

“The Arabs - A History”

A Book Review

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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While the genocide has raged on in Gaza I have been reading Eugene Rogan's large work simply titled The Arabs - A History. It is generally well written in an academic textbook manner, a political outline of the trials and tribulations of the Arab people viewed mostly through the political-military-financial manipulations of the rulers of the region. That overlaps fully with the political-military-financial manipulations of the empires and outside authorities interested in controlling the region for various reasons.

Themes

The history works at the political level, and to sum it up as succinctly as possible, presents two main themes. First is that for much of the time period of the book (starting from the Ottoman control of the lands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries), the Arabs were ruled by non-Arab authorities, either directly by the Ottoman regime, under the control of subordinate rulers, or under the control of previous non-Arab groups contesting with or subordinate to the Ottomans.

The second theme coming through is how much foreign interference has played in the region, not as just mentioned above but in more recent history with the military and financial interference and influence of mostly European empires (Italy, France, and Great Britain) and even more recently, the United States empire. There have been no effective independent Arab governments operating within democratic principles. They have tried but have always been subjugated to foreign influence, dominance, or outright control.

The first edition of the book (2009) ended with post 9/11 events. The second edition (2017) adds another chapter outlining the Arab Spring. As with all histories attempting to write fully up to date information, the latter part is weak, a natural outcome of not having the hindsight nor access to more restricted documents that could and always do reveal a more nuanced story.

The main fault with the second addition's final chapter is partly due to that; it is also perhaps due to the author's inability to pull back and put the full perspective on the changing situation, to acknowledge the role of the two main current antagonists in the region, Israel and the U.S.

Fault Lines

With any current history/current events writing about the Arab world, it cannot be properly done without a large accounting for U.S. manipulations and interference at all levels, nor with the same accounting for Israel, which includes both U.S. interests and Jewish/Zionist interests.

Israel's nuclear activity is mentioned only once in the original edition as an aspect of French assistance to the Zionists. U.S.' effects on the mujahideen and on into the Taliban and al-Qaeda and ISIS are only directly mentioned once with the supply of Stinger missiles to the mujahideen by way of Pakistan. Admittedly the latter is mostly outside the Arab arena, but bin Laden's al-Qaeda and the many Saudi sponsored madrasahs in Pakistan had a large significant overflow effect directly on the even more recent history of the Arabs.

Current Events

Today, other events have overtaken the significance of earlier events. Fortunately for Rogan he did not try to predict or formulate what the future held for the Arabs. With the ongoing destruction of Gaza infrastructure and the slaughter and genocide of its citizens there are some unfortunate similarities within the violence.

Ending with the Israeli/U.S. denial of the Hamas electoral victory in 2006, Rogan writes,

"...the United States would support any Israeli action, no matter how disproportionate, against parties it associated with terrorism." It should be understood the U.S. 'associates' whomever it decides is a terrorist as it best fits its interests. He concludes, "Far from facing censure for provoking devastating wars with Israel, the Islamic resistance movements enjoyed greater support at home and across the Arab world for standing up against Bush, Israel, and the U.S. led war on terror."

Note the bias that it was the Islamic movements that "provoked" the wars, where in reality it was the Israeli colonial-settler regime that initiated all but the Yom Kippur war (1973), while it was the U.S. attacking Iraq, Libya, Yemen (via Saudi Arabia), and Syria (via ISIS and the SFA). Also, not only did the Arab world give greater support but the Muslim world as a whole and much of the global 'south' also gave support.

The Global War on Terror Continues...

A caveat is needed concerning that support. Throughout the Palestinian struggle, the Arab rulers have frequently verbally given support to the Palestinian cause but have noticeably

done very little about it – they feared their own ‘street’ as much as outside influences. The reasons for this are several, but the emphasis should be placed on their military powerlessness in face of the supposed power of the Israeli military, including its nuclear weapons. As well, most Arab governments were either bought out by U.S. financial power or threats of U.S. military intervention (direct or covert) to replace their rule with some other more acceptable ruler.

Unfortunately that continues true today.

All the Arab governments are voicing their strong support for the Hamas resistance and decrying the genocide perpetrated by Israel. The only action being taken by any government is from tiny war torn Yemen who have effectively fought off Saudi/U.S. military attacks for many years. Non-state actors are also supporting the Palestinian resistance, but with no state to lose, no power to lose, with nothing new that can be threatened by the U.S. and its allies, Hezbollah and other militias throughout Iraq and Syria are attacking Israeli and U.S. positions in the region.

There are many nuances to the political struggles of the Arab world. As a general statement, Rogan’s summation given above for earlier events is perhaps even stronger for today’s actions. The U.S., by its deeds, fully supports Israeli actions. Israel continues its disproportionate genocide against Gaza. The resistance is receiving more and more support abroad as it stands up to Israeli attacks and sees the U.S. support. And finally, as this started with a look at “*The Arabs – A History*”, it seems that history is repeating itself, only much more violently and overtly. Except the vaunted prowess of the Israeli military has been shown to be unreal; and the fear of U.S. intervention appears to not concern at least some of the Arab interests. Whatever the outcome, not just the Arab world, but the world of empires is reshaping itself.

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