

DIVIDE ET IMPERA?: WESTERN ENGAGEMENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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ABSTRACT: One, important, reason driving recent instability in the Middle East is the influence of Western powers on local actors. In the first half of the 20th century the UK and France held significant sway; during the Cold War the US and USSR were dominant. After the Cold War, the US emerged as the sole, dominating foreign actor in the region. What commonality was shared among all penetrating powers? The strategy of divide and rule was widely deployed. Such a policy was introduced by various means: supporting segments of local populations (especially Arab Christians), polarising local communities against each other and through direct settler activities. This policy was efficient in the short-term but proved destabilising in the long-term. This work takes a critical, birds-eye view at the evolution of engagement in the region and offers insights into the problems produced by such approaches as well as the net benefactors and losers.

KEYWORDS: The Middle East, foreign policy, settlements, Arab Christians, radical Islamism, Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, al Qaeda

The British were playing all sides. They were dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Mullahs in Iran, but at the same time they were dealing with [their opponents] the army and the royal families.'

Amir Abbas Hoveyda'

INTRODUCTION

This article is focused on the strategy of divide and rule carried out by Western powers in the Middle East. I briefly introduce the basic principles of this strategy through practical examples and demonstrate the consequences of the strategy.

This article proceeds as follows: The introduction focuses on a reflection of the divide and rule strategy in contemporary interna-

tional relations theory, and schematically presents the basic principles of the divide and rule. I also focus on the powers which were (or still are) the main administrators of this strategy. In the next part I focus on the earliest exercise of divide and rule and also on the most extreme cases of it, namely the cases of settler movements that supplanted a certain ethnic or religious community in the midst of larger communities for the sake of producing allies in regions where such were very difficult to come across. In this section, particular attention is paid to the manner in which the UK, France and Israel have deployed settlers.² The second part deals with how exogenous powers extended their own influence through the support mechanisms offered to local allies. The example of French and Israeli support for Lebanese Christians is revealing and will be utilised below. The third part of this work proposes an appendage-theory that seeks to show how Islamists have been deployed as so-called 'pragmatic allies' to further divide and rule the Middle East. The conclusion of this work discusses how the divide and rule strategy has evolved, how it is currently deployed and whether there are viable alternatives to it.

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This work maintains that among the most enduring and essential (simultaneously, among the most controversial) strategies used by exogenous powers when engaging in the Middle East. By exploring this strategic orientation, it is possible to contribute explanations as to the wide assortment of conspiracy theories and general hostilities that accompany Middle Eastern interpretations of European and US approaches to the region.

THE STRATEGY OF DIVIDE AND RULE

The strategic-approach, 'divide and rule,' is ancient and may be found in full deployment in nearly every epoch and every generation of human history. Despite such endurance, a comprehensive understanding of divide and rule remains elusive in IR literature.

While some authors have addressed the strategy, such as Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, for instance³

Morgenthau just very briefly mentions that divide and rule 'has been resorted to by nations who tried to make or keep their compet-

itors weak by dividing them or keeping them divided'.⁴

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He writes that the most consistent and important policies of this kind in modern times are the policy of France with respect to Germany and the policy of the Soviet Union with respect to the rest of Europe. In my opinion there are also other good examples of divide and rule in various parts of the World, and this strategy is not just limited to “competitors”, but it could be also associated with colonial rule and analogic models of rule (mandates, protectorates, etc.). Not only France and the Soviet Union but also the British were very skilled in the divide and rule strategy – most notably in India, where they supported some local Indian rulers and thus splintered the population (often on the basis of categorizing the people as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs) to prevent an uprising against the British Raj (1858–1947). Divide and rule policies were also used by the British in Cyprus (separating Greeks and Turks), and, last but not least, in the region of the Middle East. The nations in the Middle East, India, etc. were not competitors in Morgenthau’s direct sense, but the unity of these nations was an obstacle for British interests and colonial rule.

The mechanisms of divide and conquer as used by the British and also by other great powers could be generally explained as follows: If great power or superpower X wants to increase its influence in a region or state (R) in which X has an interest (e. g. imperial, economical) but at the same time is obvious that R is usually more or less hostile to X, it will be much easier for X not to conquer all of region R and its communities militarily but to find other options or a combination thereof:

- creating allies by settler activities – e.g. French settlers in Algeria, Israeli settlers in Palestinian territories,
- finding some reliable allies (e.g. on the basis of their cultural closeness) whom power X will support politically, economically or often even militarily – e. g. the support of Lebanese Maronite Christians by Israel,
- finding some pragmatic and purely instrumental allies who will be (usually temporarily) supported (e. g. the support of Arab Islamists against Arab nationalist régimes during the Cold War or the US and Israeli support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt against Nasser) – e. g. for the purpose

of a proxy war.

The strategy of divide and rule is not merely about finding an ally in a hostile region to dominate it more easily. Usually this strategy leads to a weakening of the existing system of power structures in R and encourages the weakening and internal strife inside R. This strategy helps in pitting ethnic groups, tribes or religious groups against each other. In this situation power X advances its interest in region R much more easily and starts to dominate it.

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Many practical examples from the history of international relations (e.g. as the British policies in the Middle East after First World War) have shown that this strategy of superpower X is very effective, at least in the short-term. On the other hand, historical experience has also shown that these strategies tend, in the long-term, to bring about many “unexpected” problems. For example, power X may become extremely unpopular and hated in region R (with the exception of the proxy ally community, but some hatred of X is found even within it). In addition, insurgency and terrorism may spring up against power X. Lastly, X’s strategy may exacerbate ethno-religious tensions within region R, leading to a breakdown of the traditional bonds in the society. It may even result into civil conflicts and wars which could begin to endanger not only superpower X’s interests and position in R but all the neighbouring areas around R. Such conflicts could sometimes even become global threats.

As we mentioned above, not only Great Britain but also other Western imperial powers started to introduce *divide et impera* tactics in their regions of interest and colonies. Not so well known is the example of the German and later the Belgian policies in Burundi, where Germany and Belgium were supporting the Tutsis against the Hutus, thus participating in establishing the roots of the future genocide. The divide and rule strategy was also used in the Middle East by France, the USA and Israel. In this paper we will focus on selected cases connected with the divide and rule policy of these Western powers in the Middle East.⁵

THE EARLIEST EXERCISE OF DIVIDE AND RULE IN THE
MIDDLE EAST BY THE WEST AND THE USE OF SETTLERS AS
A TOOL OF THE DIVIDE AND RULE POLICY

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Before influence of imperial powers such as France and Great Britain started and before they introduced their versions of “divide and rule” strategy in the Middle East, there was quite long tradition of use of similar approaches in this region during history. It is not purpose of this article to analyze the politics in the Middle East in ancient times but at least it should be mentioned, that “divide and rule” strategy was used in this region since ancient times by various empires including the period of spread of Islam and first Caliphs and later by the Ottoman Empire. Initially the “divide and rule” was used especially for conquering vast territories and later for preserving their unity. Western powers, especially France and Great Britain, started to be more interested in increasing their influence in the Middle East since the end of the 18th century, when a still significant part of the Middle East was under Ottoman rule. In this period of time, the influence and ambitions of European powers (again, especially those of Great Britain and France) were growing, and on the other side the might of the Ottoman Empire was fading. One of the instruments for increasing the Western imperial influence was the use of segments of the local population (usually non-Muslim) for implementing and strengthening the Western imperial interests and influence. The direct involvement of the Western powers can be said to have truly begun with Napoleon’s military campaign in Egypt in 1798–1801. But even earlier, France started to represent itself as a protector of the Christian communities in the Ottoman Empire.⁶ The strongest Christian communities still live mainly on the territories of contemporary Egypt, Lebanon and Syria. In Algeria France started to support some local communities (e.g. the Jews of Algeria) but also developed a very active settler policy and moved significant numbers⁷ of its inhabitants there, thus strengthening its divide and rule strategy. Settlers were sometimes used as a buffer between the colonial authorities and the native population under colonial rule.

The settler strategy – the creation of “new facts on the ground” – was implemented (as part of the divide and rule tactics) by many powers during different periods of history: by Britain (e.g. in Ireland, India, and South Africa), by the Dutch (South Africa), by Israel (the Palestinian territories, especially the West Bank) or, with much success, by China (in Tibet and Uighur East Turkestan, Xinjiang).

The British are considered to be the pioneers of settler policy

in modern times.⁸ Their tactics of divide and rule was very successfully implemented in Ireland at the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the English forcibly removed the traditional Catholic clans from the north of Ireland, moved English and Scottish Protestants into the same territory, and founded the Plantation of Ulster. Protestant settlers were given special privileges (such as special access to land and lower rents), which distinguished them from the native Catholics. This kind of segregation started to also be typical for more modern settler activities. We can see the results of the English settler policy in Ireland throughout the centuries: the hatred and violence (which also worsened the bad economic situation in Ireland) finally led to the withdrawal of the English from the larger territory of the country in 1922. The English stayed in most of Ulster (Northern Ireland), but the conflict there escalated during the twentieth century into the Troubles (1968–1998), and even after the peace process the situation in Northern Ireland could be dangerously destabilized.

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The British settler activities were an inspiration for some of the other powers. In the Middle East, the most notable case of this was that of the State of Israel after the 1967 Six Day War. It could look a bit like a paradox, but before the creation of Israel, the Zionists themselves were partially an instrument of the British divide and rule strategy in the Middle East. The Balfour Declaration (1917) promise to “give Zionist Jews the Jewish Homeland in Palestine” was not just an altruistic act but it was motivated also by a desire to maintain British dominance in the Middle East. The first British Military Governor in Jerusalem Sir Ronald Storrs very openly stated the following: “The Zionist will form for England a little loyal Jewish Ulster in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism.”⁹ Two decades later most of the Zionists turned against the British because of the contradictory pragmatic British policies in the Middle East. Some Zionist groups, most notably the Irgun and Lehi, even started to fight against the British and killed not just a score of British troopers but also some high-ranking British politicians (the assassination of Lord Moyne, the attempt to kill Sir Harold MacMichael, etc.).

The Israelis started their settlement policy after conquering the Arab territories in 1967.¹⁰ Since the beginning, the settlement activity was openly supported by the Israeli governments. During the reign of the leftist governments (1967–1977) it was especially in

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strategic parts of the West Bank. During the reign of the rightist governments (after 1977) the settler activity was encouraged even more strongly, as the governments even supported the religious fundamentalists from the messianic movement *Gush Emunim* ("The Block of the Faithful"). The Israeli governments created, through the settler policy, many "new facts on the ground", made the settlers a very strong pressure group segregated from the Palestinians, and made the settlements very difficult to remove (especially those in the West Bank). But the growth of the Palestinian population in the Territories was much higher than the increase of the settlers. The settlements created great tension between the native Palestinian population and the Israelis. Some settlers, especially religious ones, started to be extremely aggressive. As a reaction, Palestinian vindications were often aimed not only against settlers but also against non-settler Israelis directly in the Israeli territory, which often resulted in bloodshed. On the other hand when some Israeli government evacuated some settlements (like in the case of the evacuation of the settlements in the Gaza Strip in 2005) or just attempted to evacuate them, it caused grave anger in the settler community. It is not a coincidence that Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a settlement supporter and that some settler groups today are strongly opposed to the Israeli government and political system.¹¹

The French settler strategy in Algeria also partially turned against the metropolis during the Algerian War (1954-62) and advanced dangerously close to leading to a civil war and a breakdown of democratic institutions.¹² The organization called *Organisation de l'armée secrète* (OAS) started to use armed struggle and terror in an attempt to prevent Algeria's independence. There were also, like in Israel, OAS attempts to kill the highest politicians (such as the assassination plot against De Gaulle) but these were unsuccessful. The majority of the French were finally evacuated from Algeria and OAS was crushed by French authorities. In contrast, the population of Israeli settlers is still growing, is still supported by the state, and remains a very important pressure group in Israeli politics.¹³

Nowadays the danger of the settler policy lies not only in breaching international law and alienating the native population but in the fact that the policy could cause serious troubles for the metropolis (the native land of the settlers). Historical experience proved that only enormous violence – which is unacceptable for contemporary

Western societies – could make the settler policy successful. Thus the USA was able to crush the Native Americans in the 19th century and settle America in a way which would be totally unacceptable today. Thus China – without a democratic political system and without public control and criticism of its government's steps – was able to succeed in its settler colonization of Tibet and Uighur East Turkestan. Thus the Chinese were able to create with their settler policy such “facts on the ground” and such a status quo that it is, in fact, practically impossible now to restore the former situation and the original ties.

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FAVORITE ALLY: LEBANESE CHRISTIANS

Arab Christians were for centuries culturally closer to Europe than the majority of the Muslim population. So it was only logical that since the age of the Crusades, and later in the age of European imperialism in the Middle East, the Arab Christians sought for Western (e. g. Papal or French) protection and became natural ally and also a good instrument of the Western imperial policies. This relationship remained unaffected by the fact that the ethnicity of the Middle Eastern Christians is predominantly Arab, but with some exceptions.¹⁴

The relationship between Christians and Muslims in the Middle East was not always perfect and in various regions there were periods of peaceful coexistence as well as times of violence and oppression (usually from the Muslim majority).¹⁵ Especially in the territory of contemporary Lebanon, there were severe conflicts between Muslim, Christian, Druze and other communities, and so the Lebanese Christians (especially the Maronites, the Eastern Christian group who always accepted the rule of the Pope) were usually the most sympathetic to the increasing French influence in region and were seeking French protection. The finest hour of the Maronite-French connection came after the end of World War One in the Middle East, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated and the French forces and administration started to rule the territory of the so-called Greater Lebanon, which was divided from the territory of the French Mandate of Syria. Many non-Christian Arab communities were incorporated into this territory, and a mandate territory with extreme religious diversity was created. The Lebanese

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political system was developed on confessional divisions, making sectarianism a key element of Lebanese political life. In this system, with French backing, the Maronites started to dominate Lebanese politics. Carl Brown assumes that as a result, finally 'most of the Lebanese Muslims identified with neighboring Muslim Arabs (some of them favored absorption into a greater Syria or some form of pan-Arab state) whereas Christians (fearing that they would become an insignificant minority in any larger Arab polity) have sought a Lebanon more attached to France and the West'.¹⁶

France finally accepted the Lebanese independence in 1943 but the configuration of the political system remained one based on sectarianism and a divergence of communities. Even though after World War Two the economic situation of Lebanon was developing very progressively, the political situation in the country and the relationship between the communities remained fragile and unstable. Destabilization came with the emergence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after 1948. The influx of Palestinian refugees (mostly Sunni Muslim) into Lebanon and the foreign politics of Israel significantly influenced the future of Lebanon and its conflicts.¹⁷

After 1945, Zionist and, later, Israeli politicians were desperately looking for an ally in the region, which was very hostile towards the newborn State of Israel. The Christians, especially the Maronites in neighbouring Lebanon, were in an analogical situation as the Zionists, so there were attempts at a cooperation between the two communities.¹⁸

One of the most explicit examples of direct cooperation between Israel and Lebanese Christians was the Israeli support for the splinter-faction of the Lebanese army called the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Israel supplied the Christian-led SLA with armaments and charged it with control of the buffer zone near the Israeli frontier to prevent Palestinian commandos from infiltrating into Israel.¹⁹ The results of the Israeli-SLA cooperation were very controversial as it partially enforced the dire humanitarian situation in Southern Lebanon and helped to create Hezbollah,²⁰ and finally the SLA sustained heavy losses and collapsed. After the Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon, the remaining members of the SLA were withdrawn to Israel because many of them were *in absentia* condemned by Hezbollah to death.²¹

Another group of allies to Israel in Lebanon were the Maronite

Christians, especially the Maronite Phalange quasi-fascist party led by the powerful Jumayyil family. Israel supported the Phalangists in their fight against the Palestinians in Lebanon. In 1982, following Israel's invasion, Bashir Jumayyil (openly supported by Israel) was elected President, but soon after the election, he was assassinated. It directly led to revenge against the Palestinians (who were paradoxically not responsible for the assassination) and to the infamous Sabra and Shatila massacre. The Israeli influence and the support for the Phalangists not only destabilized the situation in Lebanon but also caused an earthquake in Israeli politics, where the anti-occupation peace movement and demonstrations were boosted. The indirect participation of the Israeli Army in the Phalangist massacres also immensely harmed the image of Israel in the world and helped to raise anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism in many countries.

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The results of the Israeli divide and rule policies in Lebanon proved to be very short-sighted and harmful. Before the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, there was an extreme decrease in Israel's popularity even within formerly allied communities, and the tensions after the withdrawal led to the bloody Israeli-Lebanese conflict in summer 2006.

PRAGMATIC ALLIES: RADICAL ISLAMISTS

The most controversial example of divide and rule policy in the Middle East proved to be the pragmatic (and usually temporary) alliances of the Western powers with radical Islamist movements. There were various reasons for this (from a contemporary point of view, very paradoxical) cooperation. Contrary to the examples mentioned above (those of the majority of settlers and native allies), until today, many radical Islamist movements transformed into dangerous movements aimed against the West and also against the moderate majority of Muslims. The most dangerous radical Islamist network, Al-Qaeda, is considered to be a global threat. But it was not so long ago (in the eighties) that US foreign policy supported (through the Pakistani intelligence service ISI) Islamist militants in Afghanistan (*mujahideens*), many of whom later formed Al-Qaeda.²² Another purpose of this policy was to find proxy allies in the Cold War against the Soviet Union. But the mujahideens served also as an instrument of the divide and rule policy in the fractionalized

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Afghan society. The US cooperation with the Afghan mujahideens during the last years of the Cold War is probably the most known example of Western support for radical Islamists. But there were examples before and after Afghanistan. Since the emergence of modern Islamism in the second half of the 19th century, there were many Western attempts to cooperate with Islamist radicals and to strengthen the Western interest in the Middle East with their help. The most notable examples are:

- The British attempts to isolate Russia with pan-Islamism spread through the ring of Islamic regions and nations on the southern border of Russia in the time of “The Great Game”.²⁸¹ Later, in the time of the Cold War, there was a similar US attempt to create an Islamic bloc of nations and movements opposed to the spread of communism and the Soviet expansion along its southern frontier.²⁸²
- The British support for the Wahhabist²⁸³ House of Saud to secretly weaken the Arab nationalists – contrary to the British policy during World War One, when the British government supported Arab nationalists against the Ottoman Empire. Generally, during World War One, the British negotiated simultaneous and contradictory agreements in order to further their strategic interests – the most notable of these agreements was the secret Sykes-Picot agreement from 1916.²⁸⁴
- The US support for the House of Saud and later (since 1932) their support for Saudi Arabia partly because of the strategic oil resources in the Saudi territory and partly because of *divide et impera*; this went along with the US support for conservative regimes in the Arab World against Arab nationalist regimes.²⁸⁵
- The *Divide and impera* elements that we can find in the Reagan administration’s ties with Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic Republic during the Iran-Iraqi war, illuminated by the Iran Contra Affair.²⁸⁶ At the same time the US was supporting Saddam Hussein’s Iraq against Iran.
- The US and Israeli support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria to weaken the (partially pro-Soviet) Arab nationalists, especially Nasser and Assad.²⁸⁷
- The Israeli support for the Palestinian Islamists (the forerun-

ners of Hamas) to weaken the Palestinian nationalists within the PLO, especially Fatah (Higgins, 2009).

But it was not simply “Islam as a religion” what was supported by Western powers. Islam itself has many forms, but mainstream Islam is, with some exceptions, a more or less peaceful religion like contemporary Judaism or Christianity. But Western powers did not support Islam or Muslims in general. Instead, they started to support the most fundamentalist streams of politicized Islam (radical Islamism). It was probably some kind of naiveté or ignorance together with a lack of understanding of the development of Islam and the Middle East (and also a low level of scientific knowledge about the Middle East) that caused such a strategic miscalculation.³⁰ Generally the Western world (“Western” in the context of the Cold war) had very little in common with Islamic radicals. They were usually strongly anti-Imperialist, anti-Liberal, and sometimes anti-Semitic, and some of them (in the time of Second World War) were even pro-Nazi. Usually there was only one important commonality between the Western world and radical Islamists: the enemy – secular (usually Arab) nationalism and communism. The two were interconnected: the nationalism was often made up of different varieties of Arab-nationalism (e.g. pan-Arabism, Baathism) which, in the time of the Cold War, flirted or directly cooperated with the Soviet Union and the Soviet Bloc. As Dreyfuss says, the West started to support radical Islamists “sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly” with funding, weapons supplying, training, etc.³¹

To implement even more the policy of divide and rule (and to confuse even more the situation in the Middle East), the USA and some Western states started to support those nationalist politicians who were opposed to the Islamists – most notably Anwar Sadat and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Saddam Hussein in Iraq, Yasser Arafat in Palestine, and Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan. Most of them were more or less secular (although formally Muslims), and some of them were cruel dictators (especially Saddam Hussein) or leaders responsible for terrorism (Yasser Arafat). One of the most extreme examples of the divide and rule strategy was the U.S. support for both sides of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), in which Iran (led by the Islamist Ayatollah Khomeini) and Iraq (led by the Nationalist Saddam Hussein) were fighting each other in one of the bloodiest wars in the history of the Middle East (Dreyfuss, 2006: 292–302).

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Of course, radical Islamism itself is not a Western creation – the ideology of Islamism started to be formed in the second half of the nineteenth century, and it reacted, among other things, against Western imperialism – but some Western states are at least partly responsible for the emergence and spread of the violence of radical Islamists, both regionally and globally, due to their controversial divide and rule policies.

CONCLUSION

In this article we tried to focus on the main aspects of the divide and rule strategy in the Middle East. Some of them are not widely known because they contradict the justification of the current Western policies in the Middle East – e.g. it would be much more difficult for the previous US government to explain “War on Terror” in the light of the US support for radical Islamists in Afghanistan and for Saddam Hussein in the eighties. It would also be more difficult for Israel to justify some of its disproportional military actions against Palestinians if it was more well known that Israel supported the precursors of Hamas. This support was aimed against the PLO and Fatah, who are now “the better side of the Palestinians” since the beginning of the Peace Process in the nineties.

In this paper I attempted to analyze the types and the most representative examples of the Western divide and rule strategy and draw some general mechanisms and conclusions. On the other side there is not enough space to analyze other examples of divide and rule – from the Soviet Union, Russia, China, India, powerful Muslim states and other countries. But the general conclusions are sufficient enough for us to understand the logic and mechanisms of *divide et impera* in the Middle East. There are three main types of *divide et impera* in the Middle East:

1. an ally which is created artificially – settlers (e.g. the Israelis in Palestine, the French in Algeria, etc.),
2. a reliable local ally (e.g. Lebanese Christians),
3. a pragmatic ally (e.g. radical Islamists):
 - typical *divide et impera* (Israel and the USA in their approach to Hamas and Fatah since 2006 – see below),
 - *divide et impera* combined with other strategies (making proxy allies) – e.g. the US support for the mujahideens in

Afghanistan during the Cold War.

Of course it is not the purpose of this paper to say that because of the policies of divide and rule Western powers are responsible for all the evil and worsening of conditions in the region of the Middle East and in all the territories of their former colonies or regions of interest. But on the other side it is important to show that the influence of the Western powers affected the development of many Middle Eastern countries very significantly and that it helped to lay the foundations of the processes and conflicts which are “returning like a boomerang” today in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Lebanon, etc. Thus this article may help to answer the question ‘Why is the contemporary situation in the Middle East often almost unsolvable and where did the logic behind some communities and groups “hating the West” come from?’

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When I was looking for sources for this paper, I was not so surprised that it was more difficult to find reliable sources than is usually the case. I understand when a similar situation arises with “reliable” sources for various conspiracy theories (e.g. those connected with 9/11). But this is definitely a different case. It is a very difficult task to stay independent and non-biased in some Middle Eastern issues and I am afraid that some authors (even renowned ones) are using some kind of self-censorship when they write about these issues. On the other side those authors who are more courageous – e.g. the Israeli “New Historians”³² or Robert Dreyfuss – deserve praise for their research. I am convinced that not blurring the history but honesty, frankness and attempts to seek the truth could finally help improve the whole situation in the Middle East, even if it will be often very awkward for the West. During the many decades since World War Two, the Westerners were looked at with suspicion by the native Middle East population. Partially it is because of the divide and rule policies, double standards, hypocrisy and pragmatism in the Western approach to this region. For example, many people in contemporary Iraq – even if most of them probably do not read scientific texts about international relations – know about the ties between Saddam Hussein’s regime and the USA during the Iran-Iraqi War and they know the US policies since 2003 very well.

But an analytic reflection of the recent history of Western Middle East diplomacy is not enough. We have to ask if the divide and rule strategies (and the affiliated controversial policies) are already

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a question of history. The answer is negative. At least the USA and Israel are still using them, sometimes even combining their respective policies. An example of this is the case of Palestine, especially during the recent US administration: although Hamas won in the democratic elections in 2006 (and “spreading of democracy” was one of the US priorities in the Middle East), both the USA and Israel (and some other Western states) rejected the result of the elections and continued in their unilateral support for Fatah (which lost the elections), even supplying it with weapons, thus strengthening the tension in Palestinian society and fuelling internal violent conflicts.³³

We have a different case in contemporary Iraq, where the US administration turned from its previous support of the Saddam Hussein-led Sunni-minority establishment during the Iran-Iraqi war in the eighties to support the majority Shia population. The Shias were harshly oppressed by Hussein’s regime but even after the first US-led war against Saddam Hussein (1990–1991), the US left him in power and allowed Hussein’s bloody crushing of the Shia uprising against him. After the 2003 war and the defeat of Saddam Hussein, the Sunni establishment was almost completely disbanded and replaced by the Shias, who are now overwhelmingly winning in the elections. The US support of the Shia establishment in contemporary Iraq also means US cooperation with the “good allies” of Iran (a country which is considered to be a “villain” in the context of US politics) and with some fundamentalist Islamist clerics such as the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, although the US fights other clerics such as Muqtada al-Sadr. There are significant differences between the two but the inconsistency of the US policy is highly visible, and the danger of encouraging internal striving in the communities is high.

What could be done to improve the current situation? First, the Western (especially because of the influence of the US) policies in the Middle East need to be more consistent. A continuation of the contradictory and biased policies (for example in connection with events of “Arab Spring”) will only further pit the Middle Eastern nations against each other and lead to even more hatred towards the West and Western interests and values, thus giving arguments to fundamentalists and terrorist networks. So the continuation of the Western divide and rule policy is not a solution to the problem

of creating a secure future in the Middle East and decreasing the danger to regional and global security.

The solution lies in an impartial and unbiased policy in which the West and Western powers would play the role of a third party and sometimes the role of a fair mediator. Hand in hand with this offered strategy goes a greater willingness of responsible Western politicians to listen to analysts and independent think-tanks, which will be preferred over an ideological approach to the Middle Eastern issues (e.g. neo-conservatism).

Of course the offered solution is only “an ideal” which could not be completely reached. This strategy could also probably weaken the Western influence in the whole region and bring more self-confidence to the local nations. But it may also lead to better stability, to a decrease of the level of internal struggles, and in many cases to more just solutions to local conflicts. It may also happen that the short-sighted benefits of the divide and rule policies could be swapped for a much longer stability of the whole Middle Eastern region. And that, in my opinion, is the most valuable merit of this policy change, which overpowers the other aspects.

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NOTES TO PAGES

- 1 Prime Minister of Iran in 1965–1977, executed by the Khomeini regime in 1979. Quoted from Dreyfuss, 2006: 112.
- 2 In context of this article is Israel also considered as a Western power although from the ethnographical point of view significant part of its population is of Middle Eastern origin (Sephardi/Oriental Jews, Israeli Arabs).
- 3 Machiavelli mentions the divide and rule strategy in, for example, his work *The Art of War*: ‘A Captain ought, among all the other actions of

his, endeavor with every art to divide the forces of the enemy, either by making him suspicious of his men in whom he trusted, or by giving him cause that he has to separate his forces, and, because of this, become weaker.' – Book VI of *The Art of War* (<http://www.constitution.org/mac/artofwar6.htm>).

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- 4 Hans Joachim Morgenthau. (1993) *Politics among Nations – The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 194.
- 5 Under the term “the Middle East”, we understand a wider interpretation of this term – the so-called “Greater Middle East” from Maghreb to Pakistan.
- 6 Bruce Masters. (2001) *Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Arab World – The Roots of Sectarianism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 152.
- 7 In Algeria there was a massive increase in the number of European settlers in the second half of the 19th century: from 283,000, or 10.4 percent of the total population, in 1866 to 723,000, or 20 percent of the total population, in 1896. (Lustick, 1985: 57).
- 8 Conn Hallinan. (2004) Divide and Conquer as Imperial Rules. *Foreign Policy in Focus*, 12/06/2004. Available at: <http://www.fpif.org/pdf/gac/0407divide.pdf>.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 The most problematic from the perspective of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict started to be the former territories of the British Mandate in Palestine inhabited by Palestinian Arabs: the West Bank (1948–1967, under Jordanian control) and the Gaza Strip (1948–1967, under Egyptian control). The Sinai Peninsula (part of Egypt until 1967) and Golan Heights (part of Syria until 1967) were inhabited more sparsely, and their inhabitants did not consider themselves to be Palestinians. Israel started settlement activities in all of its occupied territories.
- 11 For example, some members of the banned Kach party and some rabbis from the West Bank Settlements – most notably Rabbi Shalom Dov Wolpo and radical activist Baruch Marzel. See Susser, Leslie. (2005) The hard-line opponents of disengagement. *Jerusalem Report*, 21. 3. 2005; JTA – The Global News Service of the Jewish People (2008) “Rabbi wants Olmert hanged”, 3. 1. 2008.
- 12 Ian Lustick. (1985) *State-Building Failure in British Ireland and French Algeria*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies of University of California, p. 84.
- 13 Yehezkel Lein and Eyal Weizman (2002) *Land Grab: Israel’s Settlement Policy in the West Bank*. Jerusalem: B’ Tselem.
- 14 It is interesting that some Middle Eastern Christians do not consider themselves to be Arabs, but it is often very difficult to prove what exactly

- their ethnicity is, and they make this statement mainly for cultural or ideological reasons.
- 15 Christian and Jewish communities in the Muslim world had the special (subordinated) status of *dhimmis*.
 - 16 Carl L. Brown (ed.) (2006) *Diplomacy in the Middle East*. London: I. B. Tauris, p. 281.
 - 17 Formerly many South Lebanese Shiites were against the Palestinians, but as a result of Israeli policies, many of them started to sympathize with the Palestinians and developed an extreme hatred of Israel. See footnote 17.
 - 18 Jan Fingerland. (2006) Anatomie jednoho spojení. *Lidové noviny*, 26. 8. 2006.
 - 19 The SLA was originally called the Free Lebanon Army. The command of the SLA was Christian but many of its members were Shi'a Muslims. South Lebanon is inhabited mainly by Shi'a Muslims, and a lot of them were against the Palestinian presence in Southern Lebanon because of the Palestinian destabilization of the tense political situation in close range to the Israeli border. See also Tessler, 1994: 495.
 - 20 As Israeli general and politician Ehud Barak commented in July 2006: 'When we entered Lebanon ... there was no Hezbollah. We were accepted with perfumed rice and flowers by the Shia in the south. It was our presence that created Hezbollah.' See Augustus Richard Norton (2007) *Hezbollah*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, p. 33.
 - 21 Avraham Sela. (2002) *The Continuum Political Encyclopaedia of the Middle East*. New York, London: Continuum, p. 778.
 - 22 *Ibid*, p. 26–29.
 - 23 "The Great Game" is a term used for the strategic rivalry between Great Britain and Russia for dominance in the region of Central Asia (approx. 1813–1907). See also Hopkirk, 1992.
 - 24 Robert Dreyfuss. (2006) *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam*. New York: Owl Books – Henry Holt and Company, p. 79.
 - 25 Wahhabism is an ultra-conservative interpretation of the Islamic faith, and it is the state religion in Saudi Arabia. Historically, Wahhabism was seen by many Muslims and Arabs as extremism, and many of the contemporary radical Islamists have a Wahhabist education (most notably the Saudi members of Al-Qaeda who committed the 9/11 attacks). See also Allen, Charles (2006) *God's Terrorists – The Wahhabi Cult and the Hidden Roots of Modern Jihad*. London: Abacus.
 - 26 The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) itself was a major instrument of the divide and rule policy in the Middle East. It defined zones of British and French interests in the Middle East (with respect to Russia). It divided

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- the Middle East without regard to the local political interests and population. See also David Fromkin (2001), *A Peace to End all Peace*. New York: Owl Books – Henry Holt and Company, p. 188–199.
- 27 See also Craig Unger (2007) *House of Bush House of Saud: The Secret Relationship between the World's Two Most Powerful Dynasties*. London: Gibson Square Books.
- 28 The Iran Contra affair was a political scandal involving the Reagan administration, and it was revealed in November 1986. It was disclosed that senior US figures agreed to sell arms to Iran (a country under an arms embargo). The purpose of the sale was to secure the release of US hostages and to fund anti-communist contras in Nicaragua. See Hiro, 2005, p. 255.
- 29 Dreyfuss 2006, p. 205–213.
- 30 Dreyfuss writes that: ‘The United States was just beginning to feel its way around the Middle East [in the beginning of the Cold War]. Few American officials had any experience in the region, U.S. universities were abysmally weak on Middle East studies, and despite its leading role in winning World War II the U.S., militarily had virtually no significant presence in either North Africa or the Persian Gulf. The fledgling CIA, which was gobbling up Ivy League graduates and virtually anyone who could speak Arabic, was inexperienced at best. From its founding in 1947 until at least the 1950s, the CIA took a backseat to British intelligence.’ Dreyfuss, 2006, p. 66–67.
- 31 *Ibid*, p. 1.
- 32 The “New Historians” are a generation of Israeli historians and political scientists (most notably Tom Segev, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim) who have challenged “traditional” Israeli historians and their interpretation of Israeli history.
- 33 International Institute for Strategic Studies (2007) “ Hamas coup in Gaza” *International Institute for Strategic Studies* 13 (5). Available at: <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-13---2007/volume-13-issue-5/hamas-coup-in-gaza>.