

HIST343: Modern Islam

Faculty of Arts and Sciences

School of Humanities

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Marker's Comments: 88%

This is an excellent essay in answer to the topic, though I found it almost overly dense at times (a mine of information without, perhaps, enough narrative linkage). Another minor point of style is that you might have linked it again to the Akbar Ahmed statement in the conclusion.

Overall though, impressively researched and collated.


Comment [d1]: For a formal essay in history, it is better not to use headings

1. Assignment Question

Akbar Ahmed characterises the encounter between Europe and the Muslim world between 1800 and 1960 as an 'encounter of the worst kind'. In what broad ways was the Middle-Eastern region in particular affected by the Western imperialist presence?

2. Synopsis

Middle Eastern leaders modernised their Empires in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a means to guard against the European threat. In doing so they exposed themselves to the international market and inadvertently handed over power to Europeans. During the Mandate period of the twentieth century European nations carved up former empires into new nations

without considering the effect on local ethnic populations, causing lasting damage. 

3. Essay

3.1 Introduction

Between 1800 and 1960 the Middle East entered a period of western domination, the effects of which are still felt today. With the coming of the industrial revolution, the balance of power tipped towards the west. Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and Russian victories over Persia in the decade that followed demonstrated western advances.¹ Middle Eastern rulers realised that change was required for protection against the European threat. Mansfield calls the subsequent modernising of the Middle East 'Defensive Developmentalism', encompassing military, bureaucratic and economic reform.² Defensive Developmentalism in turn opened Middle Eastern economies to the world markets. In the period following World War One the Middle East was placed under European Mandates that created new nations out of the fallen Ottoman Empire. This essay will study examples of Middle Eastern military and

¹ Cyrus Masroori, 'European Thought in Nineteenth-Century Iran: David Hume and Others', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 61, no. 4, October 2000, pp. 658.

² Peter Mansfield, *The Arabs*, London, 1992, p. 201.

bureaucratic modernising, and its European influence. It will examine how Middle Eastern economies were exposed to foreign capital and international market forces. Finally, the creation of new borders and nations under the Mandates will be investigated, revealing one of the longest lasting conflicts in the modern world. ✓

3.2 Modernisation

Under Mehmet Ali, Egypt reformed its military along European lines. Ali sent many of his military to Europe to train in, and invited Europeans to instruct in, new military technologies.³ Ali introduced conscription in 1823 and reorganised the economy in order to support his army.⁴ He established large agricultural monopolies which supplied his army and provided cash crops to trade for weaponry with Europeans. These weapons were duplicated in local workshops.⁵ Before the 1840 and 1841 Treaties of London ousted Ali from greater Syria, Egypt's army numbered in excess of 130,000.⁶ The Tanzimat reforms led Ottoman military modernising. Reform architect Mustafa Reshid established state run training facilities along European lines.⁷ Conscription was also introduced, replacing reliance on forces from provincial notables. The army grew from 24,000 in 1837 to 120,000 in the 1880s.⁸ Unlike the Egyptians, Ottoman domestic industry was not as advanced and the Ottomans relied primarily on imported weaponry from Britain, France and Germany.⁹ In Persia the Qajars also attempted limited military reform. As well as French, Italian and Austrian military schools, the Cossack Brigade in 1879 trained elite troops modelling the Russian cavalry.¹⁰ Across the Middle East new troops were being trained with modern European weapons, all under the supervision of European advisors. ✓

Comment [d2]: Why? Some introductory sentences needed here – apart from your intro paragraph.

³ Roy Anderson, Robert F Seibert and Jon G Wagner, *Politics and Change in the Middle East*, 8th Edition, New Jersey, 2007, p. 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵ John Dunn, 'Egypt's Nineteenth-Century Armaments Industry', *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 61, no. 2, April 1997, p. 232.

⁶ Joel Beinlin, 'Ottoman reform and European imperialism, 1839–1907', in *Workers and peasants in the modern Middle East*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 45.

⁷ Michael Provence, 'Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Middle East', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, May 2011, p. 207.

⁸ Donald Quataert, 'The Nineteenth Century', in *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, New York, 2000, p. 63.

⁹ Jonathan Grant, 'The sword of the Sultan: Ottoman arms imports, 1854–1914', *The Journal of Military History*, vol. 66, no. 1, January 2002, p. 10.

¹⁰ Stephanie Cronin, 'Importing Modernity: European Military Missions to Qajar Iran', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 50, no. 1, January 2008, p. 201.

Defensive Developmentalism in the Ottoman Empire extended to bureaucracy. Under Tanzimat, the Ottoman state expanded its role supplanting traditional provincial and religious institutions. Ministries of trade and commerce, health, education and public works were established.¹¹ Centralisation of bureaucracy was organised along European lines and government extended its services to hospitals, secular schools including agricultural schools, railways and telegraph lines.¹² European skills and languages were imperative for officials within the bureaucracy.¹³ Centralisation of Bureaucracy led to increased revenue from taxation. Under the 1839 Rose Garden Decree** the government abolished tax farmers and directed tax revenues to the royal treasury.¹⁴ The 1856 Hatt-I Humayun Decree** advocated equality. Though inspired by nationalist ideals of the French Revolution, it was more than just a decree of 'patriotism'.¹⁵ Arab Christians had profited from the Capitulatory system** enjoying tax exemptions allowing them to buy and sell goods at lower prices than Muslim merchants.¹⁶ This made Christians ideal contacts for European traders wishing to trade with the Ottoman Empire.¹⁷ The decree attempted to ensure that non-Muslims were brought back under Ottoman legal systems.¹⁸ Though bureaucratic reform strengthened the Ottoman Empire, it was inspired by, and indirectly invited, European influence.

For these - **

Comment [d3]: ** - Ideally, in an essay, terms are explained. You assume knowledge on part of the reader – you should explain the situation (though it is hard to do so with a word constraint as is in place for this assignment).

¹¹ Quataert, 'The Nineteenth Century', p. 62.

¹² Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, 'Overview of the Nineteenth Century', in *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, ed. Halil Inalcik and Donald Quataert, Cambridge, 1994, p. 765.

¹³ Quataert, 'The Nineteenth Century', p. 62.

¹⁴ *The Hatt-i Sharif of Gulhane*, reproduced in James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, New York, 2005, p. 149.

¹⁵ *The Islahat Fermani*, reproduced in James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, New York, 2005, pp. 151.

¹⁶ P Brummett, R R Edgar, N J Hackett, G F Jewsbury, M Silverberg, A M Taylor, N M Bailkey, C J Lewis, W T Wallbank, 'Africa and the Middle East, 1800-1914', in *Civilization Past and Present*, New Jersey, 2003, p. 24.

¹⁷ Quataert, 'The Nineteenth Century', p. 67.

¹⁸ Peter Mansfield, 'The Struggle for Reform, 1840 - 1900', in *A History of the Middle East*, London, 1992, p. 64.

3.3 Economy and International Markets

As part of the modernisation, Europeans introduced Middle Eastern economies to the world market through exports of cash crops and raw materials. Syrian silk and Anatolian wool were prized commodities, while Egyptian cotton was especially important for British textile mills.¹⁹ In dealing with Mehmet Ali's presence in greater Syria, the Ottomans signed the 1838 Balta Liman treaty, abolishing local monopolies and ending protectionist policies on exports. Foreign countries importing Ottoman goods paid a mere three percent tariff.²⁰ As well as securing Middle Eastern investment, European powers actively worked against local industry. The British in Egypt tried to block local textile mills fearing competition against their own.²¹ Free trade encouraged the import of superior and less expensive products driving out existing handicrafts and merchants.²² The Europeans had established a firm foothold in Middle Eastern economic affairs. ✓

Europeans economic dominance was assured through foreign loans and the financial crisis of the 1870s. The Suez Canal project and cotton boom during the American Civil War demonstrate European economic dominance. The Suez Canal contract stipulated that Egypt supply the labour and retain a mere seven-sixteenths share in the Canal while Frenchmen Ferdinand de Lesseps and other foreign investors fronted the capital.²³ Foreign loans heavily favoured the Europeans and on average interests rates of ten to twelve percent were common.²⁴ During the Canal's construction, the blockade of southern cotton fields during the American Civil War drove cotton prices up. The Egyptian governor again utilised foreign loans to finance the building of infrastructure for the cultivation of cotton including converting existing agricultural farms over to cotton.²⁵ By replacing agriculture with cotton, Egypt imported food. When the American Civil War ended, cotton prices plummeted, followed by a general fall in agricultural prices in 1871.²⁶ With the onset of the depression in

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65

²⁰ Article IV, *Commercial Convention (Balta Liman): Britain and the Ottoman Empire*, reproduced in James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 148.

²¹ James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, New York, 2005, p. 95.

²² Anderson, et al., *Politics and Change in the Middle East*, p. 44.

²³ Beinin, 'Ottoman reform', p. 65.

²⁴ Inalcik and Quataert, 'Overview of the Nineteenth Century', p. 773.

²⁵ Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 78.

²⁶ Mansoor Moaddel, 'Shi'i Political Discourse and Class Mobilization in the Tobacco Movement of 1890-1892', *Sociological Forum* 7, no. 3, September 1992, p. 457.

1873, Egyptian debt reached over £60,000,000 and in 1876 Egypt declared bankruptcy.²⁷ Britain bought out the Egyptian stake in the Suez Canal and European creditors were called in to oversee foreign debt payments in the form of the Caisse del la Dette in Egypt, and the Public Debt Administration for the Ottomans.²⁸ Courtesy of the international market, Europe had a stranglehold on Middle Eastern finances. ✓

In Persia the Qajars hoped for modernisation and revenue via the granting of concessions. In 1872 the Shah granted the British Baron Julius de Reuter the right to build infrastructure, from railroads to irrigation works, and exploit natural minerals and forests for a period of seventy years for a mere £40,000, and sixty percent of profits on customs.²⁹ Internal and Russian pressure forced the abandonment the plan, costing £40,000 in indemnities.³⁰ Sales of concessions continued with the 1890 Tobacco Concession to British Major G. F. Talbot over a monopoly on tobacco for a period of fifty years. The asking price of the concession was £15,000, a quarter of annual profits, and five percent dividend.³¹ Merchants and Islamic clerics boycotted tobacco, again forcing cancellation, and another £500,000 in indemnities.³²

Desperate Persian leaders were prepared to sell their nation for the sake of easy revenue. ✓

In the twentieth century oil was the most pressing economic commodity. In 1901 British-Australian William Knox D'Arcy was granted a concession by the Persian Shah for the exploitation of petroleum in Persia for a period of sixty years.³³ In 1908 oil was struck and the British owned Anglo-Persian Oil Company was founded.³⁴ Persia at the time was sandwiched between British and Russian interests, and to guarantee the flow of oil the two powers concluded the 1907 Anglo-Russian Conference. Persia was split into a northern Russian zone, and south-eastern British zone.³⁵ The Persians were not included in negotiations. Likewise in Iraq oil was discovered in 1927. The European and American owned Turkish Petroleum

²⁷ Anderson, et al., *Politics and Change in the Middle East*, p. 49.

²⁸ Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 92.

²⁹ Moaddel, 'Shi'i Political Discourse', p. 456.

³⁰ Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 85.

³¹ Moaddel, 'Shi'i Political Discourse', p. 459.

³² Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 85.

³³ Article I, *The d'Arcy Oil Concession*, reproduced in James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, New York, 2005, p. 154.

³⁴ Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East*, p. 86.

³⁵ Michael Axworthy, 'Oil, battleships and revolution', *Spectator Business*, vol. 1, May 2008, p. 51.

Company was granted concessions over Iraqi oil by King Feisal in 1925.³⁶ As with the Persians before, Iraq had sold its most precious commodity to foreign powers. ✓

3.4 New Borders and Nations

European powers distributed Middle Eastern territories amongst themselves without local consultation. During 1915-1916 British High Commissioner Henry McMahon negotiated with the Sherif of Mecca Amir Hussein to organise an Arab revolt against the Ottomans.³⁷ In return for their help the agreement stated 'Great Britain is prepared to recognise... the independence of the Arabs in all regions...' including Mersina, Alexandretta and portions of Syria.³⁸ At the same time the British, French and Russians concluded the Sykes-Picot agreement whereby the same territories were carved up amongst them, contradicting the McMahon-Hussein Agreement.³⁹ Neither the Amir Hussein nor his representatives were ever part of negotiations. European powers carved up maps of the Middle East at will with little or no consultation of local interests. ✓

The Europeans continued their policy of nation building without consideration of ethnic groupings. As reprisal against Feisal's 1920 uprising against the French in Syria, a significant slice of Syrian land was allocated to Lebanon. Much of this land included Muslim Arabs, leading to violence against the delicate indigenous balance present in Lebanon.⁴⁰ In 1939 the French in conjunction with Turkey designated Syrian Alexandretta (renamed to Hatay) an autonomous status under the Turkish state. Despite the majority Arab and Armenian population, a Turkish government was installed.⁴¹ European powers assigned Middle Eastern regions at will without concerns for local populations. ✓

³⁶ Walter Adams, James W Brock and John M Blair, 'Retarding the development of Iraq's oil resources: An episode in oleaginous diplomacy, 1927-1939', *Journal of Economic Issues*, vol. 27, no. 1, March 1993, p. 79.

³⁷ Ian J Bickerton and M N Pearson, 'The First World War and Mandate', in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 36.

³⁸ Extract from a letter from sir Henry McMahon to the Sherif of Mecca, Amir Hussein, 24 October 1915, reproduced in Ian J Bickerton and M N Pearson, 'The First World War and Mandate', in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, Melbourne, 1990, p. 54.

³⁹ Lillian Goldman Law Library, *The Sykes-Picot Agreement : 1916*, 2008, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/sykes.asp, accessed 29 July 2012.

⁴⁰ Anderson, et al., *Politics and Change in the Middle East*, p. 60.

⁴¹ Mansfield, *The Arabs*, pp. 204-205.

The legacy of the Palestine Mandate demonstrates the damage caused by European imperialist motives in the Middle East. In the late nineteenth century the Zionist movement encouraged Jews from around the world to relocate to Palestine. Arabs felt they were owed independence from the Mandate system and represented the vast majority of the population. However the British saw Palestine as a barrier between the rest of Europe and their Indian Empire, and the prospect of an ally in the region encouraged the 1917 Balfour Declaration between British Foreign Secretary and the Zionist Federation. It expressed support for ‘...the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people’.⁴² The King-Crane Commission of 1919 into the Palestine issue warned that Zionist colonisation would have to be checked if ongoing harmony was to be maintained.⁴³ The British dismissed the commission and the Palestine Mandate of 1922 backed up Balfour advocating ‘...grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country’.⁴⁴ ✓

Despite rising tensions in Palestine, British interests still took precedence. Between 1922 and 1939 tensions between Zionists and Arabs rose including rioting in 1929, and an Arab revolt from 1936. Numerous reports such as the 1937 Peel Commission recommended the creation of Arab, Zionist and British controlled regions in Palestine, although these recommendations were rejected. In 1939 a British White Paper recommended the independence of Palestine by 1949 with power shared between Zionists and Arabs. The agreement was meant to please all parties thus ensuring continued support of British interests.⁴⁵ Britain needed the ports in Haifa to ship oil from Iraq, and Palestine was integral to Middle Eastern communications. These concerns were increased with the onset of the Cold War and fears of Russian incursions into the region.⁴⁶ When the British looked to solidify relationships with neighbouring Arab nations, the Zionists turned on them. In December 1947 the final wave of violent Zionist-Arab clashes began, leading eventually to the Zionists’ proclamation of the nation of Israel in May

Deleted: however

⁴² Lillian Goldman Law Library, *Balfour Declaration 1917*, 2008,

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/balfour.asp, accessed 29 July 2012.


⁴³ Ritchie Owendale, ‘The origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict’, *Historian*, vol. 76, 2002, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Lillian Goldman Law Library, *Palestine Mandate*, 2008,

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/palmanda.asp, accessed 10 August 2012.

⁴⁵ Bickerton and Pearson, ‘The First World War and Mandate’, p. 48.

⁴⁶ Owendale, ‘The origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict’, p. 25.

1948.⁴⁷ Failed attacks by Arab nations, and Israeli military dominance have left lasting animosity between Israelis and Arabs in the Middle East. 

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

3.5 Conclusion

The affects of European involvement in the Middle East have been significant. Defensive Developmentalism initially succeeded in strengthening the Middle East. New technologies and training helped bring the Middle East up to date and centralisation of bureaucracy improved taxation and government influence. However, it opened the door to European military and bureaucratic advisors. Despite the burgeoning of industry in Egypt, a combination of an Ottoman central state desperate to reign in its dominant province coupled with British economic interests brought an end to Egyptian self-sufficiency. From here revenue could only be secured via the international market, and foreign investment. Middle Eastern greed combined with the economic chaos of the 1870s led to financial ruin, placing economies directly under European supervision. They would remain so for the next three quarters of a century. Under the Mandate system European powers carved up the Middle East at will with scant regard for local populations. Blind British self-interest and failure to consider the ethnic differences, especially in Palestine in turn led to the Arab-Israeli conflict, which still lingers today. ✓

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