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ROUNDTABLE

Between Global and Regional Narratives

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The expansion of U.S. power across the Middle East has led to a convergence between what had previously been distinct historical fields. As U.S. foreign relations scholars turn their attention toward the Middle East and as Middle East historians address the implications of American imperialism, both groups have produced new research on the Cold War era. Since 2001, Rashid Khalidi, Juan R. I. Cole, and Ussama Makdisi have re-examined American foreign policy during the Cold War to understand the antecedents of current events.[1] With the evolution of U.S. diplomatic history into a more cosmopolitan international history, its practitioners have consulted sources in regional languages.[2] Recent scholarship has incorporated the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) into global narratives based on the themes of superpower rivalry, decolonization, and the struggle for development. While these global narratives help to counter regional exceptionalism, historians of the Cold War would also do well to read more Middle East historiography. The growing significance of American power for the MENA region calls for greater collaboration between the two fields on common interests that they have developed, at least so far, mostly in isolation.

Cold War and Middle East historians have made the very ideas of development and progress the subjects of historical research. Scholarship on these topics brings the two fields together, where Cold War historians' study of the global conflict between U.S. and Soviet templates for modernization meets the historiography on modernity in the Middle East. These literatures are complementary, and together they point the way toward a reinterpretation of the postwar Middle East and of 20th-century decolonization.

For Middle East specialists, scholarship on Cold War modernization can show how international development discourses shifted as Soviet and American power came to supplant the colonial authority of Britain and France. By scrutinizing ideas about development inherited from postwar intellectuals, it "puts the framework inside the frame" and analyzes development "as an artifact of the political and intellectual context of the Cold War."[3] Nils Gilman and Michael Latham have traced American modernization theory to Talcott Parsons, whose rereading of Max Weber gave rise to the belief that societies develop on the basis of "integrated and interdependent" changes that follow "a common, linear path."[4] Walt Rostow, author of *The Stages of Economic Growth, A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1960), made modernization theory into an anti-Marxist development formula and open-ended justification for U.S. intervention in the Third World.[5] As Gilman has argued, modernization theory sought to universalize American liberalism: more than "just a discourse about what was *happening* in the third world,"

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it was a "discourse about what the United States was *already* like."[6] David Ekbladh explains how cold warriors saw in the New Deal's Tennessee Valley Authority a rural development strategy that was as applicable to the Nile and Jordan as to the Indus and Mekong rivers.[7] In his account of the Cold War in the Third World, Odd Arne Westad writes that "Washington and Moscow needed to change the world in order to prove the universal applicability of their ideologies, and the elites of the newly independent states proved fertile ground for their competition."[8] Westad's global narrative presents the Cold War as a zero-sum battle between a pair of modernizing systems that sowed conflicts throughout the Third World. Although postcolonial elites are the focus of superpower rivalry in this narrative, Washington and Moscow feature as the main protagonists.

Despite new research in Middle Eastern languages, Cold War scholarship could benefit from greater regional historical context, which could help to identify continuities between the colonial and postcolonial eras. As my research tries to show, U.S. development policies in the Middle East drew not only from Americans' domestic experience but also from previous colonial and Ottoman reform efforts.[9] Studying the ideas of Middle Eastern modernizers illuminates what they shared with their American counterparts. Such a focus challenges the interpretation of modernization theory as simply an outgrowth of American liberalism and the antithesis of Soviet communism. Westad's account privileges the superpowers' ideologies above others, such as Pan-Arabism and Islamism, that had greater regional appeal. It homogenizes postcolonial nationalist movements as "nativist" in its global sweep and cannot fully account for the arrival of Islamists on the international scene during the 1970s.

Cold War historians who read regional historical scholarship about the late Ottoman and interwar Middle East will find help conceptualizing how regional elites appropriated Western discourses of modernity. Dror Ze'evi emphasizes colonialism's "unwitting invasion of epistemological space," which changed how elites understood their own identities and ambitions.[10] Likewise, Keith Watenpaugh examines how members of Aleppo's middle class defined themselves using ideas and practices "actively derived from what they believed to be the cultural, social, and ideological praxis of the contemporary metropolitan Western middle classes."[11] Scholarship on interwar anticolonialism and the competition among mass movements including nationalism, communism, and Islamism also provides a useful prologue to the Cold War in the Middle East because it reveals the inadequacy of a bipolar narrative.[12] Indeed, Carter Findley has rewritten late Ottoman and Turkish history by focusing as much on the Muslim bourgeoisie and Sufism as on Westernized intellectuals and secular forms of modernity.[13]

The superpowers' modernizing discourses influenced postwar debates over politics and development, even among Middle Eastern elites who rejected both U.S. and Soviet agendas. Timothy Mitchell provides an important example by portraying American growth liberalism as one in a succession of blueprints for modernizing Egypt.[14] Mounira Charrad explores the stakes for women of ideological conflicts in postcolonial North Africa.[15] Tareq Ismael has chronicled the violent intersection of the superpowers' Cold War with the clash between Iraqi Ba'thists and Communists.[16] For John Calvert, Sayyid Qutb's "definition of Islam as a corporate entity in competition with other ideologies reflected the sharply polarized categories of the Cold War."[17] Qutb conceived of Islam as an alternative modernizing system to those of the superpowers in the years following

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his sojourn in the United States (1948–50). Although he, too, created an image of "what the United States was *already* like," Qutb's vision differed markedly from Rostow's. Calvert places Qutb in a "Third World" context, indicating how Middle East historians, like Cold War scholars, are complicating accounts of metropole–periphery relations with new global narratives emphasizing exchanges among anticolonial elites.[18]

Between global and regional narratives lies the story of how conflicts over modernity shaped the postwar Middle East. Cold War scholarship helps to explain how the competition of anticolonialisms in the MENA region evolved into zero-sum, often violent struggles among modernizing systems that proponents pitched as indigenous alternatives to the superpowers' formulas. In postwar conflicts such as those between al-Nasir's regime and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and between Iraq's Baʿthists and Communists, ideological movements battled within societies for control over independent states. Recent literature on the MENA region emphasizes the diversity of anticolonial politics and the significance of Islamists and nationalists quite apart from whether Washington or Moscow succeeded in co-opting them. Only by paying careful attention to that regional history can scholars account for Islamist movements' rise to global prominence. In a larger sense, the convergence between the MENA and Cold War fields can deepen our understanding of how decolonization and superpower rivalry made systematic, societal development the idiom of 20th-century politics.

NOTES

[1]Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009); Juan R. I. Cole, *Engaging the Muslim World* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); and Ussama Makdisi, *Faith Misplaced: The Broken Promise of U.S.–Arab Relations, 1820–2001* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010).

[2]See Jon B. Alterman, *Egypt and American Foreign Assistance, 1952–1956: Hopes Dashed* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Nathan J. Citino, *From Arab Nationalism to OPEC: Eisenhower, King Saʿud, and the Making of U.S.–Saudi Relations*, 2nd ed. (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2010); Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Peter L. Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East: U.S. Policy toward the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1945–1961* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); and Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

[3]Nick Cullather, "Modernization Theory," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, ed. Michael J. Hogan and Thomas G. Paterson, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 214.

[4]Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4. See also Nils Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

[5]Walt Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth, A Non-Communist Manifesto* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

[6]Nils Gilman, "Modernization Theory, The Highest Stage of American Intellectual History," in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, ed. David C. Engerman et al. (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 57.

[7]David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

[8]Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

[9]Nathan J. Citino, "The Ottoman Legacy in Cold War Modernization," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 40 (2008): 579–97.

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[10]Dror Ze'evi, "Back to Napoleon? Thoughts on the Beginning of the Modern Era in the Middle East," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 19 (2004): 86.

[11]Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 8.

[12]See Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman**,** *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882–1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[13]Carter Vaughn Findley, *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity: A History, 1789–2007* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010).

[14]Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2002).

[15]Mounira Charrad, *States and Women's Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001).

[16]Tareq Y. Ismael, *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[17]John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 162.

[18]See Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); and the special issue "Toward a Global History of Modernization," *Diplomatic History* 33 (June 2009).

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