

Western Policies in the Islamic World: Between Strategic Control and Cultural Influence

السياسات الغربية في العالم الإسلامي: بين السيطرة الاستراتيجية والتأثير الثقافي

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Received 31/10/2024

Accepted 18./02/2025

• Abstract:

In the game of global politics, Western countries navigate between the ropes of strategy and culture in the Muslim world, often crossing the boundaries of respect and legitimate partnership. The West's policies towards the Muslim world oscillate between illegitimate intervention and sedition with the aim of hegemony. This article examines the West's policies towards the Muslim world with the aim of clarifying the methods used to implement them in order to achieve its interests and hegemony through unjustified interventions in its political and cultural affairs. It reveals the effects and repercussions of this through a comprehensive and balanced analysis of these complex relationships.

Keywords: West, Islamic world, democracy, media, strategic control, hegemony, strategic interests.

المخلص:

في لعبة السياسة العالمية، تنتقل الدول الغربية بين خيوط السيطرة الاستراتيجية والثقافة في العالم الإسلامي، وغالبًا ما تتجاوز حدود الاحترام والشراكة المشروعة. تتأرجح سياسات الغرب تجاه العالم الإسلامي بين التدخل غير المشروع وإثارة الفتن بهدف تحقيق الهيمنة. يستعرض هذا المقال سياسات الغرب تجاه العالم الإسلامي بهدف توضيح الأساليب المستخدمة لتنفيذها من أجل تحقيق مصالحه وهيمنته من خلال تدخلات غير مبررة في الشؤون السياسية والثقافية. كما يكشف عن الآثار والتداعيات الناتجة عن هذه السياسات من خلال تحليل شامل ومتوازن لهذه العلاقات المعقدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الغرب، العالم الإسلامي، الديمقراطية، الإعلام، السيطرة الاستراتيجية، الهيمنة، المصالح الاستراتيجية.

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Introduction

The relationships between the West and the Islamic world carry a complex history of tensions and transformations, making their understanding and analysis essential for comprehending the political and cultural dynamics in the region. These relationships are embodied in the fragile balance between the strategic control sought by the West (Western European and North American countries) and the profound cultural influence in shaping the identities of Muslim peoples.

By attempting to understand this balance and analyze its effects, this article embarks on an exploratory journey through the history of relations between the West and the Islamic world, starting from the colonial period to the era of globalization. We aim to understand the driving forces behind Western policies in the region and how these policies have impacted political and cultural balances.

By providing a precise analysis of Western policies in the Islamic world, this article opens a broad window on a contradictory history and an uncertain future. It offers tools for a deep understanding of the transformations the region has witnessed, which play a critical role in shaping the international arena.

Through analyzing the political goals and cultural impact of Western policies, the article can open new horizons for thinking and analysis. It equips the reader with deep insights that help in understanding the challenges facing the region and guides towards future directions that provide the Islamic world with opportunities for development and prosperity.

Study problem

The problem of the study can be formulated in the following questions:

- How have Western policies towards the contemporary Islamic world evolved, and what role do history and culture play in shaping them?
- What challenges has the West faced in its attempts to achieve strategic control in the Islamic world, and how have Western policies been affected by these challenges?
- How do Western policies affect the cultural and political identity of Muslim peoples, and to what extent do these policies influence cultural and social balances?
- Is it possible to achieve a balance between the West's strategic objective and respecting the sovereignty and identity of the Islamic nation? How can this be achieved?

These questions open the door to a deeper understanding of the transformations in relations between the West and the Islamic world and call for a critical look at Western policies and actions and their impact on the political and cultural scene in the region.

By examining historical developments and analyzing Western policies, the article aims to direct discussions towards a deeper understanding of political and cultural transformations in the region and provide guidance for achieving a future balance between strategic interests and respecting the identity and sovereignty of Muslims.

The article begins by highlighting the geopolitical mines in the region, then moves on to review the impact of Western colonialism and the developments in strategic control. After that, the article explores the new Middle East project as a pivot for Western intervention, focusing on motivations and challenges. Finally, it delves into the geopolitical and cultural stakes in the region, shedding light on future challenges and opportunities.

1. From Colonialism to Globalization: Pathways of Western Policies in the Islamic World

In a world full of challenges and tensions, the relationships between the West and the Islamic world reflect long-term historical impacts and modern political transformations. This influence is evident in the policies of influence and intervention pursued by Western countries, raising questions about the balance between strategic control and cultural influence on life in the region. The Islamic world has garnered significant attention in Western policies since the beginning of the twentieth century, especially with British-French colonialism, the Campbell-Bannerman Conference (1905-1907), World War I (1914-1919), and the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916). Following the end of World War II (1945) and the beginning of the American-Soviet struggle for global control, the Islamic world became an arena of conflict and competition. Up until the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc (1991), and with the United States asserting global dominance, the region experienced significant geopolitical transformations. Western countries focused extensively on the Islamic world, recognizing its crucial role in the global economy and international security.

American research centers presented studies and plans to launch a new project for the region¹, using the events of September 11, 2001, as a catalyst and justification for fundamentally altering the concept of state sovereignty in the international community. This initiative aimed at seriously

¹- This project comes in the context of rapid political, economic, and social changes in the Arab and Islamic world. The United States discusses its strategy to confront the challenges it faces in this region. This strategy is based on several aspects, including combating terrorism, supporting democracy, and enhancing economic stability.

and decisively reforming the dictatorial political regimes in the region, which were seen as supporters of terrorism, and modernizing them according to American perspectives to align with their political and security interests. President George W. Bush announced the start of democratic reforms stretching from Western Sahara to Pakistan's Baluchistan, excluding the so-called "Axis of Evil" countries and excluding Israel, which was considered the ideal democratic model in the region according to the American vision.

As a result, the Islamic world, especially the Eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf regions, became riddled with crises in the era of globalization. These regions epitomize the contradiction between two projects for the future and two different identities for the region. This conflict and contradiction have become the primary drivers of political interactions, casting the shadow of war over the region².

2. Historical and Geopolitical Challenges

Amidst geopolitical minefields, the West has employed various strategies to bolster its influence in the Islamic world, ranging from military intervention to political support for favorable governments. With increasing Western colonial influence, the region has faced political, economic, and cultural challenges.

The strategic, geopolitical, economic, and civilizational significance of the Islamic world has attracted the attention of Western countries, making it a target for colonial ambitions and projects to divide it—not just out of a desire for wealth and expansion, but also out of fear of its resurgence. To this end, European countries, especially France and Britain, planned from the early twentieth century to contain and colonize the region, becoming key players in the colonial competition among European colonial powers, particularly between Britain and France over control of India. Napoleon's campaign to the East in 1798 was aligned with this direction. Europe's ability to expand and colonize was bolstered by the economic progress and prosperity it had achieved, contributing to its industrial and military development³.

Western countries began planning to dismantle the Ottoman Empire, which, due to its strength and strategic position, was a formidable barrier to the ambitions of colonial thinkers and Zionist

² Majid, W. A. The struggle for the Middle East surpasses and encompasses the Arab-Israeli conflict. Retrieved from Saudi Arabia in Focus: <http://www.saudiinfocus.com/articles>. 2024, 05 26.

³ Jammal, S. A. The Greater Maghreb in Modern Times. Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Library. 1977.
Yaghi, I. A. The Arab World in Modern History. Riyadh: Obeikan Library. 1997. p. 187.

movement leaders. The Zionist movement would not have gained the support of colonial powers, particularly Britain, for its claim to establish a national homeland in Palestine if not for aligned interests. The movement's choice of Palestine was critical in garnering the Western support it received.

Given Palestine's historical and religious significance and its strategic location between Asia and Africa, and between the Mashriq and Maghreb of the Islamic world, British colonialism decided to establish "Israel" in Palestine, the heart of the Islamic and specifically Arab world, as a fulcrum to control the region and its resources, separating Asian Arab countries from African ones. Theodore Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement, expressed in his diaries in 1897⁴, that there should be a Middle Eastern Commonwealth in which the Jewish state would play a leading economic and scientific role, attracting investments and expertise.

In 1907, a report by then British Prime Minister Campbell Bannerman, resulting from a conference held by historians, politicians, and economists, addressed the situation in the Islamic and particularly Arab world⁵. The colonial conference developed plans and means to weaken the Islamic world, facilitate control over it, contain its will and resources, and prevent its development and unity.

Thus, following World War II, many changes occurred in the Islamic world, which was divided by the Allies (Britain and France) after signing several agreements, particularly the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) and the San Remo Conference (1920), which arranged the legal statuses for dividing Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and parts of Iraq. If Europe, represented by Sykes and Picot, laid the political foundation for the fragmented Middle East post-World War I, America, represented by George Marshall⁶, set the economic structure for the world starting with post-World War II Europe and extended its influence over the Islamic world, presenting the new Middle East project and considering it "a necessity for the world as it offers a unique opportunity for the international community."

Amid these events, Palestine was lost, and the Zionist entity's project was realized in 1948, serving as a military tool for colonial powers to thwart Muslim unity and development, subjugate

⁴ Inaam, R. *Middle Eastern Zionism and the Counter Plan*. Beirut: Dar Al-Tanweer Publishing House. 1997. p. 62.

⁵⁵ Majid, S. *The Middle Eastern Regional System*. Damascus: Al-Yazji Printing House. p. 1996. 14.

⁶- George Marshall (1880-1959): U.S. Army Chief of Staff during World War II, Secretary of State in 1947, and Author of the Famous Marshall Plan for European Recovery. Nobel Prize Winner in 1953.

them, control their wealth, and sever their geographic continuity. This also drained the economic resources of Arab countries.

With the end of the Cold War, the United States began exporting its results by positioning itself as the world's leader, determining behavioral norms and shaping international relations⁷. The unilateral establishment of a global order began with the events in Kosovo in 1998, followed by the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, then revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen, which shook the stability foundations in the Islamic world, marking the start of a new era characterized by the annulment of state sovereignty for greater international peace and security interests.

The numerous projects and plans put forth serve as compelling evidence of the convergence of Zionist and imperialist interests, the latter engineering the fragmentation and division of the Islamic world, preventing its unity and resurgence by planting an entity distinct in thought, race, and creed.

The two significant events (the fall of the Twin Towers and Baghdad) followed a series of events revealing the depth of Zionist influence in US projects and its consistent bias towards "Israel." Since the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt (1956), the large-scale invasion of Egypt and Syria in 1967 with substantial American support, Israel's strike on Iraq's nuclear reactor in the early 1980s, Israel's invasion of Beirut, continuous threats to Syria, unilateral solutions in Palestine, geographic alterations, historical revisionism, and the encouragement of Israel to appear as a regional superpower, distinguishing between American and Israeli security interests is difficult. The strategy for continuation and prosperity necessitates imposing hegemony over the Islamic world.

In this colonial project, geography, history, and ideology intertwined, obscuring the evolution of the relationship between the Islamic world and the West before World War I.

Today's new American philosophy is based on the idea that any internal issues in a state that have negative effects on the international community will not be left to endanger vital interests. The United Nations and the Security Council, on behalf of the international order and affected states, will act. The question is no longer about being safe from external foreign intervention but about maintaining the intertwined global order and preventing its fragmentation due to internal

⁷ Abdelkader Rzig, E.-M. *The New International System: The Constant and the Variable* (2nd Edition ed.). Algiers: University Publications Office. 2004.

state issues. The international community relies on stability, and its disruption harms other states. Under the guise of self-defense—a principle of international law that cannot be overridden in any treaty or legal document—campaigns like Kosovo in 1999 are justified as defending NATO's vital interests.

Thus, the American project fits into this context of defending strategic interests. A neutral observer can question: why is the American project marketed specifically to the Middle East? Why not to Africa, which is poorer and more backward? Why not to Latin America, which shares many characteristics with the Middle East? Do Americans genuinely want reform for Arabs and Muslims? Is the United States qualified to reform the region?

3. The New Middle East Project: Based on Previous Interventions

Due to its strategic importance, there has been early interest in the entire Islamic world, especially the Arab region, with a struggle among colonial powers for control. Discussing the New Middle East Project necessitates addressing the historical development of the concept and the American motivations for launching the project.

The United States initiated the New Middle East Project as part of its regional strategy, attempting to shape the region according to its strategic interests. It is seen as an effort to reshape the geopolitical map of the Islamic world, which the West views as a pivotal influence on global stability, making changes in this region an international necessity.

The term "Middle East" is a political expression that often includes non-Arab countries in the region and excludes some Arab countries. In Western writings, the Middle East appears as a region comprising a mix of nationalities, races, religions, peoples, and languages, characterized by diversity rather than unity and similarity⁸. It refers to the Arab world countries, as well as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Israel. It is a vague concept, stripping the region of its geographic characteristics and historical and cultural traits, focusing on economic geography within the framework of spreading globalization in all its aspects, starting with Israel.

The concept of the Middle East is not neutral; it has appeared in many Western studies that addressed geographical, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, driven by strategic political

⁸ Al-Din Hallal, A. &. (n.d.). The Arab Regional System: A Study in Arab Political Relations. Al-Shiraa Lebanese Magazine. 1992/ 5 /2. (575). p. 21.

motives. Western writings promoted this concept from the past century when it gained popularity in English strategic thought.

3.1 Historical Roots of the Greater Middle East Term:

The roots of the project trace back to Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, who called for what he termed a Middle Eastern Commonwealth, aiming for the Zionist entity to play an active leadership role, particularly economically. This initiative began in the early 1990s following the Madrid Conference in 1993 under the banner of peace talks, within the United States' efforts to establish a new regional order for the area, where the Zionist entity would become the center for investments, technology, scientific research, and the primary controller of the region's water resources, in addition to integrating Arab economies as a means to achieve peaceful coexistence. The concept of the Middle East is historically unstable, even in its geographical and political dimensions. Political and geographical formulations and names for this term have changed, From the Middle East to the New Middle East, transitioning to the Euro-Mediterranean and finally to the Greater Middle East, according to Western European and American concepts⁹.

Historians consider the emergence of the contemporary Middle East to have occurred in the late nineteenth century, with some pointing to its early indications with the signing of the peace treaty between Russia and the Ottoman Empire in 1774¹⁰.

British naval officer Alfred Mahan highlighted the term "Middle East" in an article he wrote on September 1, 1902, in London. Then, it was used by Valentine Chirol, a correspondent for The Times of London, in October 1902 and 1903 in a series of articles titled "The Middle Eastern Question," later published as a book in 1903.

Zionism began promoting the term "Middle East" instead of the unified Islamic world and the single nation, due to its strategic location as a crossroads of three continents and overseeing vital waterways such as the Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Strait of Hormuz, containing more than two-thirds of the world's oil reserves. Zionism and colonialism fear the establishment of a united, strong, and rich state armed with oil wealth and Islamic doctrine.

⁹ Al-Afifi, H. M. The Greater Middle East Project and Its Impact on the Arab Regional System. Gaza: Unpublished Master's Thesis. 2012. P 2.

¹⁰ Richard, H. The End of the New Middle East Era. *Foreign Affairs*. 2006, 11 13. P 49.

The term "Middle East" is credited to British intelligence officer Thomas Edward Gordon (1833-1914), who also served as the director of the Imperial Bank of Persia. In an article he wrote, he alerted the British government to the Russian threat to British interests in India through its advance in Persia¹¹.

In 1909, a book titled "Problems of the Middle East" by Hamilton was published in London, highlighting the region's importance to Europe and the world and calling for its control. In 1911, the British governor of India, Lord Curzon, announced a special administration for the Middle East to oversee the affairs of Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq¹².

Following World War I, this term gained popularity when Winston Churchill, the then British Colonial Secretary, established the Middle East Department in 1921 to oversee the affairs of Palestine, Transjordan, and Iraq. During World War II, the British established the Middle East Supply Center and the Middle East Command¹³.

George Lenzowski, in his famous book "The Middle East in World Affairs"¹⁴, stated that no sensible foreign policy can ignore the Middle East and its impact on other regions of the world. Throughout the ages, the Middle East has been a focus for many conquerors, empire builders, great powers, and scholars interested in international affairs.

British and American Jews embedded the idea of the Middle East in the core of American and British policies during World War II.

3.2 American Motivations for Establishing the Middle Eastern Order

During World War II, the geopolitical and oil significance of the so-called Middle East became evident, both in wartime and peacetime. Therefore, the three colonial powers—Britain, France, and the United States—along with global Zionism and some Arab officials, collaborated to bring the regional Middle Eastern order into existence.

The United States played a fundamental role in establishing its features, in full coordination and cooperation with Britain and France. They began assisting and strengthening the Zionist entity

¹¹ Ahmed Saleem, A.-B. The Greater Middle East Initiative: Political and Strategic Dimensions. *International Politics Journal* (158). 2004, October.

¹² Abdelkader Rzig, E.-M. *The Greater Middle East Project: Facts, Objectives, and Implications* (First Edition ed.). Beirut: Arab Science House. 2005. p 42.

¹³ Ibid, Abdelkader Rzig. 2005. pp. 36-37

¹⁴ Mansour, M. . *The American-Soviet Conflict in the Middle East*. Cairo: Madbouly Library. 1995. P 65.

militarily, economically, and politically. The United States expanded the Truman Doctrine in 1949, which included agricultural and material aid to some countries in the region under its fourth point. On May 25, 1950, the United States, along with Britain and France, signed the Tripartite Declaration, pledging to maintain the security of the Zionist entity, establish relations between it and some Arab countries, and prevent Arab countries from acquiring weapons to defend their lands. The U.S. administration attempted to establish a quadripartite leadership for the Middle East, consisting of France, Britain, Turkey, and Egypt. After Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal Company, "Israel" launched the Suez War in collaboration with Britain and France in 1956. U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower announced the Eisenhower Doctrine, or the Theory of the Vacuum, in 1957, to replace Britain and France, expressing the U.S.'s readiness for direct military intervention to support the region's countries against the communist threat, and providing military, economic, and political aid to countries that agreed to it. The U.S. deployed its forces to Lebanon, while Britain deployed its forces to Jordan in 1958. President Eisenhower expanded the Theory of the Vacuum in response to the union between Syria and Egypt.

The United States succeeded in removing Egypt from the conflict with the Zionist enemy by signing Anwar Sadat's Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Thus, President Carter's administration achieved the Zionist leaders' dream of removing Egypt from the conflict, allowing them to isolate the remaining Arab parties one by one.

Following the signing of the Camp David Accords, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) created a strategy for the Middle East called "Regional Cooperation in the Middle East." USAID commissioned eighteen American governmental and non-governmental institutions to draft this plan, which resulted in the following ideas:

- The U.S. will play a decisive role in regional cooperation, acting as a mediator.
- The concept of regional cooperation is based on a Middle Eastern, not an Arab, foundation.
- New institutions should be created to surpass the Arab League, allowing "Israel" to be integrated into the new regional system.
- Emphasis should be placed on the role of academics and businessmen at the beginning of regional cooperation and its development.

The American plan addresses the prospects of cooperation between "Israel" and Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip. It discusses shared resources

such as the Jordan River, the Dead Sea, and the Gulf of Aqaba, addressing issues related to deserts, agriculture, and scientific and technological cooperation¹⁵.

The report calls for the establishment of joint industrial projects between "Israel" and its neighbors and underscores the role the United States should play in the initial implementation phase.

The United States prioritizes the Arab region to further its economic interests, control Arab oil resources, and ensure "Israel's" dominance over all Arab nations. Professor Robert Tucker proposed that "to prevent America from suffering due to Middle Eastern oil, it must establish direct American control over the region, stretching from Kuwait down along Saudi Arabia's coastal strip to Qatar¹⁶."

General Alexander Haig, the U.S. Secretary of State, during his visit to several Middle Eastern countries in April 1981, called for the establishment of a security belt in the region, including countries from Pakistan to Egypt and encompassing Saudi Arabia and "Israel." Haig spoke about his plan for the Middle East before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, emphasizing the need to gather Turkey, Pakistan, "Israel," and several Arab countries in a joint alliance.

The United States aims to secure American control over oil sources, routes, and funds in the region through permanent military bases, maintaining "Israel's" military superiority over all Arab countries, while simultaneously disarming Arabs of unconventional weapons and limiting the armament of Islamic countries.

The Kuwait crisis in August 1990 created an Arab-Arab conflict at the expense of the existential struggle against the Zionist enemy. The Gulf War led to the enhancement and entrenchment of the permanent American military presence in Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain, increasing American political influence in the Gulf countries and reliance on the United States to maintain regional security and stability. Its negative consequences included the weakening of the Arab League's effective role and the growth and development of regional cooperation with the Zionist entity.

Israeli and American plans began to materialize after the second Gulf War and its devastating effects on the Arab system, with the Madrid Conference on October 30, 1991, and the start of bilateral and multilateral negotiations.

¹⁵ Hussein, G. (1994). *The Regional System and the Middle Eastern Market*. Damascus. pp. 36-38.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, Hussein, G. pp. 39-40.

The American vision for peace in the Middle East, as articulated by President George H. W. Bush in his speech at the opening of the Madrid Conference, was based on adopting Israeli ideas¹⁷. The Strategic Studies Group at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy issued a report titled "Continuing the Search for Peace," stating: "The end of the Cold War created a unique opportunity to move towards establishing a comprehensive peaceful settlement between the Arabs and 'Israel.' American interests remain vitally linked to this troubled region, and Arab-Israeli agreements can help protect and expand those interests by bringing 'Israel' and its Arab neighbors, along with the Gulf and Maghreb countries, to discuss regional issues. Multilateral negotiations offer an opportunity to develop a general vision for peace and create tangible confidence-building measures to provide security¹⁸."

Several American experts believe that some Arab countries are attempting to establish a relationship with "Israel." American Middle East expert Robert Stafalo said, "Some Arab countries currently want to introduce 'Israel' as a main, direct player in the power balance game and disputes among them. What we are seeing is just the prelude to a wave in the new Middle East, where Arab countries build alliances at various levels with 'Israel,' using these alliances to help them in their traditional and contemporary disputes among themselves ¹⁹ ." Stafalo attributes this new phenomenon to the fact that "Israel" is the dominant military power in the region. Additionally, many Arab countries recognize that their key to Washington lies with "Israel," so they strive to improve their relations with "Israel" to secure a good relationship with Washington, the world's superpower²⁰.

In the fall of 1992, the American professor Bernard Lewis outlined a plan for the Middle East, published in the American magazine "Foreign Affairs" under the title "Rethinking the Middle East." He started from the official abandonment of the Arab nationalism dream related to unity and a unified Arab state or even a cohesive political bloc. He depicted a new Middle East whose geographical boundaries extend to the newly independent Islamic republics, suggesting the possibility of eliminating the Arabs' role in the new history of the region in favor of other regional powers, primarily "Israel" and Turkey.

¹⁷ Bush, P. (1991). Speech at the Opening of the Madrid Conference. Journal of Palestinian Studies (9). p. 18.

¹⁸ Freedom Magazine. (1992, 12 20). (482). pp. 8-11.

¹⁹ Al-Watan Al-Arabi ,Magazine. (1993, 11 19). Al-Watan Al-Arabi Magazine. (872). p. 29.

²⁰ Al-Shiraa Lebanese ,Magazine. (1992, 5 2). (575). p. 40.

The American strategy in the Middle East aligns closely with the Israeli strategy. Both countries view the region as a vital area for American and Israeli interests and work together to eliminate the Palestinian issue at the expense of the national, religious, and cultural rights of Arabs and Muslims. They aim to subject the Arab world to American and Israeli hegemony.

The reliance of both strategies on military power led to "Israel's" aggressive and expansionist wars and the exploitation of the results of these wars, as well as the Gulf War, to push towards a settlement on Israeli terms and under American auspices. This was to force the Arabs to accept Zionist myths, falsehoods, and lies. The United States adopted the Israeli stance on the new regional system, the Middle East market, and the initiation of regional cooperation even before reaching a political settlement and without linking it to progress in bilateral negotiations. In June 1993, the Harvard Group issued a report titled: "Ensuring Peace in the Middle East: A Project on the Economy of the Transitional Period."

The report focuses on economic relations between the (supposed) self-rule authority, "Israel," and Jordan, the establishment of a free zone among these parties, and regional projects to integrate the three economies. The report also includes the inclusion of Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon in the free trade zone, emphasizing two points: first, the free movement of goods and free exchange, and second, the dominance of the market economy over the economies of the three parties. The report considers "Israel's" interests and calls for the establishment of a regional bank called the "Middle East Bank for Cooperation and Development." President George H.W. Bush adopted the Israeli settlement plan and the Israeli concept of peace in his opening speech at the Madrid Conference. The United States forced Arab countries to enter into multilateral negotiations, hold economic summits and conferences, and lift the second and third-degree Arab boycott.

The United States and global Jewry are working to integrate the Arab region into the Zionist entity, rather than integrating the Zionist entity into the Arab region, to establish it as a colonial, racist settler entity at the expense of Arab and Muslim lands and national and religious rights. They aim to make it the dominant and leading center in the region to loot its resources and wealth, maintain its fragmentation and backwardness, and ensure its continued dependency on imperialism and Zionism. Middle Eastern integration is not a path to peace, stability, and economic prosperity but rather the consolidation of occupation and settlement, imposed by the victorious over the defeated with American marketing and Israeli threats of war against Syria and Lebanon and continuous aggressions against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples. The United States adopted Israeli plans and projects for the future of the Arab region and integrated them into its global

strategy, continuing to serve its interests in the region through "Israel" as a military tool, maintaining its military superiority, securing control over oil sources, routes, prices, and money, and working towards a settlement of the Arab-Zionist conflict and the establishment of a new regional order and Middle Eastern market. It can be said that there is no American policy towards Arab countries, but rather an Israeli policy adopted by the United States.

The United States expressed its motives for proposing this dangerous project, claiming it is to help the countries involved in this initiative to develop their economic and social conditions through spreading democracy and achieving progress and stability by eliminating all causes of backwardness that stand in the way of progress and development. This represents the sole American interest in the project, which is to protect its security²¹.

4. Background and Dimensions of the Greater Middle East Project

The Greater Middle East project reminds us of the early 20th century when major powers viewed the Ottoman Empire as the "sick man" and divided its territories and resources, including the Arab lands that were part of its legacy at that time.

The ideology of the Greater Middle East traces back to British historian Bernard Lewis's proposals in his article published in the Foreign Affairs magazine titled "Reconstructing the Near East" in 1992. However, even before that, after the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991, Shimon Peres introduced the concept of the New (Greater) Middle East. He authored a book with the same title, advocating for penetrating the Arab world through economic activities, alongside American political and economic support for the Arab region. The concept of the "Greater Middle East" also appeared in the 1995 annual strategic report from the National Institute for Strategic Studies, affiliated with the U.S. Department of Defense, which dedicated a separate chapter to the Greater Middle East, stretching from Morocco to the Chinese borders, including the Maghreb and Central and South Asia.

In 1999, a significant military development related to the Greater Middle East occurred when the U.S. Department of Defense transferred the command of U.S. forces in Central Asia from the U.S. Pacific Command to the Central Command of the Middle East, known as the Rapid Deployment Forces. However, with President George W. Bush's announcement of the "Greater Middle East" initiative, there was a shift in defining the boundaries of this concept, especially since

²¹ Abdelkader Rzig, E.-M. The Greater Middle East Project: Facts, Objectives, and Implications (First Edition ed.). Beirut: Arab Science House. 2005. pp. 11-14.

the G8 Summit and the participation of European countries, expanding to include the Greater Middle East and North Africa.

Subsequently, the American administration presented the "Greater Middle East" project to the G8 and worked on formulating a unified stance on it in a special meeting held in the United States in 2004. This meeting addressed the so-called three deficits (lack of freedom, lack of knowledge, and lack of women's empowerment) mentioned in the Arab Human Development Reports issued by the United Nations for 2002 and 2003. These deficits were seen as threats to the interests of the G8 countries, as the increasing numbers of deprived individuals in the Middle East could lead to higher rates of extremism, terrorism, international crime, and illegal immigration.

Given the rising geopolitical and cultural challenges, relations between the West and the Islamic world require strategic thinking and flexibility. In this context, the current challenge demands exploring new avenues for cooperation and building stable and mutually understanding relationships. The American vision proposed as fundamental solutions for the Middle East (outlined in President Bush's speech on June 24, 2004) requires a complete transformation for the future of humanity. The vision emphasized "two states living side by side in peace and security," with peace achievable only by eliminating all "terrorism" on one hand and pursuing reforms on the other. According to this speech, reforms require the establishment of new political and economic institutions based on democracy and a market economy, along with a continuous fight against terrorism.

On the other hand, the U.S. State Department issued the official text of the "Roadmap"²² for peace in the Middle East, providing two copies to Palestinian and Israeli officials. This announcement coincided with Bush's statement calling for an end to violence and a return to negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties, based on his vision of "two states, Israel and Palestine." Both the European Union and Russia, as well as the United Nations, welcomed this in the Quartet's ministerial statements on July 16 and September 17, 2002.

The significance of this official issuance lies in its call for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of ending the occupation that began in 1967, following the references of the Madrid Peace Conference, the land-for-peace principle, UN Resolutions 1397, 338, 242, and previously reached agreements between the two parties, as well as the initiative of Saudi Crown

²² Roadmap. Retrieved from yafanews: www.yafanews.com. 2002/ 6 /25.

Prince Abdullah adopted by the Arab states at the Beirut Summit²³, calling for accepting "Israel" as a neighbor living in peace and security within a comprehensive settlement, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

No political project has garnered as much attention as the Greater Middle East project. Since President George W. Bush launched his initiative on February 6, 2004, before the National Endowment for Democracy in the United States, the world has been engrossed by it. This project has left a vast archive filled with varying positions and reactions. The result is that this project succeeded in stirring some files in the world from an international strategic perspective and redrawing maps for nations and peoples, as well as pressing for reconsideration of some economic, social, cultural, and developmental aspects.

The American initiative relied on several recommendations contained in two reports on Arab human development for 2002 and 2003, prepared by a group of Arab researchers, thinkers, and university professors. The United States presented these recommendations to the G8 to formulate unified positions. The two reports summarized three major themes: the lack of knowledge, lack of freedom, and lack of women's participation in public life.

The initiative came alongside extensive research, studies, roundtable discussions, and numerous debates that intrigued large groups of Arab intellectuals and continued to spread throughout the Arab world. It is unimaginable the scale of associations, activities, budgets, high costs, and profits dedicated to satisfying American interests according to the initiative and its numerous elements.

Bush's initiative captured some aspects of the report that had not yet been endorsed by Arabs. It began (as leaked in Al-Hayat newspaper on February 13, 2004) by reviewing several statistics, numbers, and percentages, describing the severe backwardness in which the region is mired. The document established a fundamental hypothetical premise in its introduction, stating: as long as the as more people in the region lose their economic and political rights, we will see a rise in international crime, terrorism, extremism, and illegal immigration.

The document notes that 40% of adult Arabs are illiterate, with women constituting two-thirds of this number. It predicts that 25 million Arabs will be unemployed by 2010, with a third of Arabs living on an income of less than two dollars a day. The 22 Arab League nations' total GDP is equivalent to Spain's GDP alone. These figures and statistics reflect the region at a turning point

²³ Lebanese Newspapers. The Arab Peace Initiative. Lebanese Newspapers. 2002/ 03 /27-28.

where the stability of the area and the common interests are directly threatened of major industrialized countries. The effective remedy for this dire reality is reform, as stated in the initiative.

Conclusion

In its interactions with the Islamic world, the West demonstrates disregard and oversteps legitimate boundaries with unjustified interventions in the political and cultural affairs of Islamic countries. These interventions are not simple attempts to influence but are systematic efforts to incite strife and divide Muslim countries, pursuing goals of dominance and control.

The best example illustrating our argument is the Greater or New Middle East Project, which has seen various political and geographical formulations and diverse economic and cultural ideas and visions, according to the differing interests of the countries and forces behind it, chiefly the United States. This project remains ongoing and open, seeking to attract other parties, including Turkey, Iran, and Central Asian countries.

The project's idea stemmed from the Middle East's strategic location and its rich cultural and civilizational heritage, which has not lost its value. It remains of great interest worldwide, as the cradle of human civilizations that arose and flourished there, possessing the keys to wisdom, knowledge, science, and heritage. However, its fortunes waned with geographic discoveries and the onset of the colonial era, a period that continues in various forms to this day. The struggle over the region's wealth, its Arab-Islamic identity, and its character is at the heart of the proposed new regional order.

The proposed order aims to break wills, fragment Arab countries, occupy some, and extort others to impose an Israeli settlement and establish "Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates," reshaping the region geographically, demographically, economically, politically, militarily, and culturally according to American and Zionist interests.

These policies come at the expense of the Islamic world's stability, creating reasons for internal divisions and tensions, thus exposing the region to the risks of chaos and disintegration. Behind this modern colonial behavior lie intentions to control resources and influence the paths of political and economic development in the Islamic world. The situations in Iraq, Libya, Syria, and other countries are but reconfigurations of the region, and the most dangerous battle facing the Islamic world is the intellectual battle, which has evolved into intellectual terrorism.

Although the West shows some political and economic interest in the Islamic world, these efforts are often attempts to justify its negative interventions and direct them toward achieving its strategic interests.

To overcome this situation, Islamic countries must strengthen their unity, exchange knowledge and experiences, and firmly confront attempts at division and fragmentation. The international community should support peaceful and negotiative efforts to achieve stability and sustainable development in the Islamic world, rather than undermining it with destructive interventions.

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