Letters and declarations

The nature of this melancholy becomes clearer, once one asks the question, with whom does the historical writer of historicism actually empathize. The answer is irrefutably with the victor. Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. Empathy with the victors thus comes to benefit the current rulers every time.

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*

The development of a political community is an inherently exclusionary project based upon a particular vision of the organisation of life. The establishment of bureaucratic structures that facilitate the regulation of life flows from the enactment of this idea. As we have seen, definitions of statehood and sovereignty differ greatly, but it is evident that in order for a state to be considered as such, a number of characteristics must be met, including the existence of a people residing within a particular territorial area with a shared identity and a system of governance to facilitate the survival of their project. Fundamentally, as Khaldun suggested, politics is the survival of the species.

This chapter engages with attempts to establish political projects, driven by actors both within and beyond territorial borders. In many cases, such efforts were revolutionary, violent dislocations between past and future that radically altered the ordering of space within a particular area. Yet such transformations also possessed an economic dimension as foreign powers sought to capitalise on opportunities provided by domestic upheaval, while political elites began processes of modernisation as they sought to forge states from the embers of uncertainty. The neo-liberal modernity that underpins Agamben's spatialisation of the exception shapes the local manifestations of *nomos* and while context and contingency create unique peculiarities, there are underlying structural similarities that shape the exception. Although offering a brief genealogy of the establishment of states, this chapter should not be viewed as a complete history of the contemporary Middle East. Instead I seek to offer an account of the interaction between internal and external forces – material and ideational – that facilitated the establishment of states and *nomoi*, through the interaction of *ordnung* and *ortung*.

Amid a range of parabolic pressures, the Arab state continues to face a range of pressures.¹ From this, tensions emerge between loyalty to particular communities and projects. Such projects are also shaped by global and regional events; space is (re)constructed through the interaction of the global with the local, with implications for the interaction of *ordnung* and *ortung* constituting both *nomos* and *nomoi*. In a normative environment that draws members from different states, the interaction of regional, global and local issues is hardly surprising. For Paul Noble, this shared environment created a 'vast sound chamber in which information, ideas, and opinions have resonated with little regard for state frontiers'.²

Emerging from the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the contemporary regional states system underwent a period of (re)construction forged by an array of domestic and regional struggles, amid the penetration of the Middle East by external powers. As Agamben suggests, all states operate within the global *nomos* of a spatialised exception that is underpinned by neo-liberal modernity, but such localised exceptions are shaped by local context and contingency. There is then a two-tier dimension to *nomos*: the global ordering of spatial exceptions that is viewed as the apparently universal concept of the sovereign state, alongside the localised spatial exception, where *nomos* emerges through the interaction of *ordnung* and *ortung*.

Challenges facing rulers across the twentieth century were multifaceted, yet predominantly revolved around efforts to bring dislocated peoples together to ensure the survival of the collective.³ The quest for a national identity involved harnessing a number of historical narratives, cultural norms and tribal values in an attempt to create a convincing narrative of how the political vision should be expressed. Of course, by its very nature, such projects are exclusive and required the rejection of other narratives. Exclusion fed into already existing socio-economic grievances, creating fertile breeding ground for a range of different ideologies including Arabism, Ba'athism, Islamism, Communism, along with incarnations of nationalism defined within territorial borders. Following a spate of *coups d'état* across the 1960s and 1970s, new leaders put 'coup-proofing' strategies in place to ensure the survival of regimes within specific territorial boundaries, seeking to withstand pressures from above and below.⁴

These strategies established a range of different relationships including between the family, tribe, sect, city and ethnic group, designed to draw support from a number of different constituencies, with the by-product of widespread exclusion.⁵ Processes designed to include/exclude groups from the political sphere also had serious repercussions across the region, as a consequence of the spread of identities across the Middle East, meaning that what happens within the borders of one state can have consequences elsewhere.

Reverberations from events such as the establishment of the state of Israel, the Suez Crisis, the 1967 war, the Iranian Revolution, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2005 Cedar Revolution and the Arab Uprisings were felt across the Middle East, shaping the regional security environment. The establishment of states, either in an attempt to politically represent an existing nationality, or to simultaneously create a national identity and state, take place within the context of this broader regional environment, deriving legitimacy through recourse to the norms of the environment.

A key part of efforts to survive was the ability to lay claim to legitimacy. Academic discussions about legitimacy rarely find consensus but it is generally accepted that in the Middle East, legitimacy deficits are responsible for malaise and political instability. In a groundbreaking discussion of legitimacy in the Arab world, Michael Hudson identified legitimacy deficits as responsible for a range of the region's ills, from instability to repression, via cynicism, inefficiency and corruption.⁶ Legitimacy, for Hudson, stemmed from four main sources of authority: patriarchal, consultative, Islamic and feudal. Scholars of the Middle East will note that successful leaders create reserves of legitimacy through strategies that draw upon these different sources, providing leaders with the means through which to secure their rule and improve their standing across regional politics.⁷

Reserves of legitimacy are not restricted to territorial borders. In *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, Michael Barnett's constructivist interpretation of the impact of pan-Arabism on regional politics, shared ideological movements provide opportunities to increase reserves of legitimacy. Times of crisis then serve as opportunities to reshape the regional order, where regimes lay claim to ideological membership as a mechanism of improving their legitimacy and position in the regional order. As Barnett argues,

Arab states have had strikingly different views of the desired [regional order] Although such differences might be attributed to principled beliefs, the more prominent reasons were regime interests, beginning with but not exhausted by survival and domestic stability. As a consequence, over the years Arab leaders have vied to draw a line between the regimes' interests, the norms of Arabism, and the events of the day.⁸

For Barnett, events occur within normative environments that allow actors to derive meaning and interpret events in different ways. Much like our understanding of *nomos*, Barnett's approach demonstrates that events serve as a mechanism through which regimes gain legitimacy but also shape their environments, providing transformative opportunities to reshape regional dynamics. Periods of crisis both national and regional thus provide opportunities for political elites to increase their legitimacy – beyond their capacity to govern – and strengthen their positions vis-à-vis the regional order.

Versailles and the League of Nations

Oh, if we can pull this thing off! Rope together the young hot-heads and the Shi'ah obscurantists, and the enthusiasts ... if we can make them work together and find their own salvation for themselves, what a fine thing it will be. I see visions and dream dreams.⁹

In *Arab Awakening*, George Antonius' seminal – albeit problematical – study of the Arab Revolt, the roots of Arab nationalism are traced back to Beirut in 1875, where the ideas of five young Christian men that would shape Arab politics in the following

century were forged. Amid the strict enforcement of Ottoman law, the five engaged in seditious activity, placing placards around the streets of Beirut that contained 'violent denunciations of the evils of Turkish rule' and called for rebellion.¹⁰ Although initially unsuccessful, the events of 1875 created a movement that would have a lasting impact on regional politics in the following century. Over the coming decades, amid the turbulence of political upheaval, Arab nationalism was developed and debated, driven by intellectuals but played out across the streets of the region.

The most important incident in the formative years of calls for Arab nationalism was the demise of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the Great War in November 1918, following widespread unrest among Arab populations who had grown frustrated at long-standing persecution under the Young Turks,¹¹ culminating in the Arab Revolt and the ensuing efforts of external powers to shape the actions of local agency.¹² The Arab Revolt sought to overthrow the yoke of the Ottoman Empire, albeit supported by a different colonial power. Although initially confined to the Hejaz, the revolt spread across the region and while Sharif Hussayn was able to draw upon a relatively large army, they were poorly armed. The political fallout from the establishment of a mandate system – and location of a strong international presence in the region – had serious repercussions for the ordering of space, which, in turn, determined the capacity of indigenous Arab movements to shape their own political futures.¹³

During the war, British and French diplomats became involved in detailed discussions about the reorganisation of the Middle East following the expected demise of the Ottoman Empire. Diplomatic wrangling led Sir Marc Sykes and his French counterpart François Georges Picot to divide the region into spheres of influence, seemingly disregarding indigenous political organisation. Sykes expressed that to divide the region, he 'should like to draw a line from the *e* in Acre to the last *k* in Kirkuk'.¹⁴ The agreement stated that 'in the blue area France, and in the red area Great Britain, shall be allowed to establish such direct or indirect administration or control as they desire and as they may think fit to arrange with the Arab state or confederation of Arab states'.¹⁵ Although the Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916 was never directly implemented, it had a lasting legacy upon the region, according a great deal of power to the two remaining European powers and locating the idea of partition within future diplomatic initiatives such as the Treaty of Sèvres and the San Remo Agreement.

With the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire was complete. Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant established mandates in the Middle East, where 'their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory unit until such time as they are able to stand alone'.¹⁶ Powers responsible for regulating the mandates were seen to be 'trustees', wherein they would administer life 'within such boundaries as may be fixed by them'.¹⁷

Reconstruction efforts had previously taken place between British officials and Arab leaders directly, where concessions over territorial control were made in return for political support. An earlier exchange of letters between the British High Commissioner to Egypt Sir Henry McMahon and Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, revealed how a territory 'in the limits and boundaries proposed by the Sharif of Mecca' was offered in exchange for starting the Arab Revolt.¹⁸

At the end of the war, the Ottoman Empire was divided into mandates that were later shared between the British and French. Once established, mandates became sites of contestation, with local agency posing serious challenges to colonial overlords. Iraq provides perhaps the most obvious example of the challenge of state building at this point, as newly installed political elites had to balance myriad forms of indigenous political organisation, religious networks, strong tribal groups and a severe disparity between urban and rural populations, manifesting in tensions between tradition and modernity. Competing narratives and efforts to facilitate inclusion emerging from the *nomos* shaped the political trajectory, resulting in cycles of marginalisation, persecution and violence.

Tribal, religious and class divides posed serious problems for state building in the formative years of Iraq. As outlined in Hanna Batatu's magisterial study of twentieth-century Iraq, Iraqis were not one community but were comprised of members from disparate ethnic and religious nationalities. As Batatu argues, the Arabs of Iraq were 'a congeries of distinct, discordant, self-involved societies', dissected by serious class schisms most obviously manifesting in the distinction between rural and urban societies.¹⁹

Central to the political decisions taken in both Baghdad and London was a British archaeologist from County Durham by the name of Gertrude Bell. An intrepid explorer, Bell's exploits across the Middle East rival that of T. E. Lawrence. One of Churchill's representatives at the 1921 Cairo conference, a witness to the Armenian genocide and officially recognised by Sir Percy Cox as 'Oriental Secretary', Bell played a prominent role in the establishment of Faisal as King and the formative years of the Iraqi state. In a political vacuum following the Ottoman defeat, religion played an important role in the formative years of the Iraqi state. Accordingly, the role of clerics was central to political life in southern Iraq, which worried many in the British administration, fearing an open door to external influence. For Bell, the proximity of Persia and the presence of key Shi'a shrines in Karbala and Najaf 'brought the country much under Persian influences'.²⁰

Such perceptions were central in shaping the decisions taken by the British and Faisal. The installation of a Sunni monarch to rule over a Shi'a majority was a consequence of the desire to work with the wealthy, military trained urban elites deemed more sympathetic to the British cause, but also to uphold Iraqi sovereignty and avoid the penetration of the nascent state by external powers. In the following decades, Iraqi leaders shared similar concerns about the loyalties of Shi'a communities and in an attempt to prevent unrest – and ultimately to retain power – political and legal structures were created to continue the process of marginalisation and remove political meaning from the lives of the Shi'a; at this point political institutions enshrined difference. As a general rule, no Shi'a was accepted into military college or bureaucracy, while accessing high school was problematic, creating deep grievances among Shi'a communities.²¹

Economic and tribal differences played a prominent role in shaping the early years of the state, amid competing normative agendas and visions of what such a project would look like.²² Difference required regulation and the co-opting of tribal groups into nascent forms of political organisation, much to their chagrin.²³ Urbanisation

processes included the abolition of the 1933 Law Governing the Rights and Duties of Cultivators, allowing tribes to move to cities, although by 1965 some 50% still lived in rural areas.²⁴ Unsurprisingly, oil dramatically altered the economic capability of the country, accounting for 60% of the budget by 1959.²⁵ Land ownership thus became a key component of the social fabric of the state²⁶ and a prominent site of political contestation in the coming decades.

Across the Levant, state formation was shaped by the interaction of domestic social forces with the far more powerful exogenous forces, in what Nazih Ayubi referred to as 'a disintegrative political process imposed "from without"'.²⁷ Here, states were established as arbiters among competing groups that sought to pacify groups through the instruments of central rule, notably the army and bureaucracy. Such an approach does little to facilitate harmony and integration but rather isolates and separates groups within the state. Governance was achieved through alliances between blocs that are community based and retain all of their characteristics as they come into power. Such an approach deepened political, economic, social and community divisions, facilitating grievance and distrust that would manifest in violence across the century.²⁸

Perhaps the most important mandate for future stability across the Middle East was the League's recognition of the British Mandate over Palestine, which used the Jordan river to divide the land in two, into Palestine to the West and Transjordan to the East. At this time, the Hashemites occupied three thrones across the region, with Faisal in Iraq, Abdullah in Transjordan and Hussein in the Hijaz. Yet the movements of Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud across Arabia put an end to broader Hashemite aspirations with the establishment of Saudi Arabia within the decade.

The emergence of a state under the leadership of Abdul Aziz Ibn Abd Al Rahman Al Saud in 1932 occurred after the unification of disparate tribal groups across the Arabian Peninsula into a sedentary form of political organisation over the previous decades. This process of sedentarisation and economic development continued over the coming years, but the transition from a nomadic, rural population to an urban dwelling population was central in securing the territorial borders of the state, a prime example of the relationship and interaction between *ordnung* and *ortung*, the harnessing of regulatory power to create spatial order. Fundamental to the state-building process was a centuries old alliance between the Al Saud tribe and the puritanical Wahhabi sect of Islam, but it was also facilitated by support from the British, although it was the Soviet Union that first recognised Ibn Saud as the King of the Hejaz and Sultan of the Nejd in 1926.²⁹ Tribal developments aided the evolution of the political project, not only from rural to urban but also in providing Ibn Saud with the cultural and symbolic characteristics to regulate life.³⁰

Islam played a prominent role within the nascent political project. Not only was Ibn Saud's standing army the *ikhwan*, a group of devout Muslims, central to the expansion of the borders of the state, Islam was positioned centrally within the fabric of political organisation. The relationship with the Wahhabi *ulema* offered a degree of legitimacy for Ibn Saud's rule. The importance of Islam was not restricted to the kingdom's borders, however, as Ibn Saud offered financial support to the newly established Muslim Brotherhood and when the King met Hassan Al Banna in 1936, he jokingly said 'we

are all Muslim Brotherhood'. In the coming years Al Banna was offered protection by the Al Saud amid suggestions that the Egyptian regime planned to assassinate him, but as the century developed, the relationship became more complex as we shall see.

Although largely successful, Saudi expansion during the 1920s was not without resistance. Having crossed into what is now Kuwait, *ikhwan* fighters were met by a small force and in what became known as Battle of Jahra where, in 1920, the *ikhwan* were defeated.³¹ The battle offers important insight into the complexity of political dynamics at the time, as members of the Al Mutair tribe could be found on both sides of the conflict, revealing a burgeoning attachment to the land among those fighting on the Kuwaiti side.³² This burgeoning loyalty to land led to the evolution of political organisation, transforming the way in which life was organised and ordered, within clearly defined political spaces. In later years, tribes would be essential in the development of states across the Gulf, protecting oil installations, pipelines and ports, which were essential to provide the financial might to facilitate socio-political transformations. Of course, the tribal sheikhs were handsomely rewarded for such practices and were thus brought into the political and infrastructure of the new state, creating an interaction between *ordnung* and *ortung*.

The embers of the Ottoman Empire created opportunities for the reorganisation of territory across the Middle East. While the aftershocks were felt across the region, the epicentre was Turkey. Under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a new republic was founded in 'revolutionary style', transforming citizens of the Ottoman Empire into Turkish citizens amid the widespread removal of religion from public life. The establishment of the Turkish state necessitated eradicating the residue of Ottoman rule and the creation of state apparatus and institutions.³³ This project initially abolished the Sultanate before co-opting support from the royalists and religious clerics alike by appointing an Ottoman prince as caliph, albeit before abolishing the caliphate completely in 1924 and the *azzam* in the following years as part of a secularising move. Unlike other identity-building projects in the region that had to begin from scratch, Turkish nationalism had linguistic and literary roots in the middle of the nineteenth century³⁴ but it was the nascent Ataturk regime that enshrined such sentiments into the state project.

As the historian Bernard Lewis notes, this process was not without challenges, demonstrated by new frontiers, the rejection of religious and dynastic royalties and a lack of emotional attachment.³⁵ Over time, the Republican People's Party worked towards enshrining Ataturk's vision within new political structures. Perhaps the most important aspect of this was the establishment of the military, who were heavily involved – much as in other states across the region – within the domestic political climate as well as broader regional dynamics. It was not a project without difficulty, however, as loyalty to the former caliph and caliphate remained strong among the population. One of Ataturk's closest advisors is reported to have confessed that it was his duty to 'remain loyal to the sovereign: my attachment to the Caliphate is imposed on me by my education ... To abolish this office and try to set up an entity of a different character in its place, would lead to failure and disaster'.³⁶ This opened up a key source of tension and competition over loyalty to the two distinct sovereigns.

In spite of such traces of loyalty to the erstwhile caliph, competing nationalist sentiments were rife due to the spread of different identities and political aspirations that had previously been co-opted by the Ottomans. One aspect of the nationalist project was the creation of a new system of language, which ensured that future generations would share the nationalist vision. The new Turkish language was prioritised over all other regional languages, marginalising minorities further and feeding into the cultivation of inclusion and exclusion. A new national vision was put forward that drew upon the past to shape the future.

Similar processes occurred in Persia, where Reza Khan sought to transform political organisation from the Persian Empire into a new, *modern* Iran. Amid the fallout from both the Constitutional Revolution and the aftermath of the Great War, Reza Khan established a dominant, personality-driven form of politics that succeeded in pushing both ethnic minorities and the Shi'a clerics to the margins of society. The political turmoil that followed reflected the struggle to shape the nature of the state in the move from empire to nation state, perhaps best seen in the reframing of Persia as Iran.

The speed of transformation across the Middle East was astounding. For George Antonius, these transformative processes created 'new forces and tendencies which were not inherent in the trends of the national movements'.³⁷ Antonius is correct in this observation, particularly when considering that transformation and dislocation would also result in pushback against these movements, but also in inertia and competition among existing institutions designed to implement such strategies. Perhaps the most severe of all points of dislocation from the fall out of the Great War was found in the establishment of the state of Israel.

The Palestinian mandate and the state of Israel

While European powers were operating across the Middle East, populations of these – and indeed other states – had become increasingly restless. Widespread anti-Semitism, reflected in incidents such as the Dreyfus affair, cultivated political support for what became known as the Zionist project that would eventually call for a *return* to the ancient land of Israel. The emergence of the Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century was itself a consequence of particular socio-political experiences. Central to the burgeoning movement was *The Jewish State*, written by Theodore Herzl, whose words called for 'sovereignty [to] be granted us over a portion of the globe large enough to satisfy the rightful requirements of a nation'.³⁸

In spite of the growing popularity of the Zionist movement, it took a 67-word declaration of support from the British Foreign Secretary published on 2 September 1917 to firmly locate the matter within the realm of international politics.

His Majesty's government view[s] with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing

shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.³⁹

While the Balfour Declaration expressed support for creating a 'national home' for Jewish people in Palestine, the wording of the declaration was deliberately ambiguous. For many at the time, the concept of a national home was coterminous to a state, although some such as Winston Churchill and Neville Chamberlain were largely of the opinion that a Jewish state would occur in due course; such a view helped generate a sense that the declaration was in British interests to curry favour with Jewry across the world during the war.⁴⁰ At the same time, many Arabs were of the view that the British had also promised them a state, as a reward for their involvement in defeating the Ottoman Empire.⁴¹ British policy was convoluted, seeking to support both Arabs and Jews, leaving both firmly of the opinion that they had London's support.

Before the Second World War, five distinct waves of *aliyah* (the immigration of Jews from across the diaspora to the land of Israel) had brought almost four hundred thousand Jews to Palestine. Once settled, institutions were formed – in parallel with mandatory governance structures – to provide support to Jewish settlers in what Mehran Kamrava has referred to as a 'state within a state', a common theme that emerges amid contestation.⁴² After *aliyah* came the process of transforming land into a state for the incoming settlers, at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian communities. Such processes occurred physically and intellectually, transforming the soil in accordance with particular political visions, along with creating a new ordering of space.

The need for expropriation and removal was quickly acknowledged, first by Theodor Herzl, albeit 'discreetly and circumspectly'.⁴³ In contrast, the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, argued that 'there were no others'⁴⁴ and ultimately that Palestine was the ideal choice for settlement.⁴⁵ Yet it was the transformation of life on the ground that would have the most lasting impact, as land was bought by Zionists while more directly, groups such as the Haganah, Irgun and Stern Gang engaged in violence against Palestinian Arabs.

After the establishment of the United Nations (UN), a partition plan for Palestine was approved by UN General Assembly Council Resolution 181 on 29 November 1947, which called for the partition of Palestine into eight parts: three to the Arab state; three to the Jewish state; one, the town of Jaffa, was to be an Arab enclave in the Jewish territory; and Jerusalem was to remain under international control, administered by the UN.⁴⁶ This plan was accepted, pragmatically, by the Jewish leaders, but rejected by Arab leaders who were loath to cede such an amount of territory and argued that it was in violation of their right to self-determination.⁴⁷

The Declaration of the State of Israel on 14 May 1948 was the culmination of Herzl's vision. In the years that followed, erstwhile Mandatory Palestine was existentially transformed as indigenous communities were 'systematically extinguished' to allow for the establishment of the state of Israel.⁴⁸ After the declaration of statehood, armies from neighbouring Arab armies invaded. In spite of a huge disparity in the number of

troops, the newly established Israeli Defence Force (IDF) ultimately proved victorious, feeding into an environment where seven hundred thousand Palestinians were expelled from their homes on 15 May 1948 in what would become known in Palestinian history as the *nakba*, the catastrophe.

Efforts to establish the state of Israel required engagement with a number of competing historiographies, each laying claim to land and its history. Such contestation has routinely been acknowledged by Israeli leaders along with the construction of a historiography of Jewish claims to the land, which was later powerfully destroyed by Shlomo Sand, an Israeli academic working at Tel Aviv University.⁴⁹

Nasser, pan-Arabism and Ba'athism

The failure of Arab armies to defeat Israel on the battlefield and the continued presence of colonial powers helped ferment widespread nationalist support for a pan-Arab movement that challenged the ordering of the states system. This was both physical and intellectual, as a large number of people found solace in the ideological movement. In such conditions, radical ideas quickly began to spread.⁵⁰ Long-standing tensions within the mandate programme erupted as burgeoning movements for self-determination clashed with colonial overlords amid the fallout from the declaration of the State of Israel. Political institutions established as part of mandatory control fed into the cultivation of nationalist programmes. Questions about the regulation of life and its spatial ordering became prominent within political discourse, often facilitated through colonial structures. This was a time of serious turmoil where local populations began to 'awaken to their full potential'.⁵¹

Although Egypt had been under occupation since before the establishment of the mandate system, an increasingly turbulent period would lead to a form of quasi independence, albeit on the condition that Britain retained control of the canal zone, foreign policy and security.⁵² It was within this context that a school teacher from Cairo named Hassan Al Banna formed the Muslim Brotherhood. Al Banna's vision for the Brotherhood included the provision of social goods and services that the state failed to provide, resulting in a deeply fractious relationship between the regime and the *ikhwan*.

For many scholars, with the toppling of King Farouk in 1952 and the birth of the Egyptian Republic, the modern Middle Eastern state was born. In previous decades, tensions between political elites and burgeoning nationalist movements began to manifest in countless forms but it was the alliance of the nationalist movement with members of the Muslim Brotherhood that was fundamental to the establishment of the new Egyptian Republic. This alliance proved to be short-lived amid serious personal, political and ideological tensions between the nationalists and the Islamists. The fallout established two populist strands in the Arab world and pitted them against each other over the regulation of life and ultimately, the roots of sovereign power. In doing so it resulted in the establishment of authoritarian structures and the deep state that continues to dominate Egyptian politics to this day.⁵³

The roots of Arab nationalism were found within colonial residue across the Middle East and efforts to facilitate political development amid a fragmenting post-Ottoman landscape.⁵⁴ Ideas of this shared vision reveal serious tensions between conceptions of the state and the broader Arab nation, based initially upon a shared linguistic vision, but also upon a mercantile integration of the region.⁵⁵ For some like Nazih Ayubi, the decline in this trade prevented the emergence of a strong class dimension to drive the movement, furthered by regional disintegration as a consequence of assimilation into capitalist systems by colonial actors.⁵⁶

Of course, the very concept of Arab nationalism is contested both philosophically and politically as a consequence of context and contingency.⁵⁷ Political manifestations of the concept varied from efforts to create a shared territorial entity such as the short-lived United Arab Republic (UAR) and the broader goal of unity between all Arab states, or the much less ambitious aspiration of collectivity and coordination. Seen in a range of different ways, there is little doubt that Arab nationalism was a radically new way of *doing* politics, which resulted in a populist movement that threatened the conservative status quo of 'old style notables, large merchants and landowners'.⁵⁸ The emergence of the Arab nationalist movement provoked questions about the ordering of space and the means through which life was regulated, creating friction between *ordnung* and *ortung* once again.

This new way of doing politics led to the emergence of different forms of political organisation, perhaps most notably in Syria under the leadership of Hafez Al Assad in 1971; the ensuing transformation of the Syrian state was described by one scholar as a process of turning the state's social and political structures 'upside down'.⁵⁹ The Ba'ath ideology played a key role in the development of the state and Assad occupied a prominent role in 'defending its cause on the streets', which nearly cost him his life when he was stabbed by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶⁰

The early years of Assad's rule sought to ensure the survival of the Ba'ath regime amid a range of *coups* – and counter *coups* – *d'état*, resulting in the widespread restriction of opposition and dissent. As part of this process, former members of the Muslim Brotherhood were asked to provide documentary evidence of their withdrawal from the organisation within a month; according to Law 49, anyone unable to provide it would be sentenced to death. Such measures had a dramatic impact upon political opposition across Syria. The years after the writing of the 1973 constitution were plagued by protest and violence, but the Hama massacre of February 1982 which killed an estimated thirty thousand people removed all space for public and private dissent, revealing the ferocity of the Assad regime and hinting at the characteristics of necropolitics to come.⁶¹

Yet this was just one strand of Arab nationalism. Jalal Al Sayyid, one of the prominent Arab nationalist figures – and later a founding member of the Ba'ath party – distinguished between these different strands:

Arab nationalism is the sum total of characteristics, qualities and hallmarks which are exclusive to the collectivity called the Arab nation, Arab unity is a modern notion, which stipulates that all disparate Arab countries should be

formed into one single political system under one single state ... the Arab nation is that human collectivity which speaks the Arabic language, inhabits a territory called the Arab lands and has a voluntary and spontaneous felling of belonging to that nation.⁶²

These views have their roots in the late nineteenth century, where education played a prominent role through both the establishment of institutions and the historiographies taught.⁶³ Such views are supported by Youssef Choueiri who argues that a number of local histories provided by the likes of Muhammad Izzat Darawazh, Darwish Al Miqdadi and Shafiq Ghurbal can be seen as part of broader pan-Arab trends, albeit shaped by local context.⁶⁴ Fundamentally, for Choueiri, nationalism is a process that is a consequence of modernity, stemming from the interaction of global and regional factors and the institutionalisation of Arab culture and language within the fabric of states, leading to a range of different interpretations.

A shared language was key to establishing unity amid such difference and Arabic was the vehicle through which culture and history could be developed, distinct from their Ottoman and Persian neighbours. Yet questions about the role of religion within the movement offered an area of dissent, where prominent thinkers wavered in the loyalty afforded to Islam or nationalist goals. Intellectuals such as Rashid Rida, – who we shall return to in Chapter 4 – Amir Shakib Arslan, Ma'ruf Al Arnawut and Darwish Al Miqdadi differed over the role of Islam in Arab nationalism. Ultimately, it was down to a Christian, Qustantin Zurayq, to argue that religion provided a source of ethics and culture that were integral to the nationalist cause. Yet with economic malaise and the burgeoning influence of socialism from interaction with European powers, a more secular form of nationalism began to dominate Arab political discourse.⁶⁵

In spite of a plurality of views, the movement gained a great deal of traction as ideas spread across the Middle East. Yet unlike the Zionist movement that was immediately concerned with the establishment of a state project, pan-Arabism was characterised by a range of philosophical questions about its nature.⁶⁶ Different visions of the Arab project emerged across the region, shaped by context-specific contingent factors and the lack of intellectual and political coherence ultimately prevented its development. Regime interests routinely trumped commitment to this shared ideological vision, resulting in competition between the members and a process of one-upmanship in a struggle over spatial ordering.⁶⁷

In spite of these tensions, nationalist movements possessed a strong social core. While in power, Nasser sought to bring about social justice and the development of the Egyptian economy, albeit largely unsuccessfully as a consequence of tensions between political and economic capabilities.⁶⁸ Similar tensions were found across the Middle East at this time as states sought to regulate all aspects of life, albeit to the detriment of their economies, eroding their ideological visions in the process. The dominance of private interests over public to the benefit of particular groups at this point served to further embed patrimonial networks into the fabric of the developing states.

Central to the political and economic development of states at this time was their continued assimilation into the capitalist system and world politics. Underpinning

such calculations was the emergence of a Middle Eastern 'front' in the Cold War, as concern about the spread of Communism and the location of vast reserves of oil and gas focused the attention of the super powers on the region.⁶⁹ A raft of policies were drafted in Washington, DC designed to curtail the Communist influence, most obviously seen in the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, while the UK and France sought to retain their role on the world stage amid burgeoning nationalist movements and decolonisation.

Containment policies resulted in the establishment of the Baghdad Pact and later the Eisenhower Doctrine, which attempted to secure pro-Western regimes and maintain their anti-Communist stance. Later, these efforts would result in direct interference in the domestic affairs of states across the region. A British and US sponsored *coup d'état* removed the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh, and returned Reza Shah to power.⁷⁰ The perceived success of the coup prompted the CIA to attempt to overthrow the Syrian government in 1957, but the plan was discovered before it could be enacted.⁷¹ In neighbouring Iraq, a 1958 *coup d'état* removed the Hashemite dynasty, creating a period of instability and fertile ground for the Ba'ath party, particularly amid the widespread dissatisfaction with Nouri Al Said, the Prime Minister at the time, and his apparent pro-Western leanings.⁷²

Perhaps the most important incident during the Cold War in the Middle East was the Suez Crisis of 1956, which not only signalled the end of British influence across the world but also demonstrated the vitality of the Arab nationalist movement.⁷³ Britain's presence in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had a key role to play in shaping the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood and the emergence of the Arab nationalist beacon, Gamal Abd Al Nasser. In addition to their involvement in Palestine and Iraq, Egypt was of paramount importance to the British, where the Suez Canal was described by Anthony Eden as the 'back door to the East and swing door of the British Empire'.⁷⁴ The need to defeat Nasser related not only to British goals in the Middle East but also to its position in the world. As one minister suggested, 'If we lose the [Middle East] we are finished'.⁷⁵

After the successful handling of the Suez Crisis, Nasser's popularity was at an all time high, but this would be eroded by military defeat to Israel amid an array of domestic and regional mistakes in the years leading up to his death in 1970. The starting point of this decline was the short-lived UAR, a union between the pan-Arab visions of Nasser's Egypt and the Syrian Ba'ath regime. The Ba'ath party was inspired by the metaphysical vision of the Syrian Zaki Al Arsuzi, but its main ideologue was the Arab nationalist Michel Aflaq, who formed the party in 1943 along with Salah Al Bittar and members of the local intelligentsia. Aflaq's vision was based upon a shared language that would eventually forge a stronger bond over time, underpinned by love, thought and sentiment.⁷⁶

This vision was grounded in socio-economic concerns and rapidly became fused with socialism, which helped stress the importance of both the broader collective and territorial state. Although he acknowledged the role of the state in the shared Arab vision, Aflaq stressed the importance of the party that represented 'the whole of the nation which is still slumbering in self-denial of its own reality and forgetfulness of its

own identity'.⁷⁷ At a time of bickering among Arab states, the Ba'ath slogan of 'common Arab destiny' began to resonate among the peoples of the region.⁷⁸

Yet in spite of a shared commitment to Arab unity, the UAR was undermined and ultimately decimated by political wrangling and competing political visions; Nasser later expressed that the union was against his better judgement, revealing the amorphous character of Arab nationalism.⁷⁹ Local contexts also differed greatly. In Syria, anti-Egyptian sentiment was rife – some referred to 'Egyptian colonialism' – and the commercial bourgeoisie remained active unlike in Egypt, where state control of both the economy and political sphere were rapidly increasing.⁸⁰

Political instability was not limited to the UAR but was rife amid the penetration of the region by global forces, perhaps best seen in North Yemen as civil war pitted royalists against republicans, triggered by a series of *coups d'état* that drew in states from across the region into what Malcolm Kerr later termed the Arab Cold War.⁸¹ While Egypt supported the republicans, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Jordan and others offered military aid to the royalists out of fear at the potential revolutionary repercussions along with the nationalist aspirations of Nasser.⁸² A porous border between Saudi Arabia and Yemen helped Saudi forces cross into the country which increased the severity of the task facing the Egyptians in the process. What initially began as an opportunity for Nasser to regain credibility across the Arab world proved, as Anthony Nutting suggests to be his Vietnam.⁸³

Beyond Egypt, the case of Jordan reveals the precarious challenge of balancing domestic and regional pressures. Political wrangling in the country pitted the Hashemites against the vociferous Ba'athists and Nasserists, leading to the formation of an anti-Western government led by Suleiman Nabulsi, which left the kingdom occupying a contradictory position on the world stage. This situation was ultimately resolved by Hussein dissolving parliament and restricting political space across the kingdom, allowing only the Muslim Brotherhood to operate, given their strong anti-Nasser sentiment; such a move later helped assuage concerns that the Hashemite monarchy was merely a Western pawn.⁸⁴ Yet Jordan remained trapped by regional forces. Although the Hashemite kingdom decided against joining the Baghdad Pact, it felt compelled to participate in the 1967 war with Israel, alongside a number of republics who had conspired against it. Such a position appears counter intuitive, but as Michael Barnett persuasively argues, King Hussein was trapped in the parabolic pressures of the Arab sound chamber: '[I]f he went to war with Israel, the most he would lose would be the West Bank and Jerusalem, but if he stayed on the sideline he would probably lose his crown and country'.⁸⁵

The death knell of Arab nationalism rang in the summer of 1967 when Israeli forces decimated the combined armed forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, resulting in the deaths of twenty thousand Arabs and the creation of a further five hundred thousand refugees. Perhaps most significantly – and indeed symbolically – however, the war resulted in the Israeli capture of Jerusalem along with the West Bank, Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.

Prior to the war, an air of confidence breezed across the Arab world. Newspapers such as *Al-Ahram* published opinion pieces by commentators including Mohammed

Hassanein Heikal who argued that 'Whatever happens, and without trying to anticipate events, Israel is drawing near almost certain defeat ... whether from the inside or the outside.' Others claimed that Israel could be crushed 'in a matter of hours'. Reporting on the battle, the BBC proclaimed Israeli successes as 'the swiftest victory the modern world has known'.⁸⁶ The defeat ushered in widespread recrimination and criticism of political elites through with a wave of literary works across the Middle East that framed regimes as *anzimat al-hazima*, or 'regimes of defeat'.⁸⁷ This was a seismic reframing of political leadership across the Middle East. In a damning critique of Arab states, Fouad Ajami argued that the defeat revealed that 'the Arab revolution was neither socialist nor revolutionary: The Arab world had merely mimicked the noise of revolutionary change and adopted the outside trappings of socialism; deep down, under the skin, it had not changed'.⁸⁸ Fundamentally, for Ajami, the defeat showed the bankruptcy of Arab unity.⁸⁹

Even the establishment of the Arab League was wracked by competing visions and political difference. Although the League was able to draw upon states from across the Middle East and North Africa and also oversaw inter-governmental organisations, it was largely the victim of regional rivalries. Perhaps the League's biggest success was at the 1967 summit in Khartoum, which ended Saudi and Egyptian proxy involvement in the Yemen civil war amid shared animosity towards Israel. The Yemen war was emblematic of issues that had created schisms across the Arab world, stemming from competing visions of Arab nationalism and its relationship with the sovereign state.⁹⁰ Yet the Khartoum Summit did not end the fighting in Yemen, nor did it lead to the establishment of a unified Yemeni state. While the Republic of North Yemen was established in 1962, the People's Republic of South Yemen was established in 1967, supported by the Soviet Union, while full unity was only achieved in 1990.⁹¹

A second feature of the summit was debate about how to engage with Israel. Defeat in the 1967 war had escalated divisions across the Arab world while stressing the importance of a shared position on Israel. The Khartoum summit emphasised the importance of the sovereign state across the region, while also acknowledging the need for unity. Yet such unity was constrained by the personalities of rulers from states across the region, albeit alongside a pragmatic agreement not to undermine the regional order.⁹² The summit also established the principle of 'three nos' in dealing with Israel: no negotiation, no recognition and no peace, which was seen by some to be a diplomatic success.

Others were less convinced, believing that the summit signalled the victory of conservative politics over radical. This conservatism was coupled with the vulnerability of the Arab order, which meant that the revolutionary philosophies of the likes of George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh were largely ignored. Such a conclusion helped empower a range of other actors and, ultimately, created fertile ground for the emergence of Islamist movements in the coming decade.

While Ajami's words reflect the perceptions in the Middle East towards their leaders, the geographic landscape of the region had dramatically shifted. One response to this was UN Security Council Resolution 242 passed in November 1967, which called for 'respect for the acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and

political independence of every state in the area to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries free from threats or acts of force'.⁹³ The resolution brought with it tacit acceptance of the state of Israel's existence and established the idea of 'Land for Peace', which became implicit within all future peace processes.⁹⁴

The response from Palestinian resistance organisations was to increase the ferocity of their campaign against the Israeli state with high-profile attacks including those at the Munich Olympics. By now the world was aware of the plight of the Palestinians and the UN invited the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Yasser Arafat, to speak to the General Assembly in 1974. Arafat appealed to the delegates to 'enable our people to establish national independent sovereignty over its own land'.⁹⁵ With the failure of the Arab states to address the Palestinian question, it became the *cause célèbre* of liberation movements across the world.

In spite of the increasing popularity of their cause, Palestinians struggled to integrate into Jordanian society forcing them to move to Lebanon. Once again they would struggle to assimilate, particularly with the outbreak of civil war during which massacres took place at the Sabra and Shatilla refugee camps, committed by the Lebanese Phalanges Party, but according to recently released documents with the support of the IDF.⁹⁶ Beyond this, a number of Arab leaders sensed an opportunity to capitalise upon Nasser's weakness while also addressing serious domestic problems through the instrumentalised use of Islam. The (re)birth of the pan-Islamic movement provided another means through which political elites could increase their legitimacy and speak to populations at home and abroad.

Six years after the 1967 war during the Jewish festival of Yom Kippur, Egyptian forces and their Syrian counterparts launched a strike against Israeli targets, quickly regaining control of the Golan Heights and Sinai. After this initial period of Arab success, Israeli forces turned the tide of the war, albeit with help from the United States, and regained control of both the Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula. It is widely accepted that Egyptian President Anwar Sadat began the war to try and strengthen his hand in negotiations with Israel and following a ceasefire on 22 October, he was heralded as the *batal al ubur*, the Hero of the Crossing, the one responsible for healing the wounds of Egyptian nationalism. A year later Egypt and Israel signed a disengagement agreement and, six years after the war, the Camp David Accords resulted in a peace deal between Israel and Egypt. As a consequence of the deal – and the rejection of the three nos – Egypt was isolated from the Arab world and faced sanctions from the Arab League.⁹⁷

In Egypt the years after the war were characterised by increasing repression and authoritarianism, resulting in serious economic challenges and widespread vitriol directed against Sadat. The peace deal was viewed as a betrayal of Arab, Palestinian and Muslim causes and for Egypt to be the first Arab state to make peace was an affront to many across the state. At this time the Muslim Brotherhood began to play a more prominent role in Egyptian life and amid rising violence emerging during criticism of Egypt's peace treaty with Israel – signed under US auspices after Sadat visited Jerusalem – debate about the nature of Egyptian society and celebrations of the 1973 war, Sadat was assassinated. The failure of the Arab nationalist dream – in part because of the military defeat to Israel, yet equally as a consequence of domestic

repression and rising authoritarianism – meant that political forms of Islam became increasingly popular as a way of ordering regional politics.⁹⁸

Islamic revivalism

The repercussions of the demise of the pan-Arab movement were felt far beyond the borders of Egypt. Tensions over the construction of identity amid changing regional dynamics helped create the space and context for the emergence of an increasingly politicised form of Islam. After the failure of the pan-Arab project, Islam offered the most potent form of resistance, opening up schisms in the relationship between rulers and ruled as messages were spread through mosques, largely circumventing state censorship. Religious identity had long been a key component of Arab nationalism, with the perception that to be an Arab meant that one should also be Muslim.⁹⁹ Shared cultural aspects underpin both identities that are formed within the context of particular histories and following the fragmentation of the Arab nationalist vision, an Islamic revival was hardly surprising.

It is within this context that the British government made the decision to withdraw from 'East of Suez' and by 1971, all British forces had been removed from the Gulf. This withdrawal created space for independence movements to find traction, ultimately resulting in the establishment of Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Yet British involvement in the Gulf continued. In Bahrain, Ian Henderson, a colonial policeman awarded the George Medal for his role in quashing the Mau Mau rebellion, was installed as the head of security in 1966. Henderson retained his position for thirty years amid wide-ranging allegations of torture during his tenure.¹⁰⁰ Even after formal withdrawal, British involvement in Bahrain remained strong, continuing to head up key security portfolios and using an array of strategies perfected amid counter-insurgency campaigns.¹⁰¹ Although British involvement remained, political tensions were exacerbated by increased Iranian activity on the archipelago, reviving historical Persian claims to sovereignty over Bahrain that were later rejected in a UN-supported plebiscite.¹⁰²

The following years were shaped by global concerns about oil, resulting in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) crisis of 1973. At this time, the power of ideology had given way to the economic might of states across the Gulf who, other than Saudi Arabia, were little more than city states at this time and thus were sarcastically referred to as *al-dawla al-bi'r*, the oil-field/well states.¹⁰³ Yet such states would exercise a great deal of power and influence in the coming years, as events across the Gulf began to be felt across the Middle East.

Revolution in Iran resulted in a serious dislocation of the regional order.¹⁰⁴ While under the Shah Iran worked closely with Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf states on regional security, the revolution and ensuing establishment of the Islamic Republic put an end to this cooperation. It also added an explicitly sectarian dimension to the foreign policies of the Persian Gulf states,¹⁰⁵ alongside a strong Iranian desire to provide financial, logistical and ideological support to marginalised groups across the region.

The aftershocks were felt across the region as revolution left 'a trail of devastation in regional relations, littered with spontaneous utterances and unfettered intervention in neighbouring states'.¹⁰⁶

A great deal has been written about the revolution in Iran, but a few points are worth repeating. Widespread unrest stemming from a history of persecution and draconian policies had ostracised large aspects of society who took to the streets after protest groups were brutally repressed. Ruhollah Khomeini had been viewed by many as the figurehead of opposition to the Pahlavi regime, returning from exile shortly after the Shah had abdicated. The system of *veleyat-e faqih* was quickly established, creating an Islamic system of government ruled, in the absence of the missing twelfth Imam, by Khomeini.

At this point, ideas once again took on a central role in the organisation of regional politics in the guise of pan-Islamism. Much like Arab nationalism before it, visions of pan-Islamism required demonstrations of *adherence* to – and *purity* of – Islamic messages in an attempt to speak to members of the global *umma*. Once again, regime interest began to manifest in such claims, as Saudi Arabia sought to frame Iran as a Shi'a state, reducing its appeal to Sunni Muslims, while also stressing the Persian nature of the revolution. In contrast, Tehran sought to portray the Al Saud as unpious and not worthy of being the guardians of the two holy places.¹⁰⁷

Domestic unrest also began to increase amid the rising prominence of Islam within politics. The same year, on the eastern and western coasts of the kingdom, unrest was brewing. On the western coast in the largely Shi'a areas, political unrest among the marginalised Shi'a groups, long persecuted by the state on the grounds of their sect had been empowered by events in Iran. On the opposite coast, during the pilgrimage season, a descendent of the Saudi *ikhwan*, Juhayman Al Utaybi, seized the Grand Mosque of Mecca in protest at what was seen to be the 'moral laxity and degeneration of the Saudi rulers'.¹⁰⁸ While ended by military force, the symbolic ramifications of events demonstrate different interpretations of Wahhabist doctrine within Saudi Arabia.

The events of 1979 demonstrate the symbolic importance of religion within regional – and global – politics, particularly in light of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and ensuing flow of Muslims to the country to fight for the Western-backed *mujahedin*. While some scholars reduce the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran to a sectarian schism,¹⁰⁹ a more nuanced reading of events suggests that religion has taken on additional political meaning within the context of increasingly vocal sectarian divisions.¹¹⁰ In a reading of events similar to that put forward by Barnett to describe the regional influence of Arabism, Islam thus took on a symbolic role, serving as a source of legitimacy for audiences across the region. From this, religion also became a source and arena of competition and rivalry, resulting in the politicisation of religion and the conflation of politics with religion.

In Lebanon, the collision of religion, politics and geopolitics resulted in the establishment of Hizballah, the Party of God, which was formed with Iranian support, both financial and ideological, for Shi'a communities across the south of the state. In the following decades Hizballah would go on to become a prominent Iranian ally, but as we shall see, context and contingency were central to the group's formation.¹¹¹ While the

new Islamic Republic was central to the emergence of the Party of God, we must also recall the importance of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 in response to continued attacks from the PLO. The importance of the Israeli invasion in creating Hizballah was acknowledged – and perhaps overstated – by former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who argued that ‘it was our presence there that created Hezbollah.’¹¹²

It was hardly surprising that war quickly followed the declaration of the Islamic Republic. Iraqi armed forces invaded Iran on 22 September 1980 and began an eight-year conflict that resulted in a catastrophic loss of life and drew in other Gulf states, demonstrating the regional importance of the war amid widespread fear of Iranian intentions.¹¹³ Khomeini’s rhetoric only served to fuel such concerns by stressing a desire to export the revolution and to provide support for oppressed Muslims across the world. The use of religious rhetoric threatened to open up the regional order, leading to the fear that minority Shi’a groups – many of whom had experienced discrimination throughout state-building processes – would side with Iran.

Shared religious and ethnic ties across the border between the two states meant that in both Tehran and Baghdad, ethno-religious minorities were perceived as fifth columns and subject to discrimination and marginalisation from state projects. In Iraq, Saddam Hussein had risen to power in 1979 after a bloodless coup toppled Ahmed Hassan Al Bakr. At this point tensions between ruler and ruled resulted in a violent society and the widespread repression – and murder – of Shi’a political and religious figures. Minority groups were violently repressed, most notably in the al-Anfal genocide and the Halabja massacre which resulted in the deaths of over a hundred thousand Kurds.¹¹⁴

Following the end of the war, circumstances facilitated moves towards rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia following a catastrophic earthquake in Iran and continued fear about the aspirations of Saddam Hussein. The annexation of Kuwait as the nineteenth province of Iraq in 1991 was the manifestation of such fears, exacerbated by Saddam’s weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programme. The invasion quickly toppled the regime of Sheikh Jaber Al Sabah, who fled to Saudi Arabia, but a week after Operation Desert Storm was launched, the Iraqi military was decimated but the Ba’ath party rule continued.

Political turmoil was not restricted to the Gulf. The struggle between Israelis and Palestinians erupted once again in 1987 with the first *intifada* (uprising) comprised of widespread acts of civil disobedience and resistance across the West Bank and Gaza. The events lasted until 1991 with the Oslo Accords but marked a significant turning point in the Palestinian cause as local agency began to act independently of regional Arab states. The Oslo Accords sought to restart the peace process and move toward a two-state solution, based on the 1978 Camp David Accords but predicated upon mutual recognition and the right of Palestinians to self-determination as documented in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Signed on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993, the accords put a road map towards a two-state solution in place, which was halted in 1995 with the assassination of Yitzak Rabin by Yigal Amir, an Israeli citizen who rejected peace with the Palestinians. Showing the power of ideas

and ideology and their interaction with political projects, at his trial, Amir claimed that he was acting in accordance with Jewish Law, which was rejected by the judges.¹¹⁵

The War on Terror

The events of 11 September 2001 dramatically altered the nature of international politics, creating more conducive conditions to spatialise the exception. The declaration of War on Terror called for the eradication of violent Islamic fundamentalism and the safe havens that allowed such groups to flourish. Across the region, the narrative of the War on Terror provided scope for leaders to frame dissent as terrorism and draw upon US support in the process. In framing political struggles as part of this broader struggle, regimes were able to conduct military campaigns that involved emergency powers, derogation from legal structures and, also, to transgress humanitarian concerns.¹¹⁶

In the State of the Union speech that followed the 9/11 attacks in early 2002, President Bush positioned Iran and Iraq as part of an 'axis of evil' that would shape the contemporary world order. Although eleven of the nineteen hijackers were Saudi citizens, the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States remained positive amid strong personal relations between kings and presidents.¹¹⁷ Regional security calculations were a central part of tensions across the Persian Gulf, with Saudi Arabia reliant upon the United States for security while Iran deemed itself uniquely qualified to preserve the regional status quo.¹¹⁸

A year later, a US-led military force invaded Iraq, albeit with limited international support and without a UN Security Council Resolution. There is little doubt that the invasion and its aftermath had a catastrophic impact upon Iraq as it quickly became the site of a struggle for political power and a broader conflict that drew in a range of regional actors not only in response to the invasion, but also in an attempt to shape the post-war landscape of the country. Abu Al Zarqawi, the leader of Al Qa'ida in Iraq, suggested that the fight against coalition forces in Iraq would play an important role in the group's larger struggle: 'the spark has been lit here in Iraq, and its heat will continue to intensify – by Allah's permission – until it burns the crusader armies in Dabiq'.¹¹⁹

Post Saddam, politics in Iraq became shaped by a range of parabolic pressures that thrust the indigenous alongside the regional and the international, with Iran in a position of influence.¹²⁰ For many Arab leaders, the idea that Iran would gain a foothold in the Arab world was a source of great concern. Saudi Arabia was especially worried, urging US officials not to 'leave Iraq until its sovereignty has been restored, otherwise it will be vulnerable to the Iranians'.¹²¹

Iraq quickly become the main arena of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia – along with other Sunni Arab states – and Iran, although the struggle was not limited to Iraq's territorial borders, opening up space for a regional competition. The rivalry was escalated by King Abdullah of Jordan's claims about a 'Shi'a Crescent' that framed Shi'a communities across the region as fifth columnists, doing the nefarious bidding of Iran.

Efforts to frame regional politics along sectarian lines began in earnest after the 2003 war, yet these narratives struggled to find traction across the region, where President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran had become one of the most popular figures through his anti-imperialist stance.

Ahmadinejad's popularity was matched by that of Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hizballah, whose actions in the 2006 war with Israel were well received by populations across the Middle East. Only a year before conflict, Hizballah's power in Lebanon appeared to be in jeopardy following the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister – allegedly by Hizballah and Syrian actors¹²² – which resulted in the withdrawal of Syrian troops from the state who had been in Lebanon since the start of the civil war.¹²³ Yet within the space of a year, the Party of God fought a thirty-four-day war with Israel in south Lebanon, which resulted in the punitive destruction of the Beirut suburb of Dahiyeh but was framed as a success for Hizballah and, by extension, Iran.¹²⁴ As a consequence, Hizballah's popularity increased dramatically across the region, laying bare a dilemma in Arab leadership: to support groups that opposed Israel, or to oppose Shi'a groups across the region and, by extension, Iran.

Post 2003, scholars began to view a new form of regional organisation through the lens of a 'normal' Westphalian system, where states were driven by *raison d'état*.¹²⁵ With the increased prominence of non-Arab players within regional politics the move to a 'post-Arab system' appeared in motion. At this point, as scholars such as Vali Nasr suggested, sectarian identities began to shape the region, not Arabism.¹²⁶ Yet as Morten Valbjørn and André Bank stress, Arab politics became shaped by a 'new' form of competition over the meaning of Arab nationalism. Evoking Malcolm Kerr's work on the *Arab Cold War* and Jerrold Green's assertion that 'Arab politics is still Arab',¹²⁷ Valbjørn and Bank argued that this new form of Arab nationalism played out over Arab symbols, allowing for analysis of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.¹²⁸ Yet with the Arab Uprisings of less than a decade later, the ordering of space took on a different form, shaped by the interaction of Arabism with Islamism, taking place within arenas that were not traditionally associated with the Arab cause¹²⁹ and cultivating sect-based cleavages.

In December 2010, the actions of a Tunisian street vendor triggered a tidal wave of protests across the region that toppled long-standing authoritarian regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya. The Arab Uprisings eviscerated regime–society relations, opening up deep schisms within the fabric of political projects and revealing traumatic memories across the region's history. The spread of protests across the region driven by a dissatisfaction with the economic climate and frustration at the nature of regime–society relations is the focus of later chapters, but it is important to note that the spread of these grievances from Tunisia to Bahrain shows the capacity of ideas and movements to transcend state borders. The emergence of regional grievances created conditions of uncertainty that placed serious pressure on regimes across the region, resulting in fragmentation and reframing the relationship between *ordnung* and *ortung*, with broader regional consequences.

The uprisings also impacted upon relations between states as a number became embroiled in proxy conflicts in pursuit of their foreign policy goals.¹³⁰ Other states affected by the uprisings were able to avoid widespread destruction yet claims to

sovereignty and legitimacy had been damaged by the unrest. This unrest put serious pressure on regime–society relations and the ability of a state to withstand this reveals a great deal about the state-building process. It also opened up schisms within these processes, particularly over the role of religion within political life. While suspicion at Iranian involvement had escalated into proxy conflicts across the region, it later transpired that groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood had received support for Qatar, leading to a Saudi-led land and sea blockade.

The blockade shortly followed the withdrawal of Saudi, Bahraini, Emirati and Sudanese ambassadors, posing a serious challenge to the very survival of the Gulf Co-Operation Council (GCC).¹³¹ The GCC had been formed in the midst of the Iran–Iraq War to maintain security and stability across the Persian Gulf, but was predominantly formed to counter threats from across the Gulf. Yet Qatar's apparent counter-hegemonic behaviour across the post-Arab Uprisings region including the funding of violent groups, support for Islamist movements and Al Jazeera's anti-status quo coverage of the uprisings created serious schisms within the organisation. The blockade continued over the summer of 2018, echoing a similar withdrawal of ambassadors in 2014 and resulting in tenders being placed to create a canal zone between Qatar and the mainland.

Perhaps the biggest impact on the territorial construction of the Middle East, however, was the emergence of Da'ish in the summer of 2014. The declaration of the caliphate spanning territory in both Iraq and Syria was heralded by a video posted on YouTube by Bastian Vasquez, a Chilean-Norwegian man, stood on the border between Iraq and Syria. The video, entitled 'The End of Sykes–Picot' shed light upon the intentions of the group, rejecting the 'so-called border of Sykes–Picot' and articulating widespread anger and frustration at the legacy of state formation across the region.¹³² Despite the inaccuracy of the claims, the Sykes–Picot narrative proved to be a powerful vehicle for demonstrating the legacy of external interference across the region. Although defeated through a loose alliance of forces from Iraq, Popular Mobilisation Units (PMUs), Iran, Hizballah, Syria, the United States, Russian, UK and Turkey, the legacy of the caliphate remains, as post-conflict reconstruction efforts play out across Iraq and conflict continues in Syria.

Conclusions

Results from a 2015 study undertaken by a research team at Mount Sinai hospital in New York found that trauma from the Holocaust with epigenetic alterations can be seen in both parents and offspring. The conclusions of the study suggest that trauma can be intergenerational and similar conclusions can be derived about how memory can be shared across communities.¹³³ From this, historical experience has an undeniable role in shaping the present. Thus, the establishment of political organisation across the region should not be viewed in isolation. Rather, we should place the emergence of states and groups within context, through which rules and norms are established and ultimately, one learns how to live. Interpretations of history

result in the cultivation of particular forms of identities and political organisation, shaped by the residue of history.

Tensions over memories and the political actions that they provoke can cause rifts within and between states, leaving regimes open to criticism, which itself creates space for new arrangements of political life, as we see in the cases of Arabism and pan-Islamism. Thus, events occur within the context of history and memory and how people act at such points is a consequence of their engagement with both the *nomos* and the political structures of the state, which may not be aligned.

Structures also exist between states, as collective memory and experience operates within ethnic groups, sects, religions or broad ideological positions, setting rules on how to live and defining spatial borders. Ultimately, a dialectic relationship between agency and *nomos* means that political actions have metaphysical consequences with longer-term repercussions. Such structures impact on the ability to act in particular ways, creating, replicating or moulding grievances across time. Structures can exist within states, for instance across history, reflecting the challenges that the state has gone through, along with the type of nation building and the assimilation of others into national projects.

A central tension emerges from the interaction of *nomos* and *nomoi* that exist within powerful currents, driven by nationalist, tribal and religious sentiments. While the global *nomos* offers a form of political ordering, the interaction of *ordnung* and *ortung* that defines *nomoi* can create myriad forms of political life amid parabolic pressures and currents. Such currents posed challenges for the development of political organisation, seen in Migdal's ideas about the role of the state in society and the inability to penetrate and regulate social relationships.

The presence of 'weak states' and a shared normative environment means that regional security machinations have domestic repercussions. Fearing increased Iranian involvement, regimes typically respond with restrictive strategies and securitisation, resulting in conditions of bare life and necropolitics as a consequence of regional events. Of course, this is not a region-wide strategy, as we shall see in Kuwait, but it is common in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen and Israel. Opposition is often framed within the context of an existential struggle for survival in an attempt to justify recourse to emergency legislation. For many states, this transcends conflict and also exists within the context of a process of securitisation, often along sectarian lines and thus, occurring across borders. Framing political tensions in such a way removes agency from domestic groups while also consolidating the support base of a ruling elite and eroding the traction of socio-economic protest movements. Within this process, regimes create the conditions of bare life and necropolitics in an effort to ensure their own survival, while securing regional alliances in the process. Yet the onset of the uprisings suggests that it is not enough to focus solely upon structure; we must also consider the role of agency in political activity.

As we move forward, it is important to remember the legacy of this experience as residue feeds into quasi-normative structures such as memory, trauma and empowerment, shaping the behaviour of actors. Indeed, the interaction of material and ideological structures shapes the capacity and desire of actors to behave in particular

ways. Yet we must also note that state experience – and from this, the experience of individuals and groups within the state – differ, shaped by contingent facts. Such experiences create normative environments that regulate life, but also provide opportunities for regimes to derive legitimacy from times of contestation.

Notes

- 1 Ariel I. Ahram and Ellen Lust, 'The Decline and Fall of the Arab State', *Survival*, 58:2 (2016), 7–34.
- 2 Paul Noble, 'The Arab System: Pressures, Constraints, and Opportunities', in Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), p. 57.
- 3 Bahgat Korany, Paul Noble and Rex Brynen (eds), *The Many Faces of National Security in the Arab World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).
- 4 See James Quinlivan, 'Coups-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East', *International Security*, 24:2 (1999), 131–65; Owen, *State, Power and Politics and Rise and Fall*.
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