

# Petropolitics: East and West

A Short Presentation on the  
Geopolitics of West Asia





# Roadmap

1. Background/Brief History
  - a. Geography Overview
  - b. BRIEF AS POSSIBLE summary of various events from 3500BCE to 1900CE
  - c. 20th century events
  - d. 21st century events
2. Modern Situation
  - i. Davids Corridor
  - ii. Rojava and broader Kurdish Question
  - iii. Impacts to Palestine
  - iv. Iran
3. Orientalism
  - a. The place where all the bad things happen
  - b. Ethnic and Religious Supremacy
  - c. Combatting Orientalism
4. Tying it all together



# Important Point!!

- A large portion of this presentation is focused on explaining history, in order to provide proper context for modern geopolitics
- This is a very SIMPLIFIED version, and skips over certain events for concision
- It is important to educate oneself about this history in order to understand modern implications
- Good starting points can be found in the reading list section at the end

The background is a solid orange color. In the top-left corner, there are three vertical bars of varying heights, each composed of several overlapping semi-transparent orange circles. In the bottom-right corner, there are four vertical bars of varying heights, also composed of overlapping semi-transparent orange circles.

# **General Background:**

## **Geography and History from 3500BCE to the 20th century**



# Geography

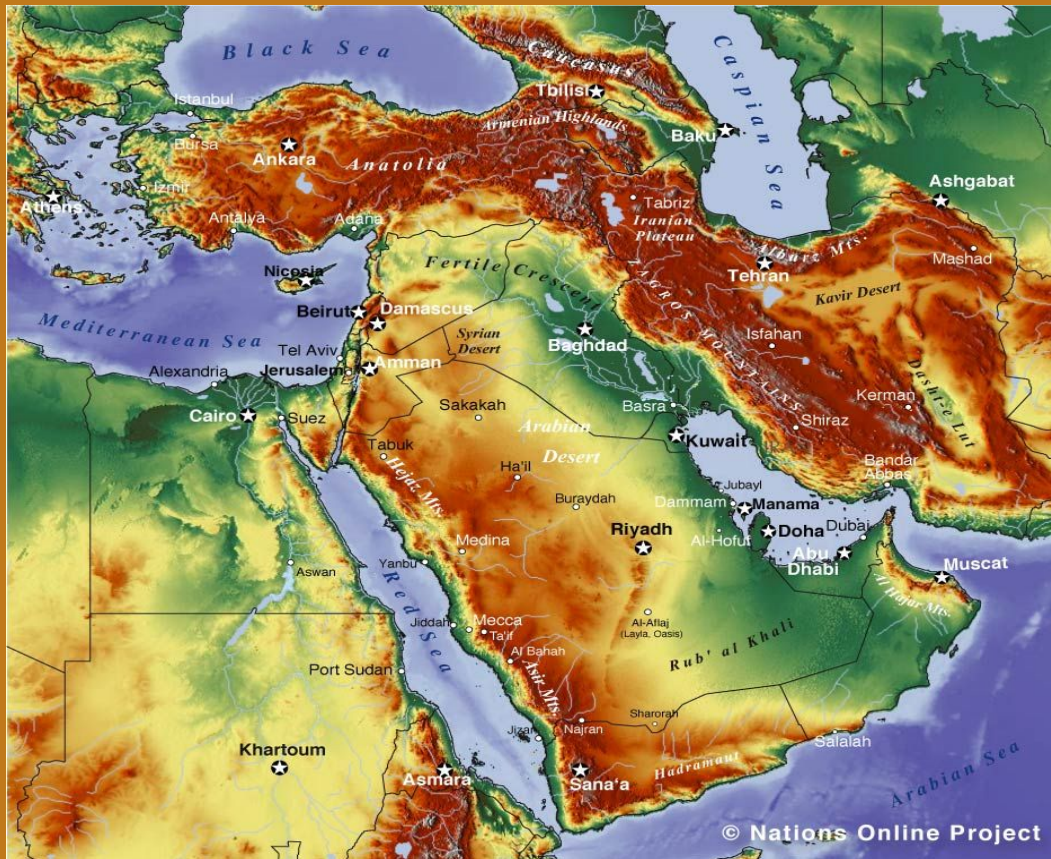
- Asia is a Greek word meaning East
- West Asia today refers to the original Greek usage, Asia reflects a larger “continent”
- Broadly, one can define West Asia as bounded by the Bosphorus, Greater Caucasus, Suez Canal, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and Mountainous Central Asia (Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan)
- The region has historically been the crossroads of trade and empires within the larger Eurafasian continent
- The region has large mountains, long rivers, fertile plains, as well as vast deserts and oases
- The largest factor in modern geopolitical relevance is the abundance of oil, followed by a centralized location in the Eurafasian continent.





# History

1. Various empires have fought over this large area throughout history
2. Most notably, we see a trend of a power ruling the Western part of the region and a rival power ruling the East.
  - a. Examples:
    - i. Rome and Parthia
    - ii. Rome and Sassanid Persia
    - iii. Byzantium and Early Caliphates
    - iv. Ottomans and Safavids
3. Religion has played a large role in the claims to legitimacy of empires, and continues to in the modern day.



Broadly, the historical regions of West Asia:

Anatolia, Cappadocia, Armenian Highlands, Iranian Plateau, Zagros Plateau, Lower Mesopotamia, Upper Mesopotamia (Jazira), the Upper and Lower Levant, the Sinai Peninsula, Hejaz, Yaman, Bahrayn, Najd, Khaleej, Oman, Syrian Desert (Badiya), the Arabian Desert, the Alborz Plateau, The Kavir and Dasht-e-Lut deserts, Khuzestan, and the Gulf coast of Persia (Bandar).

Other regions such as the Greek Islands and the Nile have much historical continuity as well, but are traditionally excluded from modern definitions. Regardless, some of the regions that border West Asia still influence it to this day, manifested by the modern powers of Greece, Egypt, Afghanistan, and Russia.

Map of West Asia highlighting mountains, rivers, and plains

Note: green does not mean forested, and red doesn't mean hot. Red Areas are higher in elevation, Green are lower.

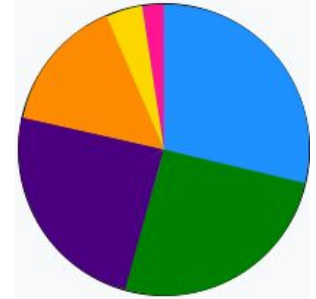


The Various West-East splits of West Asia. 1: Achaemenid Empire, the only power to control the entire region at once, apart from Alexander. 2: Roman-Parthian boundary. 3: Ottoman-Safavid boundary. 4: Sassanid-Roman boundary. 5: Byzantine Abbasid boundary. 6: Byzantine, Seljuq, and various crusader states in 1135.



# Religion

This is a chart of world religions. Christianity is Blue and Islam is Green, representing 29% and 26% of people respectively. Purple is agnostic/atheist.



1. West Asia is where the Abrahamic faiths originate, adhered to by approximately 50% of the world.
2. As such, religion plays a large role in the politics of the region.
3. Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Yarsanism, Mandaism, Yezidism, Druze, Alawism and the non-Abrahamic Zoroastrianism all have played pivotal roles in the formation of modern nation states, identity, and culture.
4. The general trend is to view the progression as Polytheistic Godkings → Zoroastrian States → Christian States → Muslim States → Modern Nation States
5. This is of course much more nuanced, for example the Levant only became majority Muslim around 1400, despite being governed by a “Muslim State”, and this number only became an overwhelming majority around 1800. See Orientalism section for more elaboration



# Major Empires

- Achaemenids
- Alexander and Seleucids
- Rome
- Parthia
- Sassanids
- Armenia (Artaxiad)
- Assyria (original and neo)
- Akkad
- Sumer (early and late)
- Babylon
- Elam
- Byzantium
- Seljuqs
- Ottomans
- Mamluks
- Crusader States
- Safavids
- Aq and Qara Qoyunlu
- Timurids
- Afshars
- Qajars
- Russia
- Britain
- France
- Egyptian Dynasties
- Gutians

These are the empires that ruled multiple regions for long periods of time. There are smaller ones such as the Shah Armen, Najdi Emirates or the Hasmonean Kingdom, which controlled smaller regional areas, but they did not have the same level of control and military might as the listed empires.



# Modern History

1. It would be take far too long to summarize 5500 years of history, so instead we will start around 1400, because the years from 1400-1924 establish the modern foundations of West Asia
2. Events of Note:
  - a. Decline of Byzantium and Fall of Constantinople
  - b. Rise of the Ottoman and Safavid Empires
  - c. Religious reforms, imperialism, and slavery
    - i. proto-Salafism
    - ii. Ottoman Slave Trade and Devsirme system, Safavid Slave Trade and Gholam System
  - d. Tanzimat reform and Edict of Gulhane
  - e. Rising nationalism among ethnically and religiously diverse populations
    - i. Three Dominant Groups: Arab Turk and Persian
    - ii. The “leftovers”: Kurds, Armenians, and others



# Decline of Rome, Rise of Rum

1. By the early 1400s, the Byzantine empire had already started to decline, due to betrayal from its allies, (Venice, Crusader States, Mongols) and war with its enemies (Seljuqs, Mamluks, Bagratid Kingdom). The final blow was dealt in 1453 with the fall of Constantinople, and the massive Ottoman expansion that followed.
2. These circumstances resulted in a new rome, or “Rum” forming in the wreckage of the former one. The Ottoman Empire went on to fill the role the Byzantines had, as an intermediary between Europe and Asia, and as the leading imperial force in the region. Much like the previous Byzantine Sassanid wars, they too would engage in conflicts with a neighbor to the East, the Safavid Empire.
3. Notably, while both empires were Islamic ones, the Sunni Ottomans had much contempt for the Shia Safavids, and disputes over religious authority were often a casus belli in justifying war to the populations.



# The Ottoman State

1. The Ottoman Empire's ascendance saw a rapid growth of bureaucracy, statecraft, and imperialism within the region. By the 1700s, the Ottomans had already achieved military supremacy over the Safavids, and conquered much territory from them. They also lead successful campaigns into the Balkans.
2. The Ottomans had a strong slave-society, where ethnic and religious minorities were taken as captives, converted, and used to form a military force without loyalties to any Muslim noble family. The process was known as Devsirme, roughly translating to “blood tax” in Ottoman Turkish. This was justified using the practices of the Umayyads and Abbasids, as well as through interpretations of Hadith. Although the Safavids also engaged in this practice, known as the gholam system, its extent was limited by the Safavids decline.
3. The Ottoman State became more involved with Europe, forming powerful alliances with Germanic states in particular, and a bitter rivalry with the Russian Empire, whom it would ultimately lose much territory to in the Russo-Turkish wars of the 1800s.



# Reforms, Nations, and Religious Revival

1. The Ottomans claimed caliphal authority in 1517, after conquering the Mamluk territories of Egypt and the Levant (Bilad Ash Sham). This led to a period of Ottoman scholars and clerics forming consensus in regards to Sunni Islam. Previous texts had been rediscovered by the Ottomans, and although many were rejected, some were incorporated into the Fiqh of the empire.
2. The Ottomans had traditionally maintained a “Millet” System, which was a form of social-segregation and caste within the lands it ruled. It had ethnic and religious components, but notably viewed all Sunni Muslims as one group, and separated each minority into its own caste. Non-Sunnis, including Shia and Alevi Muslims, as well as the Christian, Druze, Jewish, and other communities, were forced to participate in the Devsirme system, and pay the poverty-inducing Jizya tax. These practices had been adopted from the previous Seljuq policies, that came to be during an event known as the Sunni Revival.
3. This system proved ineffective, and led to many ethnic groups revolting, prompting a new system
4. Importantly, by lumping all of the Sunni groups into one “nation”, this setback the national aspirations of Arabs and Kurds, which would come back later to bite the Ottomans



# Tanzimat and Gulhane

- In 1839, Ottoman Government enacted a series of reform through the Edict of Gulhane, leading to the Tanzimat Era of the Ottoman State
- These reforms were enacted to keep the empire from falling behind its European co-imperialists, failed miserably
- Implemented a secular code of law alongside the Sharia
- Created a strong bureaucratic administration, provinces, and pulled the empire into modern capitalism, from a semi-feudal society
- Lead to a rise in nationalism, secularism, and self-determination movements
- Maintained the millet system, but changed aspects of it
- Abolished the Janissaries
- Attempted to industrialize the empire, only succeeded in Northern portions



# Nationalism

- The New Ottoman state under the Tanzimat system attempted to create a sense of Ottomaness - a national identity centered arounding proto-Turkishism - in order to compete with the rising national self determination movements, primarily the Arab and Balkan ones.
- This “New Nationalism” was a success in creating a concentrated Ottoman bourgeois in the Northwest of the Empire, which would later become the Republic of Turkey
- It also lead to widespread poverty in the Levant and Mesopotamia, regions already only loosely controlled by the Ottoman state
- To counter this, the Ottoman authorities would scapegoat various minority groups and incite violence against them, such as the Anti-Druze and anti-Maronite massacres of the 1860s



## Hamidian Massacres and prelude to WWI, Early Zionism

- Another example of this practice was the Hamidian massacres, committed by the Hamidiye infantry division of the Ottoman Empire. Named after Abdulhamid II, the religious revivalist sultan, they targeted Armenians in the Coastal Urban areas of the Northern Ottoman Empire, killing an estimated 25k people. Support for the massacres came from the rising Ottomanist Nationalism.
- The Zionist project had also began, with the Ottoman Sultans inviting Jews from Europe to settle in the Syria province, which included modern Palestine. They believed the influx of Europeans would help build relationships with other states in Europe, as well as bring economic connections to the broader European market.



# The Young Turk Revolution

- In 1908, the Sultanate was officially abolished, and replaced with a parliamentary system by a political faction known as the Young Turks (Itihad ve Tariki Cemiyet)(ITC). The ITC revived the Ottomanist movement, and was supported by many ethnic minorities, who rejected the Sunni Nationalism espoused by Abdulhamid.
- The Young Turks were quick to provide concessions to these groups, but this would change with the start of WWI.
- The rebirth of the “Ottoman” identity create an easy scapegoat of minorities who rejected it
- The Ottoman Empire entered WWI as a central power, primarily to support its German allies



# WWI, the Arab Revolt, and collapse of Empire

- The Ottoman empire had been a longtime ally of Germany, since the time of Prussian states, and was dragged into WWI, primarily fighting against the Russian Empire
- The Young Turk government blamed ethnic-minorities for the losses, primarily Armenians, Greeks, and Assyrians. They also understood the empire would not survive the war intact, and preferentially allocated resources to what is now the borders of the Republic of Turkey.
- This causes the predominantly Arab speaking regions of the Levant and Mesopotamia to revolt against Ottoman rule, with support of the British and French, creating the short lived Arab Kingdom of Hejaz
- The Ottoman Empire collapsed at the end of WWI



# Post WWI



# Sykes-Picot, Betrayal, “Lines in the Sand”, and the so-called “Turkish War of Independence”

- The British and French betrayed the Arab rebels, annexed Lebanon and Syria to France, Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq to the UK
- Repressive period of colonial rule, comparable to the repressive Ottoman colonial period that preceded it
- Created arbitrary borders and states that still exist today
- Turkey was immune to the impact due to the so-called “Turkish War of Independence”, where it gained acceptance as a co-imperialist by the European powers, as the new “Republic of Turkey”
- Ottomanists today will say things like “The Arabs betrayed the empire, this is why Israel exists today” - This point erases the centuries of oppression the ottomans inflicted upon the Levant and Iraq, and misinforms surrounding the Ottoman view of Zionism (they supported it)



# Balfour and Post-Qajar Iran

- Reza Khan, a Qajar military officer initiated a coup in 1921, and was declared Shah by the parliament of Iran in 1925. This saw the end of the last imperial dynasty of Iran, and began a new one, known as the Pahlavi era
- This period was marked by modernizations and reforms, as well as the sale of oil from the Caspian Sea.
- Concurrently, the British began accelerating their program of colonization in the mandate of Palestine, after promising the eventual establishment of a state, detailed in a document known as the Balfour declaration.



## **WW2 in West Asia, withdrawal of European powers**

- Replacement of Reza Khan with Mohammed Reza
- Independence of most states (Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan)
- Decolonial revolutions, extending to North Africa
- Legacy of French and British rule, lines in sand, creates territorial questions, on top of the pre-existing national and religious ones
- These questions were weaponized and exploited by various powers seeking dominance, including the newly forming Zionist Entity



# Foundations of Modern Lebanon and Syria

- When the French divided the Levant, they separated regions based on ethnic and religious makeup
- Lebanon was the Maronite state, and was predominantly Maronite Catholic up until the 1960s
- The non-Maronites in Lebanon, constituting around 45% of the population, demanded a system that offered them political representation, resulting in the formation of the National Pact, a confessionalist system of governance that mandated certain positions be held by members of specific religions, and the allocation of seats in parliament based on religious affiliation.
- Syria also experienced demographic split due to the French colonial process and historic chauvinisms, but was founded on a unified national identity known as “Syrianism”, resulting in less sectarian conflict, until very recently.



## Foundation of the Zionist Entity, the Nakba

- During this time (30s - 40s), European Jewish migration to Palestine exploded and the earliest Zionist paramilitaries began to form (ex: Lehi, Hagana, Irgun)
- Increased surveillance of Palestinians in order to prepare for ethnic cleansing
- With support of the British and UN, paramilitaries in 1948 launched an assault on the Palestinian population, leading to events known today as the Nakba (meaning Catastrophe in Arabic)
- These paramilitaries would eventually be consolidated into the IOF.
- In Palestinian Studies, “The Nakba” usually refers to the initial Nakba, while the “Ongoing Nakba” refers to the continued persecution and genocide of the Palestinian people.



## Iran in the 1950s

- In the post Reza Khan era, Iran was dominated by the politician Mohammad Mosaddegh
- Mosaddegh attempted to nationalize Iran's oil industry, removing the cuts the UK received
- As a result the UK sanctioned Iran, and eventually collaborated with the US to overthrow Mossadegh.
- This resulted in the Shah gaining much more political power, effectively turning the constitutional monarchy into a strict monarchy.
- The Shah was a member of the Safari club, a group of diplomats and politicians, who met to oppose the Soviets
- Mohammad Reza Shah's regime was marked by strong anti-democratic character, political persecution, and a secret police force



## 67 and 71 wars

- In the years following the establishment of the entity, the West Bank was governed by Jordan. In 1967, Israel move to annex the West Bank, prompting Egypt, Jordan, and Syria to declare war and prevent this.
- This result in a landslide victory of the Zionist entity, occupying the entire Sinai Peninsula, the Golan heights of Syria, and the West Bank.
- The impacts of this war caused Jordan to normalize with Israel, and maintain collaborationist relations since
- In 1971, Egypt and Syria attempted to retake their lost territories, with Egypt ultimately betraying Syria and normalizing relations to regain the Sinai diplomatically, while the Golan are still occupied to this day.
  - Camp David Accords and Anwar Sadat
- These wars are colloquially known as the Six Day War, and The Ramadan/Yom Kippur War.



# Lebanese Civil War, 1975-1991

- The ongoing occupation of Palestine had numerous impacts on the region, particularly Lebanon.
- The demographics of the country had shifted, from being predominantly maronite to plurality maronite, mostly due to the influx of Palestinian refugees in the 1950s.
- Forces within the religious right-wing of the Maronite political sphere attempted to align the country with Israel, expel the refugees, and forcibly regain a maronite majority.
  - Committed numerous massacres, including the infamous Sabra and Shatila
- This was opposed by various coalitions, including a left faction, and shia faction, and a pro-Syria faction.
- This war had disastrous consequences and ultimately, led to the signing of the Taif agreement, which remodeled the national pact to be more demographically accurate to the modern Lebanese state.

Wikipedia is not a good source, but this graphic helps illustrate how many groups partook in the war

Belligerents		
 [show]	 [show]	 Syria
<b>Lebanese Front (1976–1990)</b>	<b>Lebanese National Resistance Front (1982–1990)</b>	<b>(1976, 1982–1991)</b>
 Army of Free Lebanon (AFL) (1976–1978)	 Lebanese National Movement (1975–1982)	 Amal Movement
South Lebanon Army (SLA) (1977–1990)	 PLO (1975–1991)	 Palestinian National Salvation Front (PNSF)
 Israel (1978–1990)	 ASALA (1975–1991)	 Marada Brigade (from 1978)
		 Lebanese Forces – Executive Command (LFEC)
	 <b>Hezbollah (1982–1990)</b>	
	 Iran (1982–1990, mainly IRGC and Army paramilitary units)	
	 <b>Islamic Unification Movement (1982–1990)</b>	
		 <b>Lebanese Armed Forces (1975–1991)</b>
		 <b>United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (1978–1990)</b>
		 <b>Multinational Force in Lebanon (1982–1984)</b>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> United States</li> <li> United Kingdom</li> <li> France</li> <li> Italy</li> </ul>
		 <b>Arab Deterrent Force (1976–1982)</b> <sup>[a][1]</sup>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> Saudi Arabia (1976–1979)</li> <li> Sudan (1976–1979)</li> <li> UAE (1976–1979)</li> <li> Libya (1976 only)</li> <li> South Yemen</li> </ul>



# Islamic Revolution in Iran, 1979

- Widespread discontent with the Shah's autocratic rule led to a popular uprising, with multiple factions
- The Left faction and the Islamist faction worked together, culminating in the overthrow of the Shah and monarchist government
- Allegedly, the Shah was overthrown in part by betrayal from his Western Allies, although the scale of this is quite controversial.
- The aftermath led to the Islamists taking power, and persecuting their former allies, the Leftists.
- These events resulted in the founding of the Islamic Republic of Iran



# Iran-Iraq War, 1980-1988

- Almost immediately after the establishment of the IRI, Saddam Hussein, at the time an ally of the West, declared war on Iran.
- The casus belli given was to “liberate the Arabs of Ahwaz”. The real reason was fear of the Shia revolution spreading to Iraq, which at the time was around 45% Shia. Today it is 55%.
- The war was a deadly 10 year quagmire, resulting in millions of deaths.
- The War also gave the Iraqi government an excuse to persecute Kurds and Shias, during an event known as the Anfal campaign.
- The Iranian government used the war to persecute its own political dissidents, mainly Leftists
- UN brokered peace in 1988, resolution 598 defined border
- Relations normalized in 1990



## First Intifada, 1987

- Started in Jabalia refugee camp when four Palestinians were killed in what is speculated to be an Israeli response to the killing of an Israeli in Gaza a few days earlier
- During the first Intifada, the Islamic Resistance in Palestine ( Hamas ) initially a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood formed
- Hamas led demonstrations, mutual aid, and led acts of resistance against the Entity, joined by other Palestinian factions, including the PLO and Fatah
- Ended with the Oslo Accords, where PLO and Fatah normalized
  - Hamas did not



# Soviet-Afghan War

- In 1978, the Afghan communists overthrew the government, and instituted the Democratic People's Republic of Afghanistan
- They faced widespread opposition from the religious clergy in the country, as well as Western forces supporting said clergy
- The Soviet Union intervened in 1979, supplying the Afghan communists with troops, weapons, and logistics, while China and the US aided the Mujahiddeen
- Soviets withdrew in 1988, after a near-decade long quagmire
- The US used Afghanistan to test its latest tool, political Sunni Islam, against its arch-enemy, the USSR. This tactic would later be used in Iraq and Syria in the coming decades.



# Fall of the Soviet Union, NK war and Tajik Civil War

- It became clear in 1988 that the Soviet Union would not last much longer
- Ethnic cleansing began in the ASSR, against the Armenian and Talysh populations, events that would lead to the First Nagorno Karabagh War
- This also created a refugee crisis of Armenians in Tajikistan, which would be used as a casus belli by the Sunni Religious Faction in the Tajik Civil War
- The NK war ended in a decisive Armenian victory, allowing the indigenous Armenians of Artsakh to remain in their lands, until 2024
- The Tajik Civil War ended with a totalitarian secular state, which persecuted religion heavily. The fighters in this war who were recruited by the US's Political Islam department were moved around to new battlefronts. Many of them initially came from the Soviet-Afghan War.



## Oslo Accords, 1993

- Peace (normalization) treaty between the PLO, Fatah, and the Zionist Entity
- Signed under the administration of Bill Clinton between Yasser Arafat (Fatah) and Ariel Sharon (Entity)
- Established the Palestinian Authority to rule over Gaza and the West Bank
- The PA effectively functions as a liberal wing of the Zionist Entity, policing and arresting Palestinians and promoting the apartheid state within Occupied Palestine
- Widely unpopular, esp in Gaza
- Led to a rapid increase in the expansion of settlements within the West Bank



## 90s Politics and the Gulf War

- During the British rule of Iraq, a portion of the historical gulf region was sectioned off, much like what Lebanon was, as an independent polity. This was called Kuwait. When both gained independence, the British maintained power in Kuwait, while Iraq took various diverging paths, from Abdelkarim Qasim to the eventually Ba'athist government.
- The Ba'athists were useful against Iran in the 80s, but afterwards, the US saw little use for them, and alienated their former ally, Saddam Hussein
- Saddam annexed Kuwait, and was met by an unexpected Western response of condemnation, leading to a full-scale invasion, in events now known as the “Gulf War”. This position Iraq as extremely hostile to the West, despite its former connections.
- Importantly, the US had supported Saddam and encouraged his rapid expansion up until Kuwait. This is often referred to as “The Kuwait Trap” by IR theorists.



Top Left: the infamous “highway of death”

Top Right: the “Nayirah Testimony”, an admitted falsehood

Bottom Left: Iraqi Tanks in Kuwait City

# Invasion of Iraq, 2003





# Invasion of Iraq, 2003

- The US already had many strategic interests in Iraq, and saw the benefits that it had reaped from the Gulf War. Using 9/11 as an excuse, despite the fact that all the 9/11 terrorists were from Saudi, trained in Pakistan, and housed in Afghanistan, the US invaded Iraq, in a quick and decisive plan.
- Like in the Gulf War, where the US fabricated claims of “Iraqis taking babies out of incubators”, the US insisted that Iraq was manufacturing “WMDs”, despite no evidence of this ever being found.
- This killed thousands of Iraqis, destabilized the country, and paved the way for extremist groups to take over in the following years.
- While Saddam was a criminal, who persecuted Shias and Kurds heavily, his overthrow and the aftermath were also horrific, and interventionism, as well as the Saddam government, should be condemned.



## 2nd Intifada, Occupation of Lebanon, Syria

- Began in occupied Jerusalem as a civilian uprising after Ariel Sharon made a provocative visit to Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa
- Regional instability, Syrian troops deployed to assist Lebanon against Israel's 2nd invasion of Lebanon. Syrian troops had been present in Lebanon since the onset of the civil war, and the Israeli-supported South Lebanon Army had controlled positions in the South until 2000.
- This created tensions within Lebanon, with some opposing Syrian intervention and viewing it as a threat to Lebanese sovereignty.
- The second intifada, and the resistance it created, ultimately ended when the traitor Mahmoud Abbas signed another "peace" deal with Ariel Sharon.
  - This is slightly broad, and there is no "hard" definition as to the end of this uprising
- Syria fully withdrew from Lebanon in 2005



# Arab Spring and Reformism Within Iran

- In 2010, revolutions against the authoritarian military “party of power” style governments across Arab majority countries began breaking out, most notably and successfully in Tunisia
- Many other countries followed suite, and some of these movements succeeded, while others developed into civil wars
- This period was highly influential in the re-ignition of political Islam within the region
- These events occurred simultaneously with a new reformist faction taking power in Iran, which relaxed some restrictions, but also took a stronger role in interference within regional states



# Syrian Civil War, Daesh, and blockade of Gaza

- After Hamas elected, The Entity immediately insisted on Hamas disarming and abandoning its anti-entity rhetoric; Hamas refused
- In 2007 the Entity began construction of the Gaza border walls, effectively blockading Gaza for 18 years
- This drastically reduced supply of food, water, and medicine into Gaza
- In Syria, a civil war broke out after protestors challenged the authoritarian rule of the Assad dynasty
- Although initially economic and democratic in nature, the Syrian revolution was quickly hijacked by rightwing takfiri groups, supported by Turkey
- The war was defined by various sectarian massacres committed against Syria's Alawite, Christian, and Shia minorities. These massacres were carried out by Ottomanist, Salafist, and Ikhwani militias, often sponsored by Israel, Turkey, Qatar, KSA, and the United States.
- The war lead to the rise of Daesh (ISIS) ini Iraq and Syria, ruled the region from 2014-2017, centered around the island of Mesopotamia
- One of this militias, Jabhat Al-Nusra (whom had previously split from Al-Qaeda over leadership disagreements) renamed itself into Hay'at Tahrir Al Sham (HTS). This group was founded by ex-ISIS ex-Al-Qaeda commander Abu Mohammad Al Jolani
- Jolani's forces were responsible for numerous massacres, including the infamous Battle of Maaloula



# Iranian Military Expansion and Kurdish SD

- Throughout the Syrian Civil War, Iran greatly expanded its role in Syria and Lebanon, sending troops, weapons, and training fighters to combat both the Islamic State and other rebel groups.
- This also led to Iran gaining valuable assets from Syria, traded as “part of the deal” between the two states
- Russia and the US intervened as well, each supporting various groups in their goals
- This period was also marked by the beginning of a Kurdish uprising, known as the Rojava Revolution, which formed a coalition of peoples in the Jazira region, notably Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, and some Arabs, in a political entity known as the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North-Eastern Syria.
- Rojava means West in Kurdish




# Contemporary Events



# Escalation of Genocide in Gaza 2023



# Escalation of Genocide in Gaza 2023

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- On October 7th, 2023 Hamas and its military wing (The Al-Qassam Martyr's Brigades) launched a military insurgency, temporarily breaking out of the apartheid wall and advancing into Occupied territories from 1948
  - Hamas, alongside forces from the DFLP and PFLP fought against the IOF and gradually retreated back into Gaza where the blockade was reinstated
  - What followed was an ongoing multi-year siege including bombings, drone strikes, targeted assassinations, famine, medical scarcity and mass destruction/displacement inflicted by the IOF against the people of Gaza
  - An estimated 600,000 people have been killed within Gaza alone (not including casualties in Lebanon or Syria) since the start of the escalation of the genocide
  - Northern Gaza has been largely destroyed, cities throughout South and Central Gaza lie in ruins
  - Food and water are extremely scarce
  - Thousands of children are orphans and amputees
  - Electricity and internet are rare and temporary
  - Disease is extremely prevalent and medical facilities are near non-existent
  - There is a constant fear of re-escalation resulting in even more casualties
  - The responsibility of this genocide is entirely in the hands of the IOF, its suppliers, and its foreign state supporters (America, Saudi, Qatar, UAE, Turkey, Azerbaijan, etc.)



## Fall of Artsakh, 2023

- In late September 2023, Azerbaijan launched its 3rd and final incursions into the Republic of Artsakh. Having previously gained territory in the 44 day war of 2020, and skirmishes in 2022, they completed the annexation, expelled the Armenians, and killed any who remained.
- This brought Azerbaijan one step closer to its eventually goal of seizing Zangezur, created a contiguous border with Turkey, and eliminating the need for the more complex BTC pipeline. This will allow the new pipeline to pass directly through Azerbaijan, to Turkey, to Israel, without needing Iranian or Armenian permission.
- Zangezur had portions ceded illegally by Trump and Aliyev, as well as their puppet leader of Armenia, Pashinyan.
- With events in Syria, this was a critical point towards the establishment of the David's Corridor Pipeline Project.
- The advantage of the David's corridor pipeline over the current BTC is that it does not require a sea route from Ceyhan to Haifa

# Fall of Syria to HTS, 2024



**Abu Mohammad al-Jolani (He/Him)**

**HTS LEADER**

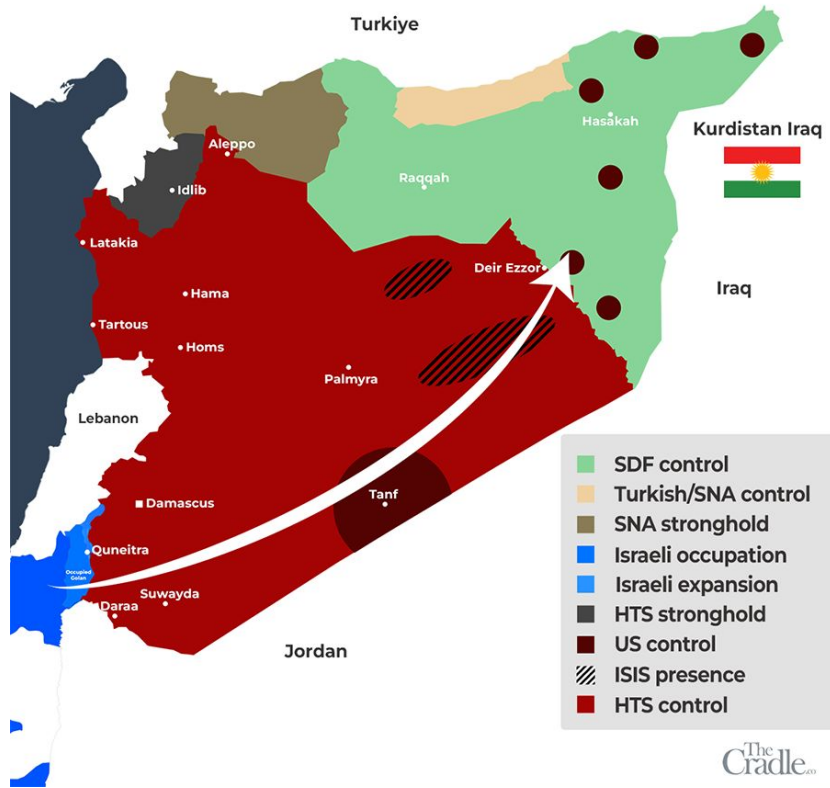
**CNN**

# Fall of Syria to HTS, 2024



- After perpetrating numerous sectarian war crimes, An Nusra formally split with AQ over leadership disagreements. This led to the founding of the Hay'at Tahrir ash Sham (HTS)
- HTS was primarily funded by Turkey and Israel, with a significant monetary contribution from Qatar as well
- The Syrian Arab Army had pushed HTS back to the coastal city of Idlib, near the Turkish border, from 2019.
- In 2024, just after the Lebanon ceasefire agreement, HTS staged a coup against the Assad Government, launching a push south from Idlib into the cities of Halab, Hama, Homs, and culminating with HTS capture of Syria's capital and largest city, Dimashq.
- Their leader, Al Jolani, is a former Al Qaeda member who massacred religious minorities in 2013-2014.
- As soon as he assumed power, Alawites, Christian's, Shias, and Druze have all been persecuted, massacred, and disappeared by the HTS
- Jolani has had relations with Netanyahu who worked to get the US to drop sanctions on Syria assuming they normalize relations with the Zionist entity/the west
- HTS continues to carry out sectarian massacres and ethnic cleansing against minorities

# David's Corridor



The planned corridor through Syria. Rojava was the last blockade between Turkey and HTS Syria, now that Rojava has collapsed, the corridor is complete.

It is important to understand that the tools being used by Israel and Turkey mirror those that colonial powers - like Israel and Turkey - have used for centuries.



Red line: current BTC pipeline  
 Blue line: new Haifa-Quneitra-Derzor-Mardin-Mus-Ordubad-Zangezur-Baku route  
 Yellow: lines of conflict as of 11 March

# David's Corridor, Latakia and Suwayda



- David's Corridor is a Turkish-Israeli project attempting to build a land corridor from the port of Haifa to the Occupied Golan Heights through Southern Syria to the Euphrates River, entering Turkey, passing through illegally occupied Zangezur, and then to Azerbaijan's Caspian oil reserves.
- This will be an extension of the current BTC pipeline, facilitating greater oil-imperialism throughout the region and justifying the presence of Turkish and Israeli military in countries surrounding the pipeline.
- The ultimate goal is to create a division, that notably excludes Iran, and promotes Turkish influence in the North, and Israeli influence in the South.
- It is a joint collaboration between the Neo-Ottomanist and Greater-Israelist ideologies
- The Alawite and Druze minorities are in the way of this plan, and are heavily persecuted by the new Syrian “government”, whose ministers and generals often have former Al-Qaeda connections. Examples of this are the Druze massacres in As-Suwayda and Alawite massacres in Latakia.
- Moreover, by creating conditions that deprive these people of livable conditions, Turkey and Israel force the Druze and Alawite communities to rely on them for support against the problem that they (Turkey/Israel) created in the first place. A classic example of colonial divide and conquer politics.



**Tom Barrack, the Mastermind**



# The Kurdish Question

- The National Question of the Kurds is the most prominent in the region, due to Kurds spanning a large area, between 4 states, and being quite numerous
- Other questions exist too, such as the Armenian and Assyrian ones, but are often lumped together with the Kurdish question due to similar concerns.
- All of the Arab states, as well as Turkey, Iran, and sometimes the West, have opposed Kurdish self-determination, except when it benefits them.
- Kurdish National Liberation is mischaracterized as a Western attempt at dividing people and creating a regional outpost, this is an example of chauvinism.
- Rojava was the most successful attempt at creating a multi-ethnic state in Syria, while primarily Kurd-led, it focused on incorporating a “brotherhood of peoples” and allocated representation to Armenians, Assyrians, and Arabs.
- After the fall of Rojava, the encroachment and betrayal of Bashur, the depoliticization of the PKK and Bakur, Rojhelat remains the only Kurdish region with a potential for statehood.



# Decapitation of Resistance, Outlooks for Palestine

- Overthrow of Assad
- Assassination of major leaders such as Ismail Haniyeh (former head of Hamas), Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah (former Head of Hezbollah), Yahya Sinwar (former head of Hamas, Ayatollah Khamenei (Supreme leader of Iran)
- These assassinations mirror previous ones carried out by the Entity such as the assassination of Qasem Solemani
- This campaign was deliberately carried out to fragment resistance groups and isolate Hamas from its state allies of Assadist Syria and Iran
- In December of 2024, Israeli and Turkish backed mercenaries overthrew the government of Syria and established a right wing Takfiri (muslim fascist) government, cutting off Hamas' main supply of weapons
- Iran is now the sole state power in the Levant that supports resistance and opposes the Entity and as a result, it is highly sanctioned and isolated by Amerikka and its allies



# Iran: Protests, Current Situation

- In late December '25, protests erupted over the declining value of the Riyal and restricted personal freedoms
- Initially, the protests were primarily done by the petit bourgeois merchant class, but quickly expanded to include, religious/ethnic minorities, women, and lower class people who had issues with the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurists
- The protests were violently suppressed with tens of thousands dead
- Iran bombed again February 2026
- In retaliation, Iran attacked American militaries in the Gulf and the Zionist Entity (attacks continuing as of right now)
- Iran has stated intent for a continuing/longer term war, as have the US and Israel
- The main beneficiary of this prolonged exchange is Turkey, as a fall of the IRI or the destruction of infrastructure will help them expand into Iran, as they have done in Iraq

# Orientalism



# Orientalism



- Various chauvinistic opinions are projected onto this region by “Leftists”
  - Ethnic chauvinisms such as pan-Arabism and Ba’athism
  - Religious chauvinisms such as the myth of a monoconfessionally Sunni Islamic society
  - The “Left” in the West often bases their political analysis on misinformed opinions that derive from an orientalist perception of the region
    - Examples: phrases like “you don’t have to be Muslim to care about Palestine” “The IRI is good because it fights the West” “Referring to HTS as terrorists is Islamophobic” “Turkey is an ally of Palestine” “The Kurds are a Western psy-op”
- West Asia is ‘the place where the bad things happen’
  - Seen as constantly at war and plagued by disaster
  - Constant erasure of context
  - Ahistorical view, devoid of any meaningful implication
- Important Texts
  - Orientalism, Said
  - Eurocentrism, Amin



# Connecting It All

- Various powers are vying for control over a centralized resource rich region
- These powers make strategic alliances that shift over-time
- They weaponize and exploit sectarian and ethnic violence, as well as instigate it
- One cannot form a political analysis of this region by simply saying “this group is supported by X, therefore it is good/bad”
- Turkey and Israel have split the region between themselves, but will soon enter the age old Rome vs Persia, Byzantium vs Sassania, Ottomans vs Safavids, conflict that has existed for millennia
- In a post-cold war world, Russia, the US, China, the Gulf States, Turkey, and Israel all hold unique yet sometimes overlapping interests.



# Implications Summarized

- The rights of ethnic and religious minorities are being eliminated
- The Turkish and Israel states are triumphant
- Palestine is under ongoing occupation, with its allies betraying it or being defeated
- An oil pipeline will be constructed through Northern Syria and Southern Armenia, at the expense of those who live there
- Turkey will elevate its position as an intermediary between the West and “Middle East”
- Israel will expand further into Syria, and eventually neighboring countries
- The rise of Salafism is a tool of the Turkish and Israeli intelligence



# **Questions? and Discussion**



# Reading List

## History

- History of the Arab Peoples (Hourani)
- History of the Byzantine Peoples (Vasiliev)
- The Great Game (Hopkirk)
- The 1936-1939 Revolt in Palestine (Kanafani)
- All the Shah's Men (Kinzer)
- The Caucasian Knot (Chorbajian)
- A History of Modern Lebanon (Traboulsi)
- Pakistan on the Brink (Ahmed Rashid)

## Politics

- On the National Question (Kaypakayya)
- Selected Political Works (Kanafani)
- Fedai Guerillas Speak on Armed Struggle in Iran (Multiple)
- Strategy for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)
- Perfect Victims (El-Kurd)
- Orientalism (Said)
- Eurocentrism (Amin)



# Useful Resources

- Jonathan Sachs commentary
- Speeches from Barrack detailing plan
- Analysis by Tareq Cyril Amar
- The Cradle
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# **THANK YOU FOR COMING!**



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OR ask an officer to add you to  
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**+MAKE A PLAN TO SHOW UP TO BOOK  
CLUB **THIS FRIDAY @ 5PM SLC 2.304****