

The British Influence on the Arabic Countries and Bringing Civilization to the Middle East

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Abstract

After the occupation of the British Empire for the Middle East, the British try to make their influence permanent. So, to accomplish this mission they plan to make their effect on the Arabian culture. After collecting information about the customs and culture of Arabian society, the cultural propaganda tries to change the Arabic culture by mixing it with the western culture through a lot of means. Because of the differences between the British cultural and Middle East culture, and especially in the Arabic countries, this mission faces some obstacles. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the aims, goals, and means of the British policy in the Arabic countries in the Middle East. The structure of this work is as follows: an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion. The meaning of the word Middle East, the reasons behind Britain's selection of the Middle East, and the history of Britain's colonization of the Middle East are all covered in the first part. The second section is going to introduce the division of the Arabic countries with Gertrude Bell's role in mapping Iraq, and the policy of the British in the Middle East. Section three will include British cultural propaganda and policy failure in the Middle East with the differences between Arab world culture and British culture that lead to this failure. The major findings of this study found that imposing one culture on another is possible only when the two share the same aspects, but in the case of the Arabic and British cultures, the differences lead to a gap between them

Keywords

British Empire, Colonization, the Middle East, Arab countries, and Culture

Introduction

The British come to the Middle East because the Ottoman Empire was in danger of disin-

tegrating and they strove to prevent any other power from inheriting the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The British Empire is formed over the past three centuries, a system of colonies, protectorates, and territories. To control and make her rule permanent, Britain tried to impose her culture on these colonies. In the case of Arabic countries, after collecting information about the customs and culture of Arabian society through number of spies and information officers, the cultural propaganda tries to change and affect the Arabic culture through a lot of means, such as establishing British schools, organizations, magazines and newspapers, or by inviting the elites, such as the journalists and educated people through scholarships. But, because of the differences between the cultural British and Middle East culture, and especially in the Arabic countries, this mission faces some obstacles. Through the analysis, this paper will address the research questions: (1) Does Britain policy succeeded in Middle East and especially for the Arab? (2) Does Britain bring civilisation to the Middle East? I will first examine the real reasons behind the British colonisation for the Middle East. I will then discuss the cultural and political strategies used by the British in the colonies. As a result, it may be feasible to investigate and illuminate the basic causes behind the British inability to create new nationalities for new countries

The definition of the term Middle East

The Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East are the three words used to characterize the East. Each word refers to a distinct geographical area: the Near East included Turkey, the Middle East included India, and the Far East included China (Davison 1963, 17). The Middle East has different definitions related to definite characteristic, or set of characteristics, appropriate to, for instance, racial or linguistic or religious or geographical or economic or strategic and so on. The British coined the phrase 'Middle East,' which refers to the region between the Near East and the Far East, although it has never been clear where each of these begins and ends in actuality. The Far East, for instance, does not, in English usage, include India, but India is equally certainly not in the Middle East. India, in fact, is one of the keys to the whole matter, and the fact that falls neither in the Middle East nor in the Far East is an important reminder that in the period when these terms became current, India was part of the British Empire and was indeed a sort of outpost or extension of Great Britain itself

The Near East included Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, the Levant, and Egypt before WWI, whereas the Middle East included Arabia, Mesopotamia, the Persian Gulf, Persia, and Afghanistan. The Middle East, according to Hudson, is divided into three parts: the Arab East (Mashreq), North Africa (Maghreb), and the Gulf Region (Khaleej) (Hudson 1976, 483). Tibi, regarded as one of the region's best scholars, divides the Middle East into three sub-regions, similar to Hudson, although he refers to these nations as the central and edge countries Tibi 1989:73

| The Arab East (Mashreq) | | The Gulf Region (Khaleej) | | The Arab West (Maghreb) | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Centric Countries | Edge Countries | Centric Countries | Edge Countries | Centric Countries | Edge Countries |
| Egypt Israel Syria Jordan Lebanon | Turkey Cyprus Sudan N. Yemen S. Yemen | Iraq Iran S. Arabia Kuwait | Bahrein Qatar U.A.E. Umman | Algeria Morocco Libya | Tunisia Mauritania |

The Middle East and its Parts as Sub-System According to Tibi 1989:76

Britain Selection for the Middle East

The selection of Britain for the Middle East was not arbitrary. In addition to the reason that may come to the mind that Britain come to the Middle East because the Ottoman Empire was in danger of disintegrating and it strove to prevent any other power from inheriting the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, another reason was the people who live in this reign. It is known for everybody that those people have a history .goes back at least 6,000 years

These people’s forebears are culturally the ancestors of most of today’s civilizations. The spiritual, intellectual, and even technological underpinnings of our period civiliza- tion come from the peoples that lived in the Middle East for the previous 6,000 years. In addition, the earliest alphabets were developed in the Middle East. All of the world’s main faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have their origins in the Middle East. All sciences may be traced back to the Babylonians’ fascination with celestial motions and the Egyptians’ manipulation of the Nile for agricultural purposes. In the late Middle Ages, the Arabs brought the science of algebra, medicine, and what was known as “natural phi- losophy” to Europe. After millennia of flowing from East to West, the direction of traffic in ideas, knowledge, and invention has just recently shifted to flow from West to East. All of these factors drive Britain to compete for control of this economically, politically, .geographically, and historically significant throne

The History of Britain’s Colonization of the Middle East

The Middle East is described as the area between Egypt and Iran, as well as Turkey and Yemen. It was centered in Istanbul and controlled by the Islamic Ottoman Empire. The British colonization of Middle Eastern nations and the creation of British imperialism began in 1798 AD, when Napoleon’s France seized Egypt, causing the British navy dread that the French authorities would obstruct their commerce with India. As a result, it col- laborated with the Ottoman Empire in order to oust French colonialism and advance its geopolitical and commercial interests in the Middle East. Prior to gaining control of the majority of Middle Eastern countries, Britain had obtained several commercial privileges in the Ottoman Empire, which helped her economic foundations, in addition to the cultur-

al foundations she drew from Turks and Muslims, which helped enrich English literature.
:The history of British colonialism in the Middle East can be summarized in four periods

Gertrude Bell and Her Role in the Division Map of Arabic Countries

After the lost against the Ottoman Empire in more than one battle, Britain thought to tip the scales, bring the Arab tribes into its alliance, and instigate a revolution against the Turks. To complete this mission the British need crucial information about the tribes that are friendly to the English? At that time few Englishmen had the answers, and Bell was one of them. Gertrude Bell was a British political officer, archaeologist, traveller, scholar and orientalist of the early 20th century who travelled thousands of miles on camels in the Arabian deserts, shared bread and salt with Bedouin sheikhs as a sign of friendship, and always listened to their political opinions. She established the current boundaries of Iraq and made a significant contribution to the formation of the kingdoms and nation states of what is now known as the Middle East, thanks to her earlier journeys and considerable expertise in the region

In Iraq, Miss Bell was able to penetrate Iraqi society and get closer to its elite and common people alike. The women's gossip sessions were used to learn about the customs and culture of Iraqi society, and to gather intelligence. She was able to win the love of everyone in Baghdad, to the extent that the Iraqi writer Abdul Majeed Al-Shawi called her the Mother of the Believers! And the common people nicknamed her the 'Khatun', due to her elegance and following the arts of etiquette and her difference from Iraqi women at that time. Gertrude Bell, in cooperation with the British colonizer, chose King Faisal I, son of the Sharif of Mecca, the leader of the Arab revolt against the Turks. After decades of ignoring Miss Bell's role in modern British colonialism, and the division of Arab countries, a number of films, books and novels have recently been produced that illustrate the role she played at the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the most important films that dealt with her life is Queen of the Desert which focused on Bill's emotional life, and also, Letters from Baghdad, which broadcast for the first time Gertrude Bell's letters to her family, in addition to her official reports, which are now kept in the Documents Center in London. Khatun Baghdad is a novel written by the Iraqi writer Shakir Nuri which dealt with the details of Miss Bell's life in Iraq. In her two books The Desert and the Sown (1907) and Amurath to Amurath (1911), Bell described her experiences in visiting Iran in 1892, and Palestine and Syria in the years (1899-1900). At the age of fifty-four, she died in mysterious circumstances on her bed in Baghdad in 1926

The Middle East and the new Nationality

After the division of the Middle East into smaller countries, only few countries have real sense of being nations within those particular geographical limits. They are the Persians and the Turks—and those are non-Arab peoples. The Arabic-speaking peoples indeed have a strong sense of belonging to one nation, and this feeling has nothing whatever to

do with the national boundaries that appear on the map today. Paradoxical as it may seem to Europeans, the object of Arab nationalism today is not to create national boundaries but to destroy them. Some examples of these intentions were the formation early in 1958 of the United Arab Republic, which consists so far of Egypt, Syria and (with some reservations) the Yemen, the abortive counter-union of the two kingdoms of Iraq and Jordan soon afterwards, and many other unsuccessful plans of union among the Arab states since the Second World War, such as that based on the so-called 'Fertile Crescent' of Syria, Jordan and Iraq. The Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), created in February 1989 by North Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, and Egypt, was the final one. In all the other Arabic-speaking countries too the sense of being part of a larger Arab nation is generally more strongly developed than that of being a citizen of the particular state outlined on the map

The Policy of the British in the Middle East

Britain exercised its influence on the structure of the Middle East in various ways and at various levels, sometimes competitively and sometimes in cooperation. For example, there is rivalry today between British and American oil companies. There is cooperation between British and American missionaries and technical aid missions. Political dominance, as well as economic and cultural influence, were held by the British and French in Middle Eastern organizations. The most visible manifestation of British-French influence in the Middle East today is the ongoing widespread usage of the English and French languages. Despite the United States' unilateral push for greater politico-military influence in the Middle East, Britain and France prioritize economic investments. Britain and France, two of the European Union's top four nations, have backed the development of a tunnel connecting Europe with Arab North Africa

The Purpose of British Policy in the Middle East

The earliest development of British dominance in the Middle East was unquestionably a policy decision, and it was not abrupt nor accidental. From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, British strategy in the Middle East was aimed at preventing any potentially hostile state from dominating the region. The reason was that the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of collapsing. Great Britain, in particular, strove to prevent any other power from inheriting the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The nature of the British interest in the Middle East has undergone three movements; economic, strategic, and political movement. Wittingly or unwittingly, Western writers, educators, missionaries, administrators, industrialists, technicians, politicians, soldiers contributed in the predominance of the Western in the Middle East

British Cultural Diplomacy in the Middle East

In addition to the political diplomacy in the Middle East, the British continued to convince, not only the leaders, but also the people through number of strategies to accept their pol-

icity in the reign, such as

1-The Ikhwan al Hurriya organisation: British authorities formed the “Ikhwan al-Hurriya” [Brotherhood of Freedom] mass membership group in Egypt in the late 1940s to propagate liberal democratic principles as an intellectual vehicle for the promotion of British values and ideas. This organization was made up of a network of committees that aimed to bring Egyptians together on a regular basis to debate social concerns and current events

2-Al Aalam Magazine and the Arabic Publications Programme: Britain published Al Aalam [The Globe] magazine in the 1950s, which was less expensive than its Egyptian counterparts. This publication also serves as a propaganda tool, emphasizing elements intended to increase British status in the Arab world. As a result, Barclay informed

3-Watson that

We hope that the magazine will gain traction and popularity before our adversaries are’ (able to officially characterize it as British propaganda.’ (TNA, May 8, 1952

Al Aalam was British propaganda that focused on declaring and advertising for issues such as British support for Middle Eastern social and economic development, Arab rulers’ educational experiences in British schools, the provision of British agricultural equipment to Middle Eastern farmers, the flourishing of the Islamic faith in Britain, and ‘a series of short biographies of British scientists who have contributed to mankind’s well-being’ (TNA: 15 July 1952

4-Inviting Arab journalists: Another powerful propaganda approach was using elites to influence the masses’ viewpoints. This was accomplished by planning visits to Britain for prominent Arab journalists in order to imbue them with a certain set of pictures of the United Kingdom and its people. It is a distinctive feature of the British people. (TNA: April 11, 1947

5-Britain’s educational effort British Council schools are the most significant arm of British cultural diplomacy in the Middle East, according to various authorities. The goal of such a school is to recruit children from prominent families and to foster an awareness of Britain via their influence on students and interactions with parents. (TNA, November 1, 1956) The British are well aware that the cultural and intellectual backgrounds of people in the Middle East, particularly Arabs, are so unlike to those of Westerners that the only way to influence them is to start from the beginning and provide them with a Western education. (TNA, June 24, 1952) The Ta’assissia Primary School in Baghdad is an example of such a school in Iraq. Another strategy used by the British is attracting the Iraqi students to complete their study in Britain, as Beeley warned

If there were no places for Iraqi students in Britain, a big number would go to the United States, where they would ‘come back with American views and tend to advocate the use (of American equipment.’ (TNA PRO: June 26, 1952

6-The British Book Trade: This is especially evident in universities, which are constantly in the forefront of political protests. With the exception of the Faculty of Law, nearly 90%

.of textbooks used in Egypt are British standard texts

7-British Feature Films in the Middle East: Another British tactic was to promote British films in the region, although this was unsuccessful due to a variety of causes. One of these problems is the inadequacy of British films for Middle Eastern tastes, which appears to be an impediment that neither information officers nor representatives from the film business appear to be capable of surmounting. The number of films played at Baghdad’s commercial cinemas according to their country of origin was seen to be as follows in the :first quarter of 1948

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| American | 66 |
| Arabic [predominantly Egyptian] | 46 |
| Indian | 2 |
| French | 1 |
| Armenian | 1 |
| British | 0 |

Thus, the British films suffered in competition with Egypt and the United States

British Cultural Propaganda and Policy Failure in the Middle East

We can justify the reason for the failure of cultural propagaanda for the differences between the cultural British and Middle East culture, and especially in the Arabic countries. :These differences can be summarised as the follows

1.1-The Arab World is made up of 22 countries in North Africa and the Middle East. These nations speak the same language, practice the same religion (almost 90% are Muslims), and have similar cultural values and customs (Barakat, 1993). The majority of people in the Arab world are Muslims, but Christians make up a big section of the population of the United Kingdom. The disparity between two cultures’ perspectives on things and the formation of their values and beliefs is based on this divergence. Culture and the conceptions that govern that specific culture are the most influential variables on how people (react, according to studies (Harry. Et al, 2002; Leung et al, 2005

2.2-Arab nations are authoritarian by nature, with commanders in charge of making decisions, and whatever they decide is correct and should not be questioned. Managers or supervisors in the United Kingdom, on the other hand, might make a decision after negotiating with subordinates and considering diverse viewpoints and perspectives

3.3-Closed cultures in the Arab World are prone to sticking to tried-and-true methods for completing tasks and overcoming obstacles. The majority of these systems and rules are based on Islamic law. The British culture, on the other hand, is more prepared to welcome new ideas, techniques, and challenges in order to enhance their conventional ways of accomplishing chores and obtain greater outcomes, regardless of whether these ideas are .against or in accordance with God’s rules

4.4-In Arabic society, the family is frequently prioritized, and relationships with family,

friends, and neighbors are viewed as vital in the lives of Arabs. British people, on the other hand, are more self-centered and, in some ways, selfish. Instead than considering the entire society, the member of the group focuses just his own interests, and perhaps those of his immediate family. In reality, any action that may be taken in the West revolves on .(privacy and independence (Buda, 1998

In the British culture society, concepts such as reputation, dignity, shame, and honor are less considered and recognized than in the Arabic culture society. For example, in Arabic culture, it is improper for unrelated men and women to establish a connection outside of marriage, such as a friendship. When socializing, it is unlawful for unrelated opposite genders to kiss, embrace, or even shake hands. These instances, on the other hand, are quite acceptable in British society

6-The manly element of the Arab World received a score of 53 on Hofstede's (2001) dimensions, whereas the masculine aspect of the UK had a slightly higher score of 66. As a result, British culture is more masculine, with rivalry and assertiveness given more weight in society. When compared to the UK society, the Arab World has a little more equitable and balanced male-female connection

The British tried to impose their culture on the Arab but the differences between the two communities lead to establishing a gap between them which lead to refuse the existence of the British forces on its lands

Conclusion

It is known that occupation is one of the political phenomena that aim for the superpowers to seize the weak ones and work to extend their influence. In order to exploit their social and other resources, in addition to plundering all their wealth, insulting the dignity of the peoples of these countries and destroying their cultural and civilizational heritage. This article revealed a lot of facts related to real reasons behind the British political and cultural strategies in the Middle East. It briefly presented the historical and economic importance for that make many consecutive invaders came to the reign. Furthermore, the research and survey used in this article shed light on a number of topics that might be crucial in understanding why British strategy in the Middle East failed. The following points :can be used to summarize these issues

In addition to the reason that may come to the mind that Britain come to the Middle East because the Ottoman Empire was in danger of disintegrating and it strove to prevent any other power from inheriting the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire, another reason was the importance of the people who live in this reign

Paradoxical as it may seem to Europeans, the Arabic-speaking people indeed have a strong sense of belonging to one nation, but the object of this nationalism is to destroy the national boundaries to create one Arab Nation

It is commonly assumed that the British bring civilization to the Middle East by establishing schools, organizations, magazines, and newspapers, or by inviting the Middle

East's elites to visit Britain, but in reality, they use these strategies to persuade not only the leaders, but also the people, to accept British culture

We can justify the reason for the failure of cultural propaganda for the differences between the cultural British and Middle East culture

The British tried to impose their culture on the Arab but the differences between the two communities lead to establishing a gap between them which lead to the failure of British diplomacy

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