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The Newsletter of FPRI's Wachman CenterA New Middle East? A Report of FPRI's History Institute for Teachers

by Trudy J. Kuehner, rapporteur

January 2005
Vol. 10, No. 1

During the past two years the United States has launched several major initiatives intended to remake the Middle East as part of the War on Terrorism. This included the overthrow of Saddam and the political reconstruction of Iraq; the "Road Map" proposal for Israeli-Palestinian peace; a "forward strategy" to encourage democracy in the region; multilateral efforts to contain nuclear proliferation; and a program to encourage economic growth. All told, it is the most ambitious policy ever attempted to transform the prospects of a region sunk in a generation of economic stagnation, religious turmoil, and violent conflicts.

What impact has the War on Terrorism made on the Middle East? Can we see any progress toward U.S. goals? Are we moving toward an end of conflicts and a rebirth of economic and political change, or the reverse? It is especially important for American educators to understand these political changes so that the next generation of Americans will understand where this region is going and why. To illuminate these issues, FPRI held its 12th **History Institute for Teachers** on October 16-17, 2004. Forty teachers from 15 states attended the weekend program at the Gregg Conference Center in Bryn Mawr, PA, sponsored by Mason Crest Publishers (**www.masoncrest.com**) and Mr. and Mrs. Robert A. Fox.

FPRI's **History Institute** is chaired by **David Eisenhower** and **Walter A. McDougall**, and is supported by grants from The Annenberg Foundation and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation.

The Future of Saudi Arabia and What al-Qaeda Websites Tell Us

Michael Doran of Princeton University discussed the information available today on the various Islamist groups at their websites (see Lawrence Wright's "The Terror Web," *New Yorker*, July 26, 2004). For Middle Eastern analysts, the Internet provides the opportunity to monitor what the groups are thinking and saying day to day.

Al Qaeda represents the most extreme version of Wahhabism, the official ideology of Saudi Arabia. It has generated enormous amounts of intellectual activity, posting hundreds of thousands of pages of material on the Internet. For ideology and propaganda, there's Sawt al Jihad (The Voice of Jihad); another periodical, Muaskar al-Battar (Prophet's Sword), is devoted to military preparations for Jihad. The website www.tawhed.ws includes Al Qaeda's library, with books for download and the full text of fatwas. It defines the "straight path of Islam" the group feels it represents. Of note, that site is mainly concerned with Al Qaeda's relations with other Muslims. Indeed, Arabs and Muslims are more concerned about relations with other Arabs and Muslims than with the West.

Saudi Arabia's two key political communities are the Westernizing technocrats, centered in Jeddah, and the Wahhabi clerics, who believe that all political associations should be based on religion, not national identity. There is no single Wahhabism, but the main line of interpretation began with Ibn Tayimiya, passed through his students, and was revived by Ibn Abdul Wahhab in the 18th century. Wahhab made common cause with the Saudi royal family and gave the dynasty its official ideology.

Saudi Arabia is in the throes of a population explosion. With half the population under age 20 and the economy declining, the younger generation knows it cannot hope to replicate its parents' standard of living. It is increasingly resentful, and both technocrats and clerics agree that something has got to reform. But institutional change poses a

problem for the clerics, who own a large part of the state—schools, the judiciary, the police, mosques.

Al Qaeda is one of several Islamist groups in the country. Sahwa (Awakening) was founded in the 1990s as a grassroots movement against secularism. Its two leaders, Safar al Hawali and Salman al-Awdah, were jailed for five years in the late 1990s for anti-regime activities. Where Sahwa has since moderated its position, Al Qaeda developed on its own in Afghanistan in a different direction. Where Al Qaeda promotes violent jihad, Sahwa shuns any conflict that would jeopardize what Muslims already have in Saudi Arabia. The crackdown on terror the Saudis have been carrying out since May 2003 is strengthening this group relative to Al Qaeda.

Doran recommended Michael Cook's *Forbidding Wrong in Islam: An Introduction* (Cambridge, 2003) as an excellent primer on this subject for teachers and students.

- **View a video of Doran's lecture**

Iraqi Democracy

Eric Davis of Rutgers University discussed how historical memory informs the cultural and political consciousness of both Westerners and the peoples of the Middle East. Americans' understanding is often based on stereotypes: the notions that there can be no democracy in Muslim countries; that Arab countries lack a sense of political community and need authoritarian rulers; that tribal structures preclude the formation of national identities. In fact, during the ninth and tenth centuries, Islamic, Christian and Jewish theologians and thinkers established an ecumenical tradition that continued into the 20th century.

Western analysis of Iraq often ignores Iraqi history prior to Saddam, including the first Baathist regime, which seized power in February 1963 (Saddam's Baathist regime seized power in July 1968). Before 1968, many Iraqi intellectuals and activists had been working to establish a civil society and promote democracy, but they were imprisoned, tortured, executed or expelled.

Today, when asked about their vision of the future, Iraqis rank security and employment as more important than democracy. Elections and representative institutions are not the critical issues. What they want is more a social democracy, an anti-sectarian state that is involved in the economy. It is this strongly felt desire that Iraq never return to the sectarianism of the Baath that offers the greatest hope for a pluralist, democratic Iraq.

One of the main problems facing Iraq is the lack of trust among its main ethnic groups after forty years of sectarian rule. Thus one of the main potential functions of historical memory is to overcome that legacy and the related lack of political self-confidence. The Baath regime's Project for the Rewriting of History required professors, intellectuals, and artists to rewrite history to expunge the accomplishments of the nationalist movement. Today, we see again many Iraqis becoming actively involved in civic life: establishing municipal councils, publishing newspapers and journals, and forming organizations committed to working for democratic change.

The pre-1963 Iraqi nationalist movement had four elements vital to democracy building: (1) cross-ethnic cooperation; (2) associational behavior; (3) a desire for cross-ethnic and regional communication, and (4) widespread artistic creativity and innovation. The government needs to see to the rewriting of textbooks, by Iraqis, to promote better understandings of this. It can use the mass media; emphasize folklore, as Iraqi ruler Abd al-Karim Qasim (1958-63) did to foster solidarity; and promote coffee houses, especially those devoted to the arts. Historically, the Iraqi coffee house has been one of the cornerstones of civil society, where cultural and political debate has flourished. Creative uses of historical memory can inspire Iraqis to regain a sense of civic pride and political self-confidence.

To read two of Davis's essays on Iraq, see:

- **Democracy's Prospects in Iraq**
- **Taking Democracy Seriously in Iraq**

U. S. Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Harvey Sicherman, President of FPRI, outlined how the war on terror and the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process had demoted the Arab-Israeli conflict from Washington's top priority. American policy was based on a particular model of how peace could be made. The 1967 War discredited the formula whereby outside powers imposed a "rough justice" and then guaranteed it as had happened following the Suez crisis of 1956. Instead, Washington would encourage leaders who had convinced each other of their willingness to make a deal by reducing their risks in making it with money, arms, and diplomacy. This model produced peace treaties between Egypt and Israel (1979) and Israel and Jordan (1994), both of which have held up well despite assassination (Sadat) and war (Lebanon; Intifada). The 1993 Oslo Agreement between Yitzhak Rabin and Yassir Arafat appeared to be another such deal. But Arafat's behavior at Camp David (2000) and his role in the subsequent al-Aksa intifada discredited the Palestinian partner in Israel and the United States. The negotiating record indicated that gaps had been narrowed on territorial issues (borders; settlements) and security arrangements but were very far apart on Jerusalem and refugees.

President Bush attempted to break the stalemate by publicly endorsing an independent Palestinian state but coupling it to demands for Palestinian reform and democracy. The U.S.-led "Road Map," developed by the "Quartet" of the U.S., EU, Russia, and U.N., failed, however, when Arafat sabotaged efforts to suppress terrorism by his first Prime Minister Abu Mazen. By late 2003, the process began to look like a dead end to Israelis, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon adopted a new strategy of withdrawing or "disengaging" from Gaza unilaterally. This "unilateral" initiative has turned out to be the most multilateral of all the initiatives, involving the Palestinians, Egyptians, Americans, and Europeans.

Just as the Iraq War of 1991 begat the Madrid Conference that led to Oslo, the current diplomacy took its cue from the overthrow of Saddam. The war on terrorism and the invasion of Iraq are central to U.S. diplomacy and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process a secondary concern pending the appearance of a Palestinian leader who is willing to act against terrorism. It will remain subject to regional developments, especially actions by Syria and Iran. The formula remains the same: leaders from each side must convince each other they want a deal and then the United States can help to reduce their risks. In any event, the peace available is not going to be the one of reconciliation, as was hoped in 1993, but rather a peace of the generals, sustained by a balance of power.

- **View a video of Sicherman's lecture**
- **View a video of Sicherman's lecture on "Democracy's Prospects in the Middle East"**

The Role of Syria, Jordan, and Egypt

Najib Ghadbian of the University of Arkansas noted how, prior to 9/11, America's pursuit of its three most important objectives in the Middle East (access to affordable oil, protecting Israel's security; and maintaining regional stability) resulted in America's aligning itself with dictators. Added to these objectives after 9/11 were prosecuting the war on terror and promoting democracy.

After 9/11, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan condemned the attacks and offered assistance to the U.S. None of them publicly condemned the war in Afghanistan. Their position shifted, however, in September 2002, when President Bush sought the UN's consent to making Iraq the second phase of the war on terror, which all three opposed. Subsequently they diverged from each other, with Egypt and Jordan acceding to and even providing logistical help for the war while Syria continued to oppose it.

All three countries were hurt by the war economically, as they had benefited from both legal and illegal dealings with Saddam and depended on Iraq for oil and trade (the U.S. did compensate Jordan for this loss). Politically, they shifted their focus from possible reform to regime survival in view of the Bush doctrine. Moreover, in showcasing Iraq as a test case, the U.S. provided neighboring countries with visions of lootings and violence. Jordan's King Abdullah has restored the country's parliament and taken other steps to satisfy the U.S. and continue to receive aid, and Egypt is doing its best to retain regional influence and introduce those reforms it can short of democracy.

Syria, meanwhile, while not named to the axis of evil in January 2002, has since occasioned the Syrian Accountability Act President Bush introduced in December 2003, which calls for it to halt its support for groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah, cease developing biological and chemical weapons, withdraw its forces from Lebanon, cease interference in Iraq, and enter into negotiations with Israel. Prof. Ghadbian proposed understanding long-term political grievances, building more alliances on the model of U.S.-Pakistani collaboration, and engaging countries' own activists as more

effective in the war on terror than imposing democracy from without.

Economics, Demography and Oil

Bernard Munk of FPRI discussed oil in the Middle East, noting that while 9/11 did create market uncertainty, it produced no fundamental change. The current problems in Iraq, too, only superficially explain today's high oil prices. Over 50-100 years, oil as a commodity has gone through long periods of low prices and short cycles of high prices: it's a capacity issue. The key to lowering prices is expanding capacity. For now, the world remains dependent on Middle Eastern oil because it is the cheapest barrel and its reserves are known.

At best, Iraq exports less than 2 billion barrels/day, out of 75-80 b/d produced worldwide. Production is now about back to its pre-2003 peak, but it will take 10-20 years of investment to develop what are probably the second to third largest known reserves in the world. But a private company cannot simply go in and invest—states control the market. State involvement in the oil market has a long history going back to the 1904-05 Russo-Japanese war, after which Britain formed Anglo Persian Oil (now BP) to ensure supplies for its coaling stations around the world. Lawrence of Arabia then unleashed oil companies' desire to get in on the reserves. Oil was cheap after World War II, and the U.S. was an exporter. That's where its story becomes interrelated with the Cold War. In the late 1960s, Libya threw out the major companies; beginning the era of "resource nationalism." Control was taken back by the producing states. Oil companies in the Middle East became agents of the state, and the U.S. became a significant importer of oil after 1971.

Tie-ups between governments and markets are a recurrent theme, built around several characteristics of the commodity. Oil is price inelastic—it takes a large change in its price to induce change in consumption. There's also the problem of governments attempting to control price volatility by holding reserves, which defeats the private holding of inventory. This leaves no buffer to spikes and price moves. If oil were strictly a market commodity, supply would be far more responsive to expanded demand, but oil is a "strategic resource." Finally, the fact that sources of cheap reserves are under government control makes it virtually impossible for private companies to ignore government policies regarding development. Taken together, all this means that the market can't do the job. These factors produce price volatility which in turn produces more intervention.

- **View Munk's powerpoint presentation** (1.4MB .ppt)

Women in the Middle East

Beth Baron of CUNY, whose books include *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (U. Calif. Press, 2005) discussed the long history of Anglo-American "civilizing missions" in the Middle East that focused on women. Anglo-Americans were involved in Christianizing, Westernizing, and democratizing missions in the region from the early 1800s through the 1950s, with a heyday in the 1920s-30s. Over those years, church groups sent missionaries to Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Anatolia, Iran, Arabia, Egypt and Sudan to evangelize and convert Eastern Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Their method was to provide services, schools, hospitals, clinics, orphanages, all of which targeted women, who were seen as the key to converting a household. The majority of missionaries, too, were women, it being less expensive to send out a woman than a minister and his family.

The outcomes were mixed. The efforts did leave hospitals and a network of schools at various levels, many of which were subsequently nationalized, among them the American Universities in Beirut and Cairo. But Muslim converts were few, a strong anti-missionary movement having emerged by the 1920s. Not accidentally, the Muslim Brotherhood, one of the earliest Islamist groups in Egypt, had its roots in the peak decades of the missionary movement. That anti-missionary group actually adopted many of the methods of the missionaries.

The Liberal Age, from the late 19th to the mid 20th century, was marked by the ferment of legal ideologies. A women's press flourished, and women called for education, employment, and the reform of family law, which was based on Islamic law. They sought to raise the legal age of marriage to 16 or 18, restrict polygamy and easy divorces for men, and give women access to divorce. Both the British Colonial regime in Egypt and various American foundations (Rockefeller) sought to improve hygiene and family planning. The Socialist period (1950s-70s) saw revolutions in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq and the rise of state welfare. With education now a right for girls, women called for secondary and not just primary education. They also sought voting rights and the integration of their separate political parties.

Women were entering socialist governments, usually as social affairs ministers, where they focused on family issues. Of them, family law proved most resistant to change and indeed remains unfinished business. After 1979, women were caught between authoritarian states and the new Islamist movements. Islamic feminism emerged—women working within Islamic law to promote their rights, most effectively in Iran—but also some women joined the Islamist wave.

Looking at Iraq today, one might want to recall what happened after the 1958 Iraqi Revolution that overthrew the monarchy and brought Abd al-Karim Qasim to power. Stirred by the League for Defense of Women's Rights, which was affiliated with the Iraqi Communist Party, Qasim introduced legislation banning honor killing and reforming the laws on personal status, divorce, polygamy, and inheritance. A counterrevolution sought to roll these reforms back. After Qasim was assassinated in 1963, Saddam's second revolution continued the earlier reforms but in a controlled manner. (He had also silenced Islamists like those who had opposed Qasim.) But this began to unravel in the 1990s, when Saddam needed to encourage tribalism for political reasons. Many women's issues that are thought to be part of Islam, such as honor killings, flow from tribalism. Islamic law in fact seeks to prevent family members from taking the law into own hands.

The Coalition's Provisional Authority in Iraq attempted to guarantee 50 percent women's representation in the parliament, a percentage far higher than the ratio in America. It remains to be seen if, when Iraqis go to the polls, the outcomes will be what the United States desired. The greatest advocate of holding elections is Shiite cleric Ayatollah Sistani, who supports women's voting (as they do in Iran but do not in Saudi Arabia) and would promote Islamic family law. Shiite leadership may, then, turn out to be better for Iraqi women than the former Sunni Islamic law.

Dr. Baron concluded that targeting women as the key to broader change tends to backfire. When broader change does come, however, women's situations will improve.

The Next Middle East

Robert D. Kaplan, contributing editor to the *Atlantic Monthly* and a long-time FPRI associate, delivered the keynote address, noting that as the passing of dictators in the Middle East leaves weak, "neither/nor" democracies. After fifty years of profound economic and social change, the new leaders will not have the luxury of ruling autocratically.

Where the Middle East was once largely a rural desert society, today it is a region of mega-cities such as Cairo, Tunis, Casablanca, Damascus. As large numbers of people crowded into these cities in the 1960s-80s, there were ample incentives for juvenile delinquency, and yet the region remained nonviolent. This was because the society adapted by intensifying to a more austere, ideological religiosity suited to deal an impersonal urban environment. This unfortunately paved the way for the emergence of terrorist groups.

Over the years, various "enlightened dictators" kept a lid on this, but as modern middle classes emerge, the Middle East is on the brink of epic political change. That will lead initially to an upsurge in terrorism. When a system collapses, there is a security vacuum. Liberalization in the Middle East will lead to more terrorism, not less, until these newly emerging systems gather institutional strength. Even media such as Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera, which can operate counter to U.S. objectives, are themselves products of liberalization.

Iraq may have been the bridge too far in America's post-Cold War democratic progress, which started off easily in Central Europe after the Berlin Wall fell. But those nations had industrial bases, significant middle classes, high literacy rates, and low birth rates. The Balkans were more troublesome: Yugoslavia collapsed, and Romania, Albania, and Bulgaria all had difficult transitions. Iraq—surrounded by Iran, Syria, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the poorest part of Turkey—is even more geographically and historically challenging.

While the Sunni Triangle remains troublesome, the northern third of Iraq, Kurdistan, is a success story, and we're succeeding in the south, where the Shiites are preparing for elections. This is a good (albeit underreported) narrative going on. Iran, however, remains the big elephant in the Middle East, with 69 million people to Iraq's 23 million. This may be the last really strong, centralized Iranian state. Whatever ultimately replaces it is likely to be decentralized, and that will let the genie out of the bottle for ethnic groups throughout the region. The best way we can fast-forward change there is by concentrating on consolidating Iraq. The better Iraq looks, the better change is going to look in countries such as Syria, Iran, and Egypt.

- **Read the *FPRI Wire* on Kaplan's lecture**

Great "reads" by Robert Kaplan: *Mediterranean Winter* (2004); *Warrior Politics* (2001); *Eastward to Tartary: Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus* (2000); *Soldiers of God: With Islamic Warriors in Afghanistan and Pakistan* (1990; republished in 2001, with a new introduction); *Surrender or Starve: Travels in Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and Eritrea* (1988; republished in paperback in 2003)

Tips about teaching the Middle East were presented by the following teachers: Paul Dickler, a history teacher at Neshaminy High School and a senior fellow of FPRI's Marvin Wachman Fund for International Education, Kathy Stokes, Cherokee High School in Marlton, NJ; and Amy Glenn, Lawrenceville School, NJ.

Additional Resources on FPRI's Website

- **Teaching about the Middle East at the High School Level**, by Adam Garfinkle, *Footnotes*, 12/1999
- **The American Encounter with Islam, William Anthony Hay**, *Footnotes*, 9/2003
- **Teaching about World Religions**, William Anthony Hay, *Footnotes*, 12/2001
- **The Merits and Perils of Teaching about Other Cultures**, Walter A. McDougall, *Footnotes*, 5/1999

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Note: FPRI served as Editorial Consultant to Mason Crest Publishers for a 25-volume series on "Modern Middle East Nations and Their Strategic Places in the World," designed for secondary school students, and currently serves as Editorial Consultant for a 17-volume series on "The Growth and Influence of Islam in the Nations of Asia." The Middle East series was published in 2004; the Asia series will be published in 2005. For information, see

- **FPRI Middle East Book Series**
- **www.masoncrest.com**

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