia, Turkish nationalism mainly shed the visions of pan-Turkic unity that had been articulated by some of its early supporters. Endorsed and reified by the popular government of the new Turkish state in the 1920s and 1930s during the long ascendancy of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, trust in the hypothesis of a Turkish nation positioned in Anatolia progressively dispersed beyond the exclusive circles in which Turkish nationalism had been developed. The decade after Atatürk, there has been an exhaustive debate among Turks as to the positioning of the Turkish state, particularly over the query of the part of faith in public life. Many Turks had doubts about how to balance their faith and the concept of nationalism. The one fractional exclusion is Turkey's marginalized Kurdish-speaking population, among whom demands for political and cultural autonomy appeared in the later decades of the twentieth century and, as a result, created a persistent civil war in Turkey in the 1990s.

Iran has never been able to find the right balance between nationalism and westernization. More often than not, it is stuck between Westernization and nationalism. In the early part of the 20th century, the Russians and the British separated Iran into spheres of political influence, but it was

never officially part of a European territory. In Iran after World War I, Reza Shah Pahlavi, a prominent military commander, took over the reins of power. In 1925, Reza Pahlavi's dynasty urged Iranian nationalism on the country's many ethnic minorities to facilitate the building of a modern state^[9]. He was an aggressive Westernizer, hoping to create a sense of modernism in his people, but his reshuffles and improvements did not take root as deeply as that of the much-famed Mustafa Kemal Atatürk^[10].

The primary result of all this was the formation of a well-off and prosperous Westernized class separated away from the general masses of Iran, which remembered their closer ties to Islam and also the traditional culture of Iran. Despite all this struggle, many of the same resentments toward colonization and expansionism emerged in Iran. The Pahlavi Shah was supported by Western powers openly due to his modernized way of thinking. As time passed, political and religious alliances and movements were developed to resist Western culture and influence in Iran.

Conclusion

Coming out of the dreaded Ottoman experience, the Arabs aimed for national independence through various hardships and struggles. Nationalism and Arab self-determination were the main driving forces behind their efforts. All their struggle was built around the general concept of nationalism and pride. That concept of nationalism motivated them to be superior to others; Arabs Promised a new directive of international relations with all the countries. But that wasn't the case. The Palestine catastrophe brought to light Arab weaknesses in the global arena and in local affairs. Politics of Arabs were predominantly engrossed in getting freedom from the strict colonial rule, they were not focused on economic and social aspects of their land. The newly built Arab states had no experience with the worldwide order for so long as their foreign masters oversaw all of their state and foreign affairs. As a result, the divided interests triumphed over bigger Arab benefits, which permitted the colonial rule, and even Israel, to create a fight among the Arab states and have them play against each other. The way the Middle East was molded in the war years created many stable welfare states that have recognized themselves all across the world. However, it also gave rise to persistent complications that have distressed the Middle East region and created a barrier to world peace for far too long. The most noticeable example is Palestine, where the opposing national claims have made the Arab-Israeli conflict a permanent feature of the Middle East region. The choice to build a state of Ottoman provinces of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul broke the much-famed assurance of a state specific to the Kurdish people. As a result of these, Kurdish people living in countries like Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq have eras of extreme civil war and nationalist distress. The occurrence of a newly built state system in the Middle East is thus a history of both destabilizing conflicts and the formation of stable welfare states.

End Notes

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