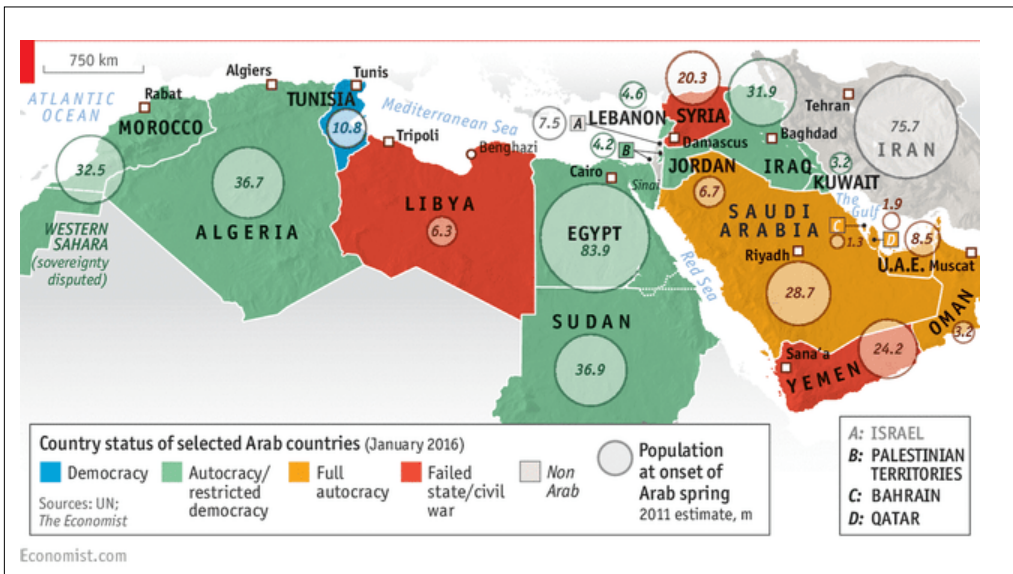




What is the Arab Spring?

- The Arab Spring is a name given to a series of uprisings and revolutions that began in December 2010 and continues to today.
- It started in Tunisia in December 2010 when a solitary and desperate vegetable seller set himself alight in front of municipal offices.
- Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire to protest the arbitrary seizing of his vegetable stand by police over failure to obtain a permit.
- It was the trigger that led to street demonstrations across the country as news of his treatment was revealed.
- Eventually, president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to abdicate his position and flee to Saudi Arabia. He had ruled the country with an iron fist for more than 20 years.
- On the 25 January 2011 - The first coordinated mass protests are held in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt against president Hosni Mubarak
- Less than a month later Egypt's Mubarak steps down.
- Then in March 2011 - protests begin in Syria.
- In August 2011 - Rebels in Libya launch battle to take control of Tripoli.
- In September 2011 - Yemenis hold a "Million Man March."
- By October, Libyan dictator Colonel Muammar Qaddafi is captured by rebels, tortured and killed.
- In November 2011 - Yemen dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh signs a power-sharing agreement. He resigns altogether in February 2012 and is later killed. In 2017.
- In June 2012 - President Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood is elected as president in Egypt. Only to be deposed a year later.



The outcomes: at a glance

- Today only Tunisia has transitioned to what some may call a democracy but its economic progress has stunted
- In Egypt there has been a return to strong man government. The tyranny of Sisi has consolidated and the police state is now stronger.
- Libya is today a failed state. There is currently a civil war between two governments, one acknowledged as legitimate by the UN in Tripoli (backed by Turkey) and another led by General Haftar (backed by France and Russia)
- And of course Syria today sits in tatters.
- There was a second wave in 2019 - Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon - further demonstrations.
- But this was stalled by Covid.
- So the situation remains in transition and is certainly not over.

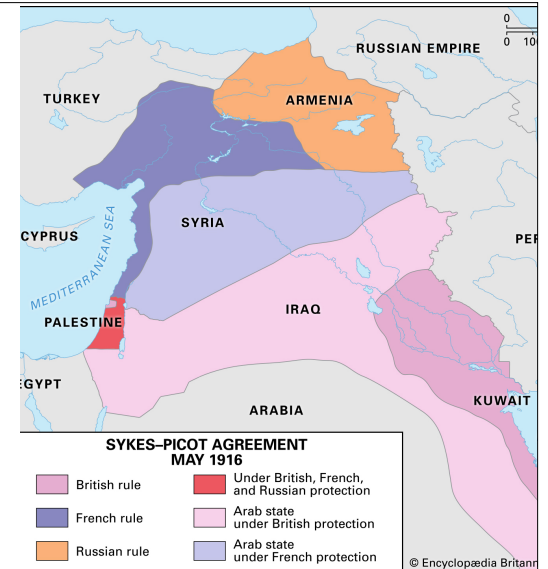
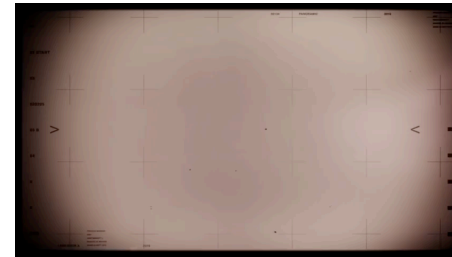


What I am going to cover today?



Background

- How do we understand these events and why they came about?
- To understand the Middle East, one needs to have a clear picture of the past 100 years.
- In 1916 - the British and the French, as WW1 was coming to a conclusion, developed a plan to divide up the Ottoman Empire.
- The Sykes Picot Agreement, was a secret plan to maintain British and French interests in the region.
- Read A Line in the Sand - James Barr



The Great Powers

- Why would these powers be allowed to do this?
- The European great powers saw themselves as having the right to secure their interests.
- They also had a sense of superiority - they saw the Middle East as backwards and had little understand or respect for their cultures.
- But at the same time, in order to gain commitment from the United States they publicly declared their commitment to decolonisation.
- President Woodrow Wilson, an American liberal, in his 14 points called upon European powers to commit to deconstructing their empires.
- He called for the 'autonomous development for the non-Turkish peoples of the Ottoman empire'
- Britain and France had other plans - they payed lip service to this idealism - the Arab colonies would be called 'protectorates' - they will 'help' these countries transition to western style democracies.
- This was the birth of the modern Middle East
- Syria was established as a French mandate
- Iraq was formed, out of three wilayat of the Ottoman Empire
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia unified
- Lebanon created
- Egypt given nominal independence from Britain.
- All of these countries were created afresh or gained new borders



1945 and the rise of US globalism

- The story remained the same in the Middle East
- Each country had a strong man in charge, beholden to the European powers.
- This is until after the Second World War, where the European powers declined.
- Since then, the United States has been in effect the regional hegemon.
- Yet Wilson and later Roosevelt's and Truman's commitment to a liberal order now took a back seat, as the imperatives of the Cold War took over.
- These oil rich states could not fall into a Soviet sphere of control.
- US policy in the Middle East was to use strongmen as a bulwark against communism.
- When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, this policy was openly stated by President Carter.
- His National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski declared,
 - "Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force."
- In The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power, author Daniel Yergin notes that the Carter Doctrine "bore striking similarities" to a 1903 British declaration in which British Foreign Secretary Lord Lansdowne warned Russia and Germany that the British would "regard the establishment of a naval base or of a fortified port in the Persian Gulf by any other power as a very grave menace to British interests, and we should certainly resist it with all the means at our disposal."



Carnage in schedule two

Disregarding NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the countries of the world are largely divided into schedules one and two. In schedule one an infringement of the civilised rules will lead to detailed examination and well-earned international reproof. In schedule two, on the other hand, anything goes. Syria has the good fortune to be listed in schedule two, and it is there that President Hafez al-Assad is trying to surmount, and may by now have surmounted, one of those revolts by Muslim fundamentalists which are described, every time they occur, as the most serious challenge to his rule so far. There has been little eye-witness stuff from the city of Hama, but the reports of escaping travellers and the Intelligence assessments of Western embassies combine to provide a picture of merciless carnage carried out by the Government's private Alawite security force in which certainly hundreds, probably thousands, have been killed and in which parts of the city have been reduced to rubble.

The Guardian After the Hama Massacre - Over 20000 killed by Hafez Al Asad

After 1991

- When the Soviet Union collapsed, America found itself as the unipolar hegemon
- It was a new era - President Bush called it 'The New World Order' during the First Gulf War.
- Fukuyama spoke of 'The End of History' - liberal democracy and capitalism would become the universal ideology - as no alternative remained.
- This captured the zeitgeist. The United States could now reconstruct the world.
- Yet instead, the Middle East remained under dictators and authoritarian Presidents, the the United States turning a blind eye to their excesses and corruption.
- In fact many of them consolidated and strengthened their relationships with America
- These dictators cared little for the progress of their people and ruled with an iron fist.
- In many places, this led to militancy, such as in Egypt - which solicited a greater clampdown on the people.
- For the United States, the old doctrine of stability remained in place. Regardless of who was in the Whitehouse.
- This is until George Bush Junior, who placed democracy promotion at the heart of his administration - it led to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Both went badly.



The Arab World - 2010

- By 2010, the Arab World was in disarray.
- There was 25-30% youth unemployment
- GDP growth in these countries, that were resource rich was 1% average
- Inequalities were clear.
- There was economic decline, unemployment, extreme poverty, and a number of demographic structural factors, such as a large percentage of educated but dissatisfied youth within the entire population.
- This dissatisfaction was palpable, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis.
- When Barack Obama was asked about US relationship with Saudi Arabia despite its human rights abuses - he responded 'it's complicated'.
- The self immolation of a simple Tunisian vegetable seller set the region alight.
- Yet at the time the United States, Britain and France were caught by surprise.
- Barack Obama initially showed mute enthusiasm towards Tunisia and then Egypt, but when demonstrations were threatening to escalate - he called Mubarak to step down.



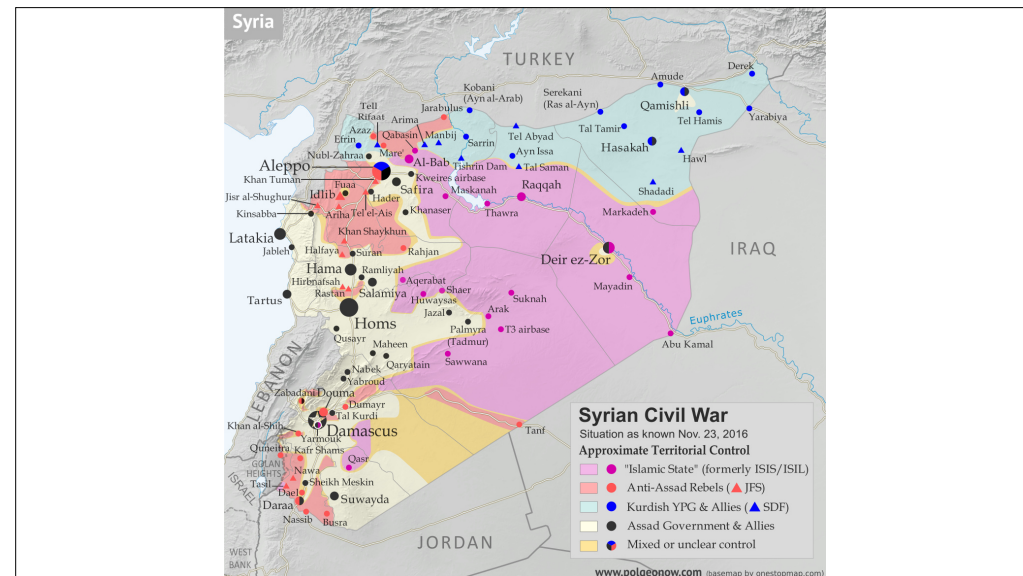
Egypt 2011

- The story of Egypt is a lesson in the 'deep state'
- Mubarak's resignation gave way to presidential elections and in June 2012 Mohammed Morsi came to office.
- Morsi was the Muslim Brotherhood candidate.
- The problem for Morsi was the deep state, the institutions and interests that had underwritten the regime of Mubarak remained in tact. The heads of policy, intelligence, judiciary and critically the army.
- The army remained the power brokers in the country.
- Morsi failed to deal with this, but thought he could make a deal with this system, like the Nahda Party had done in Tunisia.
- Instead the deep state worked to undermine him throughout the year.
- He failed to build a broad enough coalition and so the army was able to use discontent on the streets as a way to undermine him.
- He was deposed, arrested for 'corruption' and General Sisi came to office.
- Obama turned a blind eye to Sisi - even after the Rabaa Massacre in August 2013 against unarmed peaceful protestors.
- Possibly 2,600 protestors were gunned down, then followed a crackdown against the Brotherhood.
- This was supported by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who bankrolled Sisi's new government with loans. Obama condemned it but continued the \$1.5 bn military aid.



Syria 2011

- The story of Syria is sad as it is complicated.
- In 2011 protests began in Syria, after teenagers in Deraa who has daubed 'the people demand the end of the regime' on a wall.
- They were tortured.
- Incensed local people took to the street to demonstrate for political and economic reforms.
- Security forces responded harshly, conducting mass arrests and firing on demonstrators.
- Videos of security forces beating and firing at protesters—captured by witnesses on mobile phones—were circulated around the country
- Assad released at this time large number of militants from prison.
- Assad sought to portray the opposition as Sunni Islamic extremists in the mold of al-Qaeda
- The regime also produced propaganda stoking minorities' fears that the predominately Sunni opposition would carry out violent reprisals against non-Sunni communities.
- The regime used brutal force to quell the protestors.
- An anti-Assad bloc consisting of Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia formed in the last half of 2011. They offered money, assistance and eventually arms to the protestors.
- By the summer of 2011 it had turned into a civil war.



Syria 2012 - 2013

- The Syrian militias - a patchwork of many groups, funded by differing outside parties had some success.
- Government troops were forced to withdraw from areas in the north and east, allowing the rebels to control significant territory for the first time.
- They also took Eastern Aleppo.
- The balance was in their favour.
- The Syrian government continued to receive weapons from Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah.
- By late 2012 Hezbollah had also begun sending its own fighters into Syria to battle the rebels.
- Then Assad was accused of using chemical weapons in the suburbs of Damascus killing hundreds in 2013. He had crossed Obama's 'red line'
- Yet military action from the west was not forthcoming.
- Instead, Russia and America brokered a 'deal' to remove chemical weapons from Syria.
- Then in April 2013 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, declared that he would combine his forces in Iraq and Syria under the name Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS)
- This led to Western intervention - but against ISIS not Assad.
- Isis's main target were the rebel groups not Assad.



Syria Russia

- With the rebels fighting a rearguard action from ISIS and dealing with the Iranian militias, the balance tipped once again against their favour.
- Then Russia actively joined the conflict in 2015
- They claimed to be there at the behest of the Assad regime to fight ISIS, yet the majority of their sorties were against the opposition rebel groups.
- Obama has tacitly approved Russia's entry and evaded questions on whether he had advanced notice.
- For the United States, Syria was now a problem it could not solve, but it did not want the rebel forces to take power.
- Certainly the US and Russia had constant military communication - they called it deconfliction
- From this point the rebellion was lost.
- The USA utilised the Kurds to fight ISIS on through a ground offensive.
- The Kurds established a Kurdish state 'Rojava' in North Eastern Syria - which the Trump administration abandoned after a deal with Erdogan.
- Each rebel stronghold was systematically besieged, shelled, cut off, starved and then an agreement for their departure to Idlib in the north west was negotiated.
- Today the rebellion is a rump, with infighting and small territorial and turf wars.



