The Age of Nation-States

Introduction

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- The Second World War changed the structure of power in the world.

- The defeat of France, the financial burdens of the war, the emergence of the USA and USSR as super-powers, and a certain change in the climate of opinion were to lead, in the next two decades, to the end of British and French rule in the Arab countries.

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- In one place, Palestine, British withdrawal led to a defeat for the Arabs when the so-called state of 'Israel' was created.

- Elsewhere, the former rulers were replaced by regimes committed to the cluster of ideas which had gathered around that of nationalism:

  ➢ The development of national resources.

  ➢ Popular education.

  ➢ The emancipation of women.

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- They had to try to carry out their policies within societies in the process of rapid change:

➤ Populations were growing fast.

➤ Cities were expanding, in particular the capital cities.

➤ Societies were stratified in different ways.

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- and the new mass media the cinema, radio, television and cassette made possible a different kind of mobilization.

- The dominant idea of the 1950s and 1960s was that of Arab nationalism:

➤ Aspiring towards a close union of Arab countries and an independence from the super-powers

➤ And for social reforms in the direction of greater equality.

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- The defeat of Egypt and Syria and Jordan in the war of 1967 with 'Israel' and its allies halted the advance of this idea, and opened a period of disunity and increasing dependence on one of the superpowers, with the USA in the ascendant.

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- At other levels, contacts between the Arab people were growing closer: the media, both old and new, transmitted ideas and images from one Arab country to another; in some of the Arab countries, the exploitation of oil resources made possible rapid economic growth, and this attracted migrants from other countries.

The Second World War

The Second World War

- The Second World War came upon an Arab world which seemed to be firmly held within the British and French imperial systems.

- Nationalists might hope for a more favored position within them, but the military, economic and cultural ascendancy of England and France seemed unshakeable.

The Second World War

- Once more, however, war was a catalyst, bringing rapid changes in power and social life, and in the ideas and hopes of those affected by it.

- For the first few months the war was a northern European one, with French armies in Maghrib and British and French in the Arab East on the alert but not engaged.

- The situation changed in 1940, when France was defeated and withdrew from the war and Italy entered it.

The Second World War

- Italian armies threatened the British position in the western desert of Egypt, and in Ethiopia.

- In the early months of 1941 the German occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece aroused fears that Germany might move further eastwards, into Syria and Lebanon which were ruled by France, and into Iraq.

The Second World War

- In May 1941, Iraq was occupied by a British force and in June, Syria was invaded by British and imperial forces, together with a French force.

- From the middle of 1941, the war between European states became a world war.

- The German invasion of Russia opened the possibility that Germany might advance into the Middle East

The Second World War

- At the end of the year, the Japanese attack upon the American navy brought the United States into the war against Germany and Italy as well as Japan.

- The years 1942-1943 were the turning-point in the Arab East.

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- A German army had reinforced the Italians in Libya, and in July 1942, they advanced into Egypt and stood not far from Alexandria.

- Almost at the same time, Anglo-American armies landed in the Maghrib and rapidly occupied Morocco and Algeria.

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- The Germans fell back on their last stronghold in Tunisia, but finally abandoned it under attack from both east and west.

- The active war was now more or less ended so far as the Arab countries were concerned, and it might have seemed to end with a reassertion of British and French predominance.

The Second World War

- All the countries which had previously been under British control remained so, and British armies were in Libya, Syria, and Lebanon as well.

- French rule still continued formally in Syria and Lebanon and in Maghrib.

- In fact, however, the bases of British and French power had been shaken.

The Second World War

- The collapse of France in 1940 had weakened its position in the eyes of those it ruled; although it had emerged on the side of the victors, and with the formal status of a great-power, the problem of re-creating a stable national life and restoring a damaged economy would make it more difficult to hold on to an empire that reached from Morocco to Indo-China.

- In Britain, the efforts of the war had led to an economic crisis which could be overcome only gradually and with help from the United States.

The Second World War

- Among the Arab peoples, the events of the war aroused hopes of a life made new:

➢ The movements of armies

➢ The fears and expectations of occupation and liberation

➢ The prospects held out by competing services of propaganda

➢ The spectacle of Europe tearing itself to pieces.

➢ The declarations of high principles by the victorious Anglo-American alliance

➢ and the emergence of communist Russia as a world power

The Second World War

- All of this encouraged the belief that life might be different.

- Among many other changes, the circumstances of the war strengthened the idea of closer unity between the Arab countries.

- Cairo was the main center from which the British organized the struggle for the Middle East, and also its economic life; the need to conserve shipping led to the creation of the Middle East Supply Centre which went beyond regulating imports to encouraging changes in agriculture and industry which would make the Middle East more fully self-supporting.

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- The fact that Cairo was the center of military and economic decision-making gave an opportunity to the Egyptian government to take the initiative in creating closer links between Arab states.

- In early 1941, a British ultimatum to the king of Egypt compelled him to ask the Wafd Party to form a government.

The Second World War

- The authority which this gave the Wafd government enabled it to undertake discussions with other Arab states about the possibility of closer and more formal unity between them.

- Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Yemen all shared a strong conception of their national interest and all of them wished to create an effective support for the Arabs of Palestine.

The Second World War

- Two conferences held at Alexandria in 1944 and Cairo in 1945 resulted in the creation of the League of Arab States.

- This brought together seven states which had some freedom of action (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Trans-Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Yemen), along with a representative of the Palestinian Arabs.

The Second World War

- There was to be no interference in the sovereignty of each country, but it was hoped that they would act together in matters of common concern.

- When the United Nations was formed in 1945, the independent Arab states became members of it.