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The Middle East and the centenary of the Great War¹

Abstract: The article illustrates the main developments of warfare in the Middle East from the Great War until the cold war. The author analyses European attitudes towards the Arab countries, the reasons for militarisation of specific states and the grounds for the rise of Islamic radicalism.

During the decades prior to the Great War, leading European powers consolidated their positions by expanding their spheres of influence: i.e. their colonial/imperial possessions. Great Britain was interested mainly in securing the route to India, which with respect to the Middle East, entailed annexing Aden (1839), and controlling Bahrain (1880), Muscat (1891) and Kuwait (1899). The French began the foundation of their Empire by the conquest of Algeria (1830), followed later by the occupation of Tunisia (1881) and the incorporation of Morocco (1912). Russia was building a vast Asian Empire, also at the cost of the Ottoman Empire. All of the Middle East, including Egypt, Persia (Iran) and the Sudan, was drawn into the politics of the great powers.

With the beginning of the 20th Century, both the Ottoman Empire and Persia had every cause to feel insecure: hence, the reform movements and revolts of

1 The Middle East is understood in this paper as the Arab North African and South West Asian countries in addition to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and (after its establishment) Israel. Cf. Owen, Roger: *State, Power and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Routledge: London – New York 1994, pp. 8 ff. (map on page 12, including North African and Asian countries of the region, but excluding Afghanistan). Also: Chapter 1 of Part I of: Corme, George: *Le Proche-Orient eclate. 1956–2000*. Editions La Decouverte: Paris 2003.

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1908 and 1911 in Turkey, and the constitutional movement in Iran of 1906–1911. Turkey established close relations with Germany².

The Entente Cordiale, the triple Entente or simply, the Entente, was formed in two stages: in 1904 (8 April) by the conclusion of a British-French agreement, and in 1907 by the access of Russia. According to the major clauses of the 1904 agreement, France resigned from all objections to the British occupation of Egypt and from fixing a time for its termination, while Britain acknowledged the right of France to interfere in Moroccan affairs, together with the introduction of so-called reforms, on condition of respecting the hitherto-acquired rights of British citizens. French recognition of British rights in Egypt and understandably, also in the Sudan, did not have any practical significance, particularly as they were forced to leave Fashoda (in Southern Sudan) in 1898. The French, however, gained a great boost to their empire by being granted a free hand in Morocco. Furthermore, the British monarch Edward VII (1901–1910), in recognition of British isolation on the international arena, was ready to go as far as possible to satisfy France, and later Russia, and attract them into a British-sponsored political-military alliance.

The British-Russian Convention (signed on 31 August 1907) covered three matters, which were of interest to both sides: Tibet, Afghanistan and Persia. Russia and Britain resigned from interference in the affairs of Tibet. Russia guaranteed the security of Afghanistan. Both sides agreed to the partition of Persia into their own spheres of influence. Britain allowed the northern and richer part of Persia to enter the Russian sphere of influence, while retaining the southern part of the country within its own. The two sides were separated by a “neutral” central part that included the capital, Tehran³.

Hence, the Entente Cordiale had obviously a Middle Eastern moment at its core: firstly, in 1904, when it was convened between Great Britain and France. The two world powers solved at least some of the problems of their thitherto rivalry in Egypt, these being the unilateral occupation of the country in 1882 and the earlier attainment of controlling shares over the Suez Canal Company in 1875, the Sudan, involving the Mahdist uprising and the Mahdist state of mid-1880s and 1890s and the British occupation in 1898 by Kitchener, and in North Africa, where the British accepted the primacy of French interests explicitly in Morocco and implicitly in Tunisia and Algeria. Hence, each side accepted the other’s sphere

2 Cleveland, William I.: *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Westview Press: Boulder – San Francisco – Oxford 1994, pp. 99 – cf.

3 Armand, Collin: *Lorient arabe, Arabisme et islamisme de 1798 a 1945*. Paris 1993; text of Entente Cordiale of 1904 r. as annex [in:] Carpetier, Jean/Lebrun Francois (eds.): *Histoire de la Mediterranee*. Editions du Seuil: Paris 1998.

of influence and their attainments in the Middle East, granting them freedom of action on the particular terrain.

The expansion of the Entente Cordiale in 1907 by the accession of Russia to the club through a British initiative again took place at the cost of Middle Eastern nations. This time, Persia (since 1935, Iran) was at stake, not to mention Afghanistan. The division of Persia into a northern, Russian, sphere of influence and a southern, British, sphere of influence proved a strategically vital moment during World War II and the battle for the Middle East with the Axis states: i.e., the occupation of northern Iran by the USSR and southern Iran by Britain.

Following the chronological sequence of the Great War events, the penetration of the Ottoman Empire by Germany led to its involvement on the side of Central Powers and entry to the Great War. Although the majority of the leading political force in Ottoman Turkey, namely the Committee of Union and Progress (*Jamiiyyat al-Ittihad wal-Taraqqi*), were in favour of neutrality, a small decision-making group within the Committee (rather a triumvir) led by Enver Pasha were determined to align the Ottoman Empire with Germany by signing a secret bilateral alliance directed against Russia on 2 August 1914⁴. The accord was put into effect on 29 October, when the Ottoman fleet bombarded the Russian Black Sea ports of Odessa and Sevastopol. On 11 November, the Ottoman state declared war against the Entente powers and simultaneously announced a Holy War (*Jihad*) on them.

The war theatre of the extensive borders of the Ottoman Empire covered the eastern front with Russia, as well as the operational theatres of Greater Syria, the Suez Canal, Iraq (Mesopotamia) and Arabia. Hence, in the regions of eastern Anatolia and Caucasus, war campaigns continued until 1917⁵. Despite starting with some successes, the 1914–1915 offensive was generally poorly led by Enver Pasha, leading to high casualties. Moreover, under the impact of the Russian offensive, the Ottoman army had to retreat from Erzurum. From then onwards, the Ottomans adopted defensive tactics until the Russians withdrew in 1917 in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution. In these new circumstances, the Ottomans were able to regain most of the territories lost earlier.

Here we should mention the Armenian question. Most Armenians were loyal to the Ottoman state, but Armenian nationalist organisations in both Russia and the Ottoman Empire were acting for the establishment of an independent Armenia. With some Armenians collaborating with Russia, this was treated as a danger to the Ottoman forces behind the lines. Subsequently Armenian villages

4 Cleveland, William I.: op. cit., p. 140.

5 Ibid., pp. 141–160.

were evacuated and Armenians were pushed south towards the Syrian Desert, resulting in massive death tolls, while others were killed before leaving Anatolia.

Returning to the war, it should be added that at the time of the Russian advances, the Allies were fighting on two further fronts: the first in the direction of Istanbul, the second towards Mesopotamia. In both cases, the Ottomans were able to repulse the offensives. The first case, the Gallipoli campaign, was launched in February 1915 and aimed at seizing the Dardanelles together with Istanbul. Having ended with success, it would have separated the Ottomans from Germany and simultaneously opened supply lines between Russia and other Entente states through the Black Sea. The plan collapsed even after the intervention of a 200,000-strong British-French force that landed at the Gallipoli peninsula. Ottoman artillery and defences inflicted heavy losses on the expeditionary formation, ultimately forcing them to evacuate in January 1916.

At the southern stretches of the Ottoman Empire, the British were ready to implement their military goals. One of them had been shaped a long time earlier, intended for the defence of the imperial land route to India. The second goal was aimed at defending the Iranian oil field, in addition to gaining the potentially oil-rich area of northern Mesopotamia. The conversion of fuel for the navy from coal to oil initiated before the war greatly enhanced the importance of the Persian Gulf and Mesopotamian battle front. Therefore, the British landed at Al-Fau on 6 November 1914, while the port town of Basra was occupied by the Anglo-Indian army on 22 November. The road to Baghdad seemed to be open, but at Kut al-Amara, the forces headed by General Charles Townshend were surrounded, and after suffering a long siege, they decided to surrender on 29 April 1916. However, this front was so highly significant for the British that within a year, another expedition under the command of General Frederick Stanley Maude was organised, which conquered Baghdad on 11 March 1917, bringing the southern provinces of Basra and Baghdad under British rule. After the capitulation of Baghdad, British forces were directed towards the east in order to join the Russian forces. The two met at Qizil Rabat on 2 April. The Russians, however, withdrew from the war gradually after the February and October revolutions of 1917. When the war was approaching its end, British forces were on the outskirts of Mosul. Both the town and the province were taken afterwards on the basis of Article X of the Armistice Agreement signed at Mudros on 31 October 1918. The article gave the allied powers the right to demand the withdrawal of Turkish troops from chosen territories on grounds of security.

The next battle grounds of the Middle East during the Great War were areas of Syria, British occupied Egypt (especially the Suez Canal) and the Arabian

Peninsula. At the time of the eastern Anatolian campaign of early 1915, Jamal Pasha, another leading figure of CUP, one of the triumvir, led a force of 80,000 soldiers through the Sinai Peninsula with the aim of performing a quick strike at the unprepared British defences of Egypt and the Suez Canal, with the latter intended for capture by the Ottomans.

In the aftermath of the assault, the British introduced considerable changes to their war plans. Early in 1917, the British amassing their own army in Egypt, launched their own offensive in the direction of Palestine under the command of General Edmund Allenby. The Arab Revolt against the Ottomans was yet another factor rendering assistance to the British war effort. Jerusalem was captured in December 1917 and the war in Syria continued in the face of stiff Ottoman resistance. On 1 October 1918, Damascus was captured by the Arab Revolt forces; a few days later French forces captured Beirut. As mentioned above, on 31 October 1918 at Mudros, the Istanbul government signed an unconditional surrender agreement, the Mudros Armistice, a document that emerged to seal the end of the Ottoman Empire.

During the war, the Ottoman administration bodies treated the non-Turkish population of the Empire in an extremely harsh and brutal manner. In Greater Syria, setbacks on the battle fronts were accompanied by repressive measures, including the public execution of leading Arab figures: eleven persons in Beirut in August 1915, another twenty-one in Beirut and Damascus in May 1916. These martyrs, as they became in the Arab historical mind, were not advocating independence from the Ottoman state, but merely decentralisation: an idea advocated by CUP at its initial stage.

Hence, the circumstances were ripe for an Arab uprising. However, the initiative was to come from the British. Whereas the Ottoman sultan (bearing simultaneously the title of Caliph of Muslims) had declared *jihad* against the infidels, it was conceived that there had to be a significant counterweight. The Hashimite custodian of Islam's holy cities of Mecca and Medina, Husayn Ibn Ali was persuaded step by step to stand at the head of an uprising against the Turkish rulers of the Ottoman Empire. The allied price for that Arab support in the war effort was a pledge to support the establishment of a post-war Arab state. Husayn came from a family claiming descent from the Prophet, and thus having the title of sheriff. The plan was consulted, and apparently for the Arab side elaborated, through correspondence between Husayn and the British High Commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon. Sharif Husayn claimed to represent all Arabs, in whose name he requested British recognition of an Arab state covering the Arabian Peninsula, Greater Syria (including Lebanon and Palestine) and Iraq. To that effect, Husayn sent a letter in

July 1915 to McMahon, setting a starting moment for the widely known Husayn-McMahon correspondence lasting from July 1915 until March 1916. After receiving the first letter, the British government instructed the high commissioner to continue the exchange with Husayn. Later controversy surrounded the question whether Britain promised to support the establishment of the Arab state and later opposed the idea. Meanwhile Britain, during the war, supplied the Arab rebellion with funds, weapons and ammunition. The revolt, commanded by Husayn's elder son Faisal, was formed of Arabian tribal forces, assisted by Iraqi ex-Ottoman army officers in addition to a small number of British army advisers, among them Captain T.E. Lawrence. These forces proceeded from Hijaz province in Arabia, through the port of Aqaba (1917), Palestine and Damascus (reached on 1 October 1918). At Damascus, Faisal started to establish his administration, in the hope of implementing earlier agreements.

However, the agreements with the Arabs, although being vague, opposed the allied Anglo-French-Russian accords during the war, namely the Sykes-Picot agreement. First, in March 1915, concerned with continued Russian participation in the war, France and Britain signed the Constantinople Agreement with Russia, granting Russia the right to annex the Turkish Straights together with Constantinople: an agreement that was never implemented due to the events of 1917 in Russia, which drew it out of the war and any wartime agreements. The Arab nations came to know about allied secret agreements after their publication by the Bolshevik government of Russia. The British-French Sykes-Picot Agreement, negotiated since 1915 and signed in May 1916 covered the following:

- France and Britain were prepared to recognize and protect an independent Arab state in areas 'A' and 'B' marked on an annexed map, under the suzerainty of an Arab chief. France in area 'A' and Britain in area 'B' shall have priority of enterprises and nomination of officials at the request of the Arab State or Confederation of Arab States.
- France in the blue area and Britain in the red area shall have the right of establishing direct or indirect administration after agreement with the mentioned Arab State or Confederation.
- The brown area (Sanjaq, Province, of Jerusalem) shall be established, after consultation with Russia and other allies, as an international administration pending agreement with the Sherriff of Mecca.

Another pledge of far reaching implications was made to the Zionists in a British declaration. It was contained in a letter from Arthur James Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, to Lord Rothschild, the British Zionist leader dated 2 November 1917, which stated:

His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, is being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the existing civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status of Jews in other countries. I should be grateful, if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation. Yours sincerely, Arthur James Balfour⁶.

The downfall of the Ottoman Empire as a consequence of the Great War ensured the supremacy of Britain and France in the Middle East, or rather, European supremacy. The system of mandates meant the establishment of new nation states in the region modelled on French and British patterns. During the inter-war period, the area included an independent Turkey and Iran, as well as an Eritrea and Somalia occupied by Italy, France and Britain.

British-French supremacy in the area during the post-World War I period was legalised within the framework of the League of Nations. Hence, article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant referred to colonies and dependent territories, whose inhabitants were not yet capable of ruling themselves in difficult international circumstances. The prosperity and development of those people is a sacred civilisational mission (The White Man's Burden) which could only be carried out by developed nations whose resources, experience and geographical location could best undertake such a responsibility as mandatory powers of the League. Particular reference was made to some communities of the former Ottoman Empire whose development allowed their existence as independent nations to be temporarily acknowledged, on condition of receiving the advice and assistance of a mandatory power until they become capable of independent government. However, the will of particular nations should be taken into consideration in the choice of the mandatory power. This was the case of A-type mandates (there were also B and C). Hence, Iraq, Palestine and Transjordanian were assigned to Great Britain, and Syria and Lebanon to France⁷.

The inter-war period⁸ in the Middle East was marked by the struggle for independence. The main efforts of Arabs during the period were directed towards ending foreign rule and gaining independence. Social, economic and political reforms were pushed into the background: e.g. Iraq, was granted formal independence in

6 *The Middle East and North Africa 1974–1975*. Europa Publications: London 1974, pp. 49–50, 396.

7 Gelberg, Ludwik: *Prawo międzynarodowe i historia dyplomacji. Wybór dokumentów (International Law and History of Diplomacy. Selected Documents)*. Warszawa 1958, vol. II, p. 39.

8 For a detailed view of the Middle East during these times, cf. Roger, Owen: op. cit.

1932 and Egypt in 1936, both as kingdoms, the question of Palestine, the Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, Jewish mass immigration into mandatory Palestine, the menace of Fascism / III Reich, inconsistent British policies in Palestine. In that period and during World War II, the situation in the Middle East was highly complicated both strategically, regarding the politics of the great powers, and regionally, with regard to inter-state and local politics.

With the liquidation of the Ottoman Empire, after the Great War, the stage was set for Great Britain and France as the new dominant powers of the Middle Eastern region to achieve their goals. Their status was, on the one hand, defined by the League of Nations, which, as mentioned, formally granted them mandatory powers in accordance with article 22 of the League Covenant. On the other hand, due to popular opposition to the mandatory system, relations had to be regulated by bilateral treaties, such as the 1930 British-Iraqi treaty, becoming the basis for Iraqi formal independence as a constitutional monarchy and access to the League of Nations in 1932. Egypt also achieved formal independence from the British in 1936, also becoming transformed into a constitutional monarchy. Nevertheless, the British continued to maintain military bases in the area, while the French continued a direct presence in the mentioned mandatory areas and North Africa: Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia.

The strategic importance of the Middle East, particularly for British and, to a lesser extent, French imperial interests, later for the Allies' war efforts, and naturally for the rival Axis powers⁹, was crucial; the region possessed substantial oil riches and was of great importance for maintaining sea and land communication lines between Europe and the United States on the one hand, and Central Asia and the Far East on the other.

With the outbreak of World War II, the area became directly threatened by Italy and Germany, to the effect of weakening British positions throughout the area, including Iraq, Egypt and Iran. Hence, after the defeat of France by Germany in May-June 1940, Syria and the Lebanon became an Axis sphere of domination through the Vichy authorities. These Levantine territories were used by Germans

9 Cf. Hirszwicz, Łukasz: *The Third Reich and the Arab East*. Routledge and Kegan Paul: London 1966; (Polish original edition: Hirszwicz, Łukasz: *III Rzesza a Arabski Wschód*. Waszawa 1963); Hart, Liddell: 1953. *The Rommel Papers*. Collins: London 1963; *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein*, K.G. Collins: London 1958; Cleveland, William: op. cit.; Mansfield, Peter: *A Modern History of the Middle East*. Penguin: London 1992; *The Middle East and North Africa 2000*. Europa Publications: London 2000.

to render assistance to the anti-British coup of May 1941 in Iraq headed by Rashid Ali al-Kailani. In June-July 1941, British forces together with the Free French defeated the Vichy forces, who were given the choice of leaving for France or joining General De Gaulle's forces. The majority joined De Gaulle's Free French.

As for Iraq, the mentioned serious development came in April/May 1941, when Al-Kailani, a pro-Axis politician, seized power in Iraq with the support of the army headed by nationalist elements, forcing the pro-British regent Abdel-Ilah to leave the country. German propaganda and Arab nationalists accused the British of conspiring to get rid of King Ghazi I (1933–1939: killed in a car accident), who polarized national anti-British sentiments, and appointing his uncle as regent until the heir to the throne, King Faisal II, would be old enough to rule. By deciding upon prompt military intervention against the Kailani government (May 1941), the British launched a period called by historians the second British occupation of the country.

Combat operations in the Balkans (operation "Marita"), particularly the seizure of Crete (May-June 1941), coupled with the mentioned Vichy menace in Syria and the Lebanon, and the Iraqi coup, constituted a valuable opportunity for the Germans to take over the entire Middle East. Somewhat earlier, in spite of many unfavorable circumstances, the Middle East seemed secure until Italy joined the war in June 1940 on the side of Germany. On 10 June 1941, Italy declared war on Great Britain and France, which meant the extension of military operations to the Mediterranean and Africa. At the same time, British forces were forced to wage battles against Italian forces in Libya and Eritrea. Egypt came within striking range of the Italian air force operating from Libya. On 18 September 1940, the Italians started their offensive against Egypt, advancing by 18 September to Sidi Barrani. The loss of Egypt would have given the enemy control over the Suez Canal, in addition to access to the routes towards the oil-rich Persian Gulf and strategically important Indian Ocean. However, Italian forces had to withdraw into Libya after losing the battle against the British at the end of the same year (Operation "Compass" under the command of Gen. O'Connor). Within only a few days, the Italian forces of Marshall Graziani were destroyed. The British continued their march on Libyan soil, controlling Bardia (5 January 1941), fortified Tobruk (23 January) and Benghazi (6 February).

Heavy losses induced Mussolini to accept the German offer of participation in the defense of Tripolitania on 10 February, and within a few days, the first formations of what was later called the Deutsche Afrika Korps (DAK), under the command of Gen. Erwin Rommel, landed in Libyan Tripoli.

In the meantime, the British became involved in the defense of Greece, which was attacked by Italy on 28 October 1940, while British forces were engaged in battles waged in Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea. Gen. Rommel took advantage of the occasion by attacking weakened British positions, successively conquering Benghazi (4 April 1941), Derna (7 April), Bardia (9 April), and the important port of Tobruk (20 June). The fall of Tobruk was for the Allies a heavy loss, which opened the way for the enemy to Alexandria. On 30 June, Axis forces reached Alamein. The main battle of Alamein was decided by the British counter-offensive initiated on 23 October 1942 under the command of Field Marshall Montgomery, which proved to be a surprise for Axis forces and was successful in breaking the German-Italian front (4–5 November). Consequently, the battle of Alamein ended with a long retreat by Rommel's forces, chased by the VIII Army of Montgomery. The battle marked the end of the Axis presence in North Africa.

At the same time, the American-British landing on the North African shore (November 1942) named Operation "Torch" completed the removal of both the Vichy presence and the remnants of the Axis presence in Libya. In brief, the battle of Alamein was a major victory in the fight for the Middle East. Seven months later, the entire North Africa was cleared of Axis forces. The British-American Middle East Supply Center then became the coordinating body of Allied war efforts in that region.

As to the impact of events on the Egyptian scene, it should be mentioned that as the German-Italian forces hastened their march in the direction of Alexandria at the end of 1940, many Egyptians, in their hatred of the occupants, attached their hopes for liberation with the defeat of Great Britain in the Middle East and North Africa. Aziz Ali al-Misri, the Egyptian army chief of staff (later dismissed), was active in this respect, Colonel Anwar al-Sadat (later jailed) was organizing secret anti-British military actions, and the pro-Fascist para-military organization of *Jam'iat Misr al-Fatat* (*Green Shirts' Society*) were hoping for such change. Fearing for his own eventual position, king Farouk started to hesitate and distance himself from the British, by nominating Ali Maher, then unsympathetic to the British, as Prime Minister.

The balance of power on the Egyptian internal scene started to shift away from the British, who in this critical moment undertook a decisive action. On 4 February 1942, the British ambassador Sir Miles Lampson forced King Farouk, by means of British tanks surrounding the royal palace, to dismiss Maher and nominate the leader of the Wafd party, Mustafa al-Nahhas, as Prime Minister instead of him. The action shocked the country deeply and discredited the Wafd among the Egyptian population and army. At the time, this insult to the monarch

was viewed as tantamount to an insult of the Egyptian nation. General Muhammad Nagib submitted his resignation from the army, which was rejected by the monarch, while lieutenant Gamal Abdel Naser discussed ways to rid the country of the British with a group of young officers.

Equally important as Egypt for the Allies was Iran. Its strategic significance, also naturally in connection with its rich oil fields, became enhanced after Germany's attack on the USSR in June 1941, followed by serious German successes on the Soviet fronts. Besides, German industrial and trade interests were well established in that country at an earlier stage. Nazi propaganda was actively stirring up anti-Ally (particularly, anti-British) national sentiments, while Reza Shah and Iranian elites, including the army, were generally displaying a pro-German attitude.

With the accession of the USSR to the war on the side of Allies, there arose in August the question of Allied arms deliveries to the Soviet Union through Iran. Reza Shah's rejection of this idea, which had been supported by the US within the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, caused the Soviet Union and Great Britain to undertake action. On 25 August 1941, Iran was invaded by the Soviet Union from the north and Britain from the south, meeting insignificant resistance on the part of Iranian troops. King Reza abdicated, being replaced by his son Muhammad Reza. A treaty was signed between Iran, Britain and the Soviet Union to the effect of respecting the territorial integrity of Iran, its independence, defense against aggression, and the pledge of leaving the country by foreign forces within six months after the end of the war.

After the Second World War, during the Cold War period, the fight of Middle Eastern nations for independence from European domination became more forceful, especially in the aftermath of the Palestinian *An-Nakba*: The Catastrophe, connected with the establishment of the state of Israel in mid-May 1948 and the resulting defeat in the war. The ensuing unrest took the shape of mass movements as well as military coups d'état (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Yemen), successively removing British and French positions from the region¹⁰.

During the Cold War and the prevalence of its bi-polar world order, the Middle Eastern countries moved to different sides of the international fence, becoming client states of one of the superpowers. Military-political pacts became commonplace. In the Middle East, the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact covered Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. The organisation was renamed the Central Pact in 1959

10 Cf. Calvocoressi, Peter: *World Politics since 1945, VII edition*. Longman: London – New York 1996, (on the Middle East, particularly) Part III.

after the withdrawal of Iraq. This tendency was opposed in the Arab world by the Free Officers of Egypt, who seized power in July 1952, headed by Gamal Abdel Naser¹¹. Naser was one of the first advocates of a nationalist pan-Arab policy, with the Palestine question being one of the major issues on the Egyptian agenda. With the passage of time, a radical-populist, branded officially as socialist, socio-political programme evolved in Egypt, republican Iraq (after 1958), Libya (since Qadhafi's seizure of power in 1969) and Algeria (after independence in 1962). These governments all shared closeties with the USSR, which, coupled by the requirements of the fight against Israel, drew them into an anti-Western position. On the regional Middle Eastern level, it entailed the aggravation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The lack of victory in the wars against Israel and on the Palestinian front, in addition to the costs of armaments and the militarisation of the particular countries, together with the inadequacy of the theoretical and practical proposals of so-called Arab socialism, created the circumstances for the rise in activity and the domination of the political scene by existing rival ideological-political options, above all, by Islamic radicalism, often called fundamentalism.

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11 On Naser's ideas and life, cf. Nasser, Gamal A.: *Falsafat al-Thawra (The Philosophy of the Revolution)*, Cairo 1954; Nasser, Gamal A.: *Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution*. Government Publishing House: Cairo 1954; Al-Sadat, Anwar: *Revolt on the Nile*. London 1957; Nutting, Anthony: *Nasser*. London 1973; Kerr, Malcolm H.: *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals 1958–1970*. London 1971; Hofstadter D., (ed.): *Egypt and Nasser*, vol. I–III, New York 1973.

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