3.1: The Middle East and the Impact of Imperialism

Figure 1: NASA image of the Suez Canal, taken by MISR satellite on January 30, 2001.

Visual Aids for Chapter 3.

Imperialism Map: Kurdish Territory

Key Figure: Mossadegh

Key Figure: Ayatollah Khomeini

Images: Modernizing Leaders (Atatürk, Reza Shah and Amanullah Khan)

Key Figure: Gamal 'Abdul Nasser
THE MIDDLE EAST MAP OF TODAY

After the First World War, the contours of the major nation-states of today’s Middle East were delineated. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 solidified the political boundaries that later became the countries of the Middle East. At the same time a movement to recognize the sovereignty of colonized countries led to the creation of mandates based on the territories ruled by European countries, with the idea that they would develop toward independent status.

Many promises were left unfulfilled, however, as cultural communities such as the Kurds were left with no territory of their own. To this day, the Kurds are a “stateless nation”, with their territory spanning across 4 nation-states: Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran (see map, below). We cover the concept of a stateless nation and provide other examples in this chapter as part of a discussion on the national identities of the Middle East of today.

It is important to recognize that nation-states of the Middle East do not accurately represent the cultural identities of all their inhabitants. An effort was made by European countries to draw boundaries, and in fact to move substantial populations, in ways which would create nationstates which aligned with the national identities of their inhabitants. Former colonies, and countries retaining sovereignty, regrouped, gathered national together with a new sense of national unity, and joined the new global system of nation-state diplomacy. A major part of this effort was modernization: of industry, government and society. After World War I, many of these countries were indeed “reincarnated” as they began to rebuild after sustaining the impacts of war, famine and cultural hegemony. Economic collapse, war, forced migration and famine carved new contours into the region we now know as the Middle East, and created new cultural identities.

Map of Kurdish Territory by the CIA

*Figure 2*: Map of Kurdish territory by English: “The following maps were produced by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, unless otherwise indicated.” Public Domain. via Wikimedia Commons.