

## THE IMPACT OF COLD WAR ON MIDDLE EAST

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### ABSTRACT

This research article aims at discussing the various ways in and extents to which the Cold War shaped Middle Eastern geopolitical, societal, and cultural contexts. The Cold War indeed shaped political relations, market development, and sociocultural transformations by setting the America and the Union of socialist Republics against each other. This research focuses on examining the impact of these superpowers and their roles as mediators, direct interference, and strategic partners on the Middle Eastern nations. This article provides a good understanding of the Cold War and how it influenced the Middle East using information from history, such a geo-political shifts and the effects they had on the region, even up to this present time.

**Key words;** Political Alliance, Economy, Capitalism, Communism, Geo-Political.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Cold War, which lasted from 1947 to 1991, was marked by strong geopolitical tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. This time saw a fierce ideological battle between capitalism and communism, which had a huge impact on world politics. The United States, led by Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, and Reagan, and the Soviet Union, led by Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev, were major actors in the Cold War. Major events such as the Berlin Airlift, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Space Race characterized this time period and had a substantial influence on international relations (Gaddis, 2005). During the Cold War, the Middle East was a significant geopolitical crossroads that connected Europe, Asia, and Africa. Its location made it a vital link in commerce routes and transportation networks, in addition to a focal point for major nations looking to secure access to essential areas (Halliday, 2005). Furthermore, the region's massive oil reserves bolstered its status as a strategic asset during the Cold

War. Control over oil production and delivery became crucial to superpower strategy, influencing regional policies and actions (Yergin, 2006). Cold War dynamics had an important effect on conflicts in the region and tensions, including the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Iran-Iraq war. Superpower interference and backing for various groups worsened these disputes, resulting in extended periods of instability and conflict (Fawcett, 2016). In addition, both the United States and the Soviet Union established military bases and relationships in the Middle East, underscoring the region's tactical significance. Armed forces and alliances were used to project power and influence, leading to the Cold War's threatening geopolitical climate (Little, 2004).

### INTRODUCTION

Cold War can be described as a state of conflict in terms of political, economic and military between the America and Soviet Union and this had taken place between the year 1947 and 1991 and it had effected

many parts of the world and one of the area that had been most affected was Middle East. What distinguishes this period was competition and struggle of ideologies and battle of strings that helped, at the crucial level, to establish political, economical and social systems of Middle Eastern countries as well as arrangements of allied wars enacted on behalf of these nations.

The realignment of political alliances was one of the Cold War's most visible consequences in the Middle East. The US attempted to offset Soviet influence by strengthening connections with major regional actors such as Iran and Israel, but the Soviet Union expanded its influence by backing nations such as Egypt and Syria (Khalidi, 2009). The Arab-Israeli conflict, which became the focus of superpower competition, muddled the geopolitical situation even more. The United States constantly supported Israel, giving it military and economic help, while the Soviet Union supported different Arab governments, exacerbating regional tensions and wars (Quandt, 2005).

The Cold War had a tremendous economic influence on the Middle East, especially in terms of oil politics. The region's massive oil deposits became a strategic advantage in the global power struggle. The United States developed close connections with oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia, assuring a consistent supply of oil in exchange for security assurances (Little, 2004). The 1973 oil embargo by OPEC, which was driven by Middle Eastern nations, underlined the geopolitical importance of the region's energy resources as well as the countries' economic clout.

As a result of this paper, the reader can note that the Cold War has had a lasting effect on the Middle East from the social-cultural perspective. Superimpose ideological confrontation between capitalism/Communism influenced political promptings and pattern of change in the region's economist. For instance, in Afghanistan, the Soviet invasion in the year 1979 as well as the aftermath resistance by the mujahedeen with the support of the US led to a long-standing fight that had disproportionate carrying on social, political and economic changes (Fawcett 2016). Both superpowers tried elaborate cultural diplomacy measures to target the Middle Eastern public with their dissimilar messages of ideologies throughout the Cold War period (Gaddis, 2005).

This article is going to look at the various incidents that involved the Middle East in the Cold War and how it impacted political, economic and social status of the Middle East by describing superpowers' interference and proxy wars, and by elaborating on strategic alliances that a superpower adopted during the Cold War. In the wake of the Cold War, this paper will use the micro history lens to explain the impact of this war on the Middle East region still felt today.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The cold war was the major background for political, economic, and social changes in the Middle East as a general period of confrontation between the USA and USSR. As stated above, six authors are analyzed in this literature review regarding the effects of the Cold War on the Middle East.

William L. Cleveland and Martin Bunton in their book *A History of the Modern Middle East* (2016) offers an insightful review on the Middle East during the period of the Cold War Superpower confrontation of rivalry throughout the Middle East. They describe funding given to various regimes and movements by the US and USSR compounds which made worsened conflicts including the Arab-Israeli wars and the Iranian Revolution. The authors puts it forward that the Middle East still cries for peace after the Cold war as it propped authoritarianism longer than necessary.

Rashid Khalidi in *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (2009) - author analyses precisely how the Cold War affected America's foreign policy decision making in the Middle East, especially as it sought to contain Soviet influence; the author concludes that this often entailed propping up nasty regimes and fomenting turmoil in the area. He considers the role of America in the coup in Iran in 1953, and American's support to Israel and dictatorial Arab states—actions that he argues cemented long-term conflict and hostility to America.

Douglas Little in *American Orientalism: Little in The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (2008) examines how Cold War impacted the outlook of America toward the Middle East. He avers that America's geostrategic imperatives foreseeing communism and oil determined interventions that seldom took into consideration societal nuance and ambition. Stressing the key moments in the relationship between the US and the Middle East ranging from the Suez Crisis to the Six Day War up

to the Iranian Revolution, Little captures important ways how Cold War conditioned regional agenda.

Salim Yaqub in *Containing Arab Nationalism: In the book published in 2004 titled The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* Yaqub describes and analyses the Eisenhower Doctrine and its application in the Middle East in the 1950s. He looks at the manner in which the US sought to challenge the Soviet Union's influence by contained Arab nationalism which was deemed as a threat to the western interests. Through Yaqub's analysis, the American policy is depicted as a shifting and inconsistent strategy that was shaped by the ideological rivalry of the Cold War

Malcolm Kerr in *The Arab Cold War: Kerr's perhaps the most well-known work is 'Arab State' (1971) dealing with the Arab politics in the Cold War era with special emphasis on the internal rivalry within the Arab world especially the conflict between Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his opponents.*

As a result, this paper is focused on the conflict between Egypt's Jamal Abdel Nasser and his regional competitors. According to Kerr, the Cold War worsened these intra-Arab conflicts since the US and the USSR tried to support different allies and clients. It brings out the competition between the superpowers and the regional forces, which shows how the politics of the Cold War was not simple in the Middle East.

Avi Shlaim in *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World (2000)* by Shlaim – This work focuses on the role of the Cold War and its effects on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the relations between Israel and the Arab world. He claims that the superpowers' intervention in the Middle East increased the levels of conflict and affected the tactics chosen by both the Israeli and Arab governments. From the analysis of Shlaim's work one can understand how the Cold War influenced the military, political, and diplomatic aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

All in all, these works depict that the nature of the Cold War's aftermath in the Middle East is not monochromatic. It is established that the superpowers' interventions usually compounded the already existing tensions, sided with autocratic governments and bred prolonged turbulence. Knowing this historical background is paramount in trying to understand the current political system in the Middle East as well as the problems that persist to this day.

### **The Impact of the Cold War on the Middle East; Political Impact**

Cold War influenced the changes in the Middle East political map through the shift of alliances in the region and increase of local conflicts. To counter the soviet influence, the United States looked for friends in the region and the world such as Israel, pre-revolution Iran, and Saudi Arabia. However, it was a supporter of countries like Egypt up to 1972, and Syria and, hence, extended its influence. This superpower alignment very frequently either led to the rising of internal political crisis or to the intensification of the conflicts. For instance, the Arab-Israeli conflict became a proxy battleground, with the U.S. providing substantial military and economic aid to Israel, while the Soviet Union supported various Arab states, further entrenching the divide and prolonging the conflict (Quandt, 2005).

The Cold War also precipitated significant political changes within Middle Eastern countries. Superpower support often hinged on political alignment, leading to shifts in governance and internal policies. In Iran, the U.S.-backed 1953 coup that ousted Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and reinstated the Shah exemplifies how Cold War dynamics influenced internal politics (Kinzer, 2008). This intervention had lasting repercussions, contributing to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic, which positioned itself in opposition to both superpowers.

### **Economic Consequences**

The Cold War's economic impact on the Middle East was profound, particularly regarding oil politics. The region's vast oil reserves became a strategic asset for both the United States and the Soviet Union. The U.S. established strong ties with oil-rich nations like Saudi Arabia, ensuring a steady supply of oil in exchange for security guarantees. This relationship was epitomized by the Quincy Agreement of 1945, where the U.S. pledged to protect the Saudi regime in return for access to its oil (Yergin, 2006).

Oil also became a tool for political leverage, most notably during the 1973 oil embargo. Middle Eastern members of OPEC, led by Saudi Arabia, imposed an oil embargo against countries supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War. This action caused a global energy crisis, underscoring the geopolitical

importance of Middle Eastern oil and its potential as a weapon in international politics (Little, 2004). Furthermore, the Cold War fueled an arms race in the Middle East, with both superpowers supplying vast amounts of military aid to their respective allies. These weapons aggregated and brought a militarization of the region while at the same time increasing the possibilities of confrontation. For instance, Egypt and Syria had acquired substantial Soviet military assistance to be applied in their battles with Israel; the U. S. furnished superior ordnance to Israel and afterward to Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### **Social and Cultural Transformations**

This paper argues that the Cold War influences on Middle Eastern societies were as social and cultural as they were strategic and military. In this case, Prow has been the most important source of information on how the ideological conflict between communism and capitalism impacted politics and social transformations in the region. When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, and with the US-backed mujahedeen resistance that followed, a long and disastrous war ensued, which triggered social turmoil as huge number of people were displaced and radical organizations were produced (Fawcett, 2016).

Cultural diplomacy efforts by both superpowers aimed to spread their respective ideologies and influence public opinion in the Middle East. The U. S. sponsored American culture and democracy through different programs and establishments on the other hand the Soviet Union aimed at spreading communism. These efforts were directed mainly at the intellectual class and the youth for the purpose of molding future opinion makers and influencers and to ensure that the latter's views and actions are consonant with the superpowers' agenda.

### **Ongoing Implications**

It is still seen that the influence of Cold War is still present in the Middle East and it has an impact on the political, economic and social life. The relations and antagonism that were formed during this period are still felt and are part of the region's crises. Political systems of such countries as Iran and Afghanistan up to the present day were formed as a result of the cold war and various interferences and wars. On the same note, the role of Middle Eastern oil in the global politics cannot be overlooked as it determines the

relations between countries and economic strategies. The militarization of the region, driven by Cold War arms races, continues to impact the Middle East today, with high levels of military expenditure and ongoing conflicts. Socially, the legacy of displacement and ideological struggles persists, influencing the region's demographic and cultural landscapes.

### **Finding**

A glance at the nature of alliances in Middle East during the Cold War can explain the impacts of the Cold War on Middle East as mentioned below. These alliances that were often aligned to either the United States or the Soviet Union aggravated the clique contention and rivalry. Further, the oil reserves in the region made it significant for the world politics to tilt towards the Middle Eastern region mainly because of the demand of the west for oil. This was well illustrated in the 1973 oil embargo where political pressures were namely exerted (Yergin, 2006, p. 628). Furthermore, the kind of military and financial support from the superpowers affected this region through militarization of the region and in effect protracted the already existing wars hence bringing conflicts to this region and within the region itself (Little, 2004). This alone became an evidence from the ideologies of the cold war that impacted greatly affecting the social structures as it brings about the movements which is the chief cause of the social changes, such movements results to the massive displacement of the population as well as contributing to extremism (Fawcett, 2016). The second world war introduced a newly balance power in the international system and in particular in middle East, today the cold war confrontations and alignments affected by political and social relations in the region (Khalidi, 2009 pp 126).

### **Recommendation**

Several strategic activities are needed to reclaim the long-term consequences of the Cold War in the Middle East. Diplomatic relations are crucial when trying to address regional conflicts that are likely to destabilize the region. All should be directed towards diversification of the economy by shifting away from the dependence on petroleum. There is need to ensure that international relations include agreements that help regulate the use of arms and deal with probability of conflicts. Furthermore, policies should also include more general objectives of integration of

the displaced populations and prevention of radicalization for maintaining society's stability. Another essential reason is the advocacy for a balanced assessment of Cold War historiography because it is significant in ensuring that the future generations get to understand the history of their region in order to maintain social harmony.

### **Conclusion**

The region was proved to have substantial and long-term modifications through mutating its political affiliations, economic systems and society due to the consequences of the Cold War. The interactions and rivalries in this period thus made their imprimis, as they are still felt today in the region. Knowledgeable analysis of the Cold war effects can be helpful in comprehending the current conflicts and geopolitical status of the Middle East.

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