

BRITISH AND FRENCH IMPACTS ON THE MIDDLE EAST: THREE PHASES OF INFLUENCE, 1905 TO 2005

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Britain and France have had huge impacts on the Middle East over the past century. My aim during the next third of an hour will be to put their roles into a meaningful perspective for you. To do so, I have divided the time period 1905 to 2005 into three phases, namely Colonialism, Neo-Colonialism, and Euro-Med, which might be the start of Post-Colonialism. In addition, I have selected three people to characterize these phases: T. E. Lawrence (better known as Lawrence of Arabia), Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Yassir Arafat.

Even though I am teaching my 30th course on the Middle East, I know that I will still learn a lot this semester. That is because the region is dynamic, ever-changing, and always of human interest. This whole region of 16 to 22 countries, depending on how you define it, stretches from Morocco in northwestern Africa to Pakistan in South Asia, from Turkey in the north to Yemen in the south. It comprises a wide array of people all under heavy influence of three closely-linked monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It comprises important resources, such as petroleum and people. In fact, female prime ministers have led three of its countries: Israel, Pakistan, and Turkey.

Now, I will turn to Phase 1, *Colonialism*, covering 1905 to 1945, four decades known especially for their ten years of global warfare (1914 to 1918 and 1939 to 1945). The sun never set on a British empire that had moved into Egypt in 1882, controlled much of the western Persian Gulf, and ran Iran's petroleum industry for 45 years after discovering oil there in 1908. Iran's last Shah wrote that "the English always talk about the merits of democracy, but found it perfectly normal to dictate how Iranian elections should be held."

The primary reason for British imperialism was to protect Britain's access to its giant colony, India, which included present-day Pakistan and Bangladesh as well. Victory in World War I gave the Brits control of more territory, namely, three Fertile Crescent mandates: Palestine (now Israel), Jordan, and Iraq. British success in the Great War can be attributed partially to T. E. Lawrence, my phase one person. Thomas Edward Lawrence was born on August 15, 1888 in north Wales and died on May 19, 1935. His persuasive abilities with local Arabs helped to convince them to revolt against the Ottomans. In Aqaba, now in southern Jordan, he led Arabs to a victory against Ottomans who expected an approach from the sea. Lawrence had studied history and archaeology at Oxford, leaving for the Middle East after graduation.

France entered the 20th century in control of three Arab entities: Algeria (an overseas department represented in the National Assembly), Morocco, and Tunisia—

often referred to collectively as the Maghreb. World War I success gave France control of two other Arab polities: Lebanon and Syria.

As of 1920, then, the Brits and French held political control together with economic and cultural influence in 16 of the 17 colonized Middle Eastern entities. The other one, Libya, fell to Italian control in 1932.

While Britain granted nominal independence to Egypt in 1922, it still had 400,000 troops there 23 years later at the end of World War II. In contrast, Britain acknowledged the difficulty of administering Iraq by setting it free in 1932.

Phase 2, *Neo-colonialism*, lasted for 45 years from 1946 to 1991. The fact that British India attained independence in 1947 as the two countries of Pakistan and India symbolized the end of empire for Britain. Breaking free were nine Middle Eastern British colonies: three in the 1940s (Jordan, Pakistan, and Israel), three in the 1950s and 1960s (Sudan, Kuwait, and Aden or South Yemen), and three in 1971 (Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates). The French lost their five colonies more quickly than the British, in 16 years, and Libya broke free from Italy in 1951.

Nationalism had more to do with Third World independence than any other ideology. Break free first, then figure out how to govern later. So Palestine faced deaths of British occupiers by Jewish terrorists, while Algeria saw killings of rapacious French soldiers by Arab terrorists involved in an eight-year battle for independence.

The U.S. and Soviet Union as Cold War rivals filled the power vacuum in the Middle East. No events symbolized this transition more clearly than the success of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, my phase two person. Born in Alexandria on January 15, 1918, he studied history and followed a military career until his death on September 28, 1970. He eventually became renowned for designing the *coup* against King Farouk, who went into exile. As an advocate of Arab unity, he became a symbol of Arab nationalism. In 1956, he nationalized the British-French-owned Suez Canal, through which two-thirds of Europe's oil was transported. Then he received superpower support from Eisenhower and Khrushchev after Israel, Britain, and France invaded his country in October, 1956. The forced retreat of the Brits and French signaled a new kind of colonialism: economic influence of major proportions as opposed to physical control.

Phase 3, *Euro-Med*, began in 1991. It has been epitomized by heavy roles for non-state actors, whether they happen to be terrorist groups or international organizations. Even so, politico-military intervention by the U.S. has generated confusion about the future direction of the region as a whole.

I chose Yassir Arafat to epitomize this phase. Born in Cairo on August 24, 1929, he died on November 11, 2004. His name means "easy" or "no problem." Yassir became a student leader while studying engineering in Cairo. Later, he helped to create Fatah, a Palestinian group known in the late 1960s for hijacking airplanes in order to raise funds. He helped to initiate the two Palestinian intifadas that resulted this year in Israeli

removal of its settlers from occupied Gaza. For the phase three person, other people might have chosen the infamous leader of *al Qaeda*.

British-French influence today in the Middle East is seen most readily in continued widespread use of the English and French languages, especially in teaching many university classes. Of more long-lasting impact, though, is the ongoing Anglo-French role in three international organizations working toward a Mediterranean Community that will link southern Europe with North Africa and the Middle East. These organizations are the European Union (EU, a 25-member economic body), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, a 26-country alliance), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, a 55-member pan-European/Anglo-American grouping). While the U.S. participates actively in NATO and the OSCE, it does not belong to the EU.

Even as the U.S. presses unilaterally for more and more politico-military influence in the Middle East, Britain and France place primary emphasis on economic investments. Whereas the U.S. participates in decision-making within NATO and the OSCE, it must try to influence the EU from the outside. Two of the top four powers in the European Union are Britain and France. They have provided support for construction of a tunnel linking Europe with Arab North Africa. It will go from near Tarifa, Spain to near Tangier, Morocco.

As we continue to move through this Euro-Med phase during the next 20 to 30 years, expect to see more and more external involvement by non-state actors. Whether they will be private groups promoting tourism or public organizations fostering development, they will enable Britain and France to exert leadership in a much more subtle fashion than before.

Thank you. I encourage you to contact me at cbarber@usi.edu.
