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# Revolution is No Longer a One State Affair

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## Recommended Citation

When the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) began its drive for Algerian independence, one of its first goals was to "internationalize the conflict".[1] It was a rather ironic objective considering the international system had provided the biggest impetus for revolution in Algeria in the first place. Revolutions are domestic in that they seek to alter the internal political, social, and economic structures of a territory and are preceded by discontent, agitation, and other internal factors. However from the 19th century and onward, it has become impossible for any state to exist in a vacuum.[2] A state is in constant contact or dialogue, if you will, with the international system, an entity constituting all actors, states, ideologies, and events outside of a state. International events influence events within a state which may in turn influence the international system. For that reason, the international system provides the single most important group of factors in the lead-up to a revolution: the context.

This paper will explore the significant role of the international system in creating the framework for revolution through the examination of three case studies: the Young Turk Revolution (1908), the Algerian Decolonization Movement (1954-1962), and the Iranian Revolution (1979). Three factors of revolution will be studied: direct foreign involvement in a state, changes to the international opportunity structures, and the polarization of the international sphere. Finally, some brief conclusions regarding the application of these structures to other Muslim Revolutions will be given.

The first and most evident incursion of the international system into a pre-revolutionary state is through direct intervention by foreigners in the state's domestic affairs. This involvement is sometimes military in nature, but more frequently takes the form of direct or indirect control of certain aspects of state sovereignty. Although external in nature, this interference provokes extensive internal backlash within each state, thereby pushing them closer to revolution. For example, the Ottoman Empire suffered a debt crisis due to excessive spending on infrastructure and modernization in the years just before its revolution and threatened to default on its European sponsored loans. Rather than allow the empire to default, France and Britain took over administration of the debt and supervision of economic affairs within the empire through the Public Debt Administration (1881). This move naturally caused considerable internal anti-European sentiment especially among the lower classes that bore the brunt of the

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[1] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origin of the Post-Cold War Era*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), Print, 74

[2] A state here will refer simply to the political organization of an area of land. It therefore can refer to modern nation-states like France, Egypt, and Turkey but also to political entities such as the Ottoman Empire. Additionally, although extensive scholarship has been devoted to studying the creation of the international system, its origins are beyond the scope and breadth of this paper.

high taxes and self-serving legislation imposed by the Europeans.[3] The Europeans had also been propping up the "sick man of Europe" for decades through various techniques including monetary aid and military might to preserve the balance of power in the international system. It was an effort that was becoming half-hearted and disjointed by the turn of the century, thereby destabilizing the empire further in preparation for revolutionary change.[4]

Algeria, as a French colony, on the other hand, was utterly consumed by the international system. The lack of sovereignty and citizenship rights and the domestication practices of the colonists stimulated internal dissent. Although Algeria was considered a "department" or province of France, the political, economic, and social privileges of that status were enjoyed chiefly by the *noir* (French colonists) and not the native population. The complete economic exploitation by France of Algeria, a periphery state in the world system, also fueled intense resentment and violent tendencies in the native population.[5] Economics was a central area of foreign intervention in Iran as well, albeit in a different way. Iran accepted some foreign aid under the Shahs, especially to finance modernization projects. However, the aid was frequently contingent on certain economic concessions, international alliances, employment of foreign advisors in economic and internal affairs, etc… This allowed foreign actors, especially the U.S. and Soviet Union (U.S.S.R), to steal parts of Iranian sovereignty to serve their own cold war and economic interests.[6] The strategic value of Iranian oil was also a considerable international concern. Britain and the Soviet Union used this rationale to justify Operation Countenance, the full occupation of Iran's oil fields, railways, and other strategic infrastructure and interference in the Iranian political affairs during World War II. Such concerns were also at play when Iran terminated oil agreements with the American-Iranian Oil Company in 1953 and attempted to nationalize the company. Cold War politics and protection of strategic oil and economic resources were considered appropriate justification for the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) coup d'état to overthrow Iranian Prime Minister Mossadeq and install the U.S.

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[3] Erin Glade, "The Constitutional Revolution in the Ottoman Empire," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 19 Feb 2010, Lecture.

[4] Erin Glade, "Introduction to the Modern Muslim World," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 25-29 Jan 2010, Lectures.

[5] Ibid.; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, *Trans. Richard Philcox, (New York, NY: Grove Press 2004), Print*, 1-21

[6] Erin Glade, "Revolution and Islam: Iran," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 21-30 April, Lectures.

aligned Mohammad-Rezā Shāh Pahlavi.  Mohammad-Rezā Shāh Pahlavi would rule Iran with considerable U.S. support and financing until Iran's revolution in 1979.[7]

In general foreign intervention in the Ottoman Empire, Algeria, and Iran siphoned the states' economic sovereignty into the hands of foreign governments and delegitimized domestic government officials as either the puppets of the international system or foreigners themselves.  These grievances, among many, made revolution an attractive option to many groups during these region's respective revolutions.

The smaller events and trends just mentioned are the embodiment and result of much larger scale transformations taking place in the international system.  Dramatic destabilization and change to power structures and actors such as those caused by World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) in many cases made the international system more conducive to the outbreak of revolutions in particular states.  For instance, the Young Turk revolution took place during a "wave" of revolutions during the early 20th century.  The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), a Young Turk revolutionary organization, most certainly drew inspiration and tactics from similar constitutional revolutions such as the Japanese Meiji Restoration, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the Iranian Revolution of 1906.[8]  For example, Sati al-Husri (2006), a civil servant in the Ottoman Empire, made the statement that, "from now on, the 'history of Japanese progress' will show us with great clarity what kind of course of action it is necessary for us to pursue for 'true progress,'" and that, "however backward a nation may remain in the matter of progress, if it shows a sufficient level of earnestness, … it will be able to make good the time that it has lost."[9]  Successful constitutional revolutions in other states encouraged the CUP to believe that political change was possible and perhaps even inevitable within their own state.

In contrast, Algeria's revolution emerged out of the rebuilding of the international system post-WWII.  The late 1940's were a period of reinvention and rebuilding of national and state identities, particularly in formerly German-occupied-territories such as France.   French political and economic hegemony

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[7] Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Updated Ed, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), Print, 105-131

[8] Nader Sohrabi, "Global Waves, Local Actors: What the Young Turks Knew about Other Revolutions and Why It Mattered," *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* 44, 1, 2002, 45-79, Web, 19 Feb 2010, *ArticleFirst*, JSTOR, Retrieved at Macalester College, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3879400>.

[9] Sati Al-Husri, "Another opinion on the Ottoman future: 'Japan and the Japanese', in *The Modern Middle East: A Sourcebook for History*, Ed. Camron Michael Amin, Benjamin C. Fortna, and Elizabeth Frierson. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006, Print, 438-440

and sense of legitimacy was weak over all its colonies, including Algeria during this time. Given the instability and anticipation of change that this post-WWII environment engendered, it was only natural that the FLN saw these conditions as a window of opportunity in which to execute their revolution. Additionally, Algeria also had the company of a wave of other decolonization movements in other colonies. These including its French-occupied neighbors Morocco and Tunisia, and the breakup of the European-controlled Mandate states in the Middle East into free nation-states following WWII. The Bandung Conference, a meeting of developing nations and colonies who wished to remain "unaligned" with either the United States or Soviet Union during the Cold War, presented additional openings. The FLN was able to develop friendships with countries less dependent on Cold War politics for survival, such as Egypt, at the conference.[10] Algeria took advantage of the international opportunities offered by the new international system, along with the fear and sympathies that existed in western nations still recovering from the calamity that was WWII, to launch its battle for domestic independence and international solidarity with its colonial compatriots.

Because the Iranian Revolution occurred about two decades after most other Muslim revolutions, it was much more dependent on the Cold War international structure and its reactionary movements than its predecessors. After 20 years of American or Soviet style development and the inherent secularization policies that came with each, many Muslim states were disillusioned with Western policies of development in general.[11] This triggered an Islamic resurgence in many states including Iran that incorporated narratives of a return to the "true way" and the reassertion of Islam in political life. This international system shift, along with an internal economic recession within Iran, provided an opportune environment for the Iranians to launch their revolution against the Cold War system, the corrupting influences of the west, and western modernization policies.[12] Some scholars have gone so far as to call the Iranian Revolution a

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[10] Erin Glade, "General Lectures: Broadly Spaced Content," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 25 Jan 2010-1 May 2010, Lectures; Connelly 3-37, 69-90

[11] Secularization and atheism was naturally canonized in the Marxist-Leninist policies of the U.S.S.R. However, secularization policies were not a part of American development policies until the release of W.W. Rostow's *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* in 1960. His manifesto was one of the first to equate traditional undeveloped societies with religion and place secularization as a "condition for takeoff" in economic development; Erin Glade, "Revolution on the International Stage," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 26 Mar 2010, Lecture;

[12] Erin Glade, "Course Wrap-Up," Revolution and the Emergence of the Modern Muslim World, Macalester College, 1600 Grand Avenue, St. Paul, MN, 3 May 2010, Lecture.

"clash of civilizations", between East and West, tradition and modernity, Islam and Christianity.

Yet this brings up an interesting, but little talked about phenomenon in the international system and revolution: the polarization and re-polarization of identities within the system. Normally, one thinks about identities as a pair, one representing a particular viewpoint and understanding of the world system and the second, an "other" identity with different and "foreign" viewpoints from the former. In everyday life, the identity and its "others" are in constant flux, "continually being constructed and reconstructed through interaction with one another."[13] However, at some times two identities may become "polarized" and perceive one another as antagonistic and a threat. As mentioned previously, this happened with the U.S. and U.S.S.R. identities during the cold war, creating a bipolar and tension-wrought international system that was partially conducive to revolution.[14] However there are two other identity system struggles that were strong factors in this paper's three case studies, and many other Muslim revolutions as well.

The first was the colonial identity system, a structure that Frantz Fanon (2004) described as a "world divided in two."[15] The worldview was centered on the division of individuals into colonist and native, oppressor and oppressed. Colonists saw the native "other" as backward, colored, evil heathens needing western tutelage. On the other hand, the native saw the colonist "other" as violent, oppressive, threatening to his/her religion and culture, etc…. This system waxed in the late 19th century with the mad colonial scramble for Africa by the European powers. The identity system waned during the World Wars when Allied and Axis identities and conflict were of more importance than colonial issues. Its salience, though, increased dramatically in the years following WWII, especially when decolonization was more prevalent. In the Algerian case and in the colonized world more generally, "otherhood" constituted threat and virulent hatred. If Frantz Fanon claims are accurate, violence was not only inevitable but necessary to destroy the polarized system.[16] Whatever the truth of his assertion, the polarization of colonial identity in the international system was vital to creating a physical and mental enemy which could be fought against.

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[13] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization* 46,2 1992, Web, 2 Mar 2010, *JSTOR*, Retrieved at Macalester College, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706858, 391-425

[14] Alexander Laban Hinton, Why Did They Kill: Cambodia in the Shadow of Genocide, (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2005), Print, 33

[15] Fanon 3

[16] Ibid 33

The second system, what I will term the haves and have-nots system, is more economic and development based. As Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1997), an ideologue of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, describes in his book *Gharbzadegi (Weststruckness),* the international sphere is divided into two groups, Europe and the West or: those with full stomachs and power, and Iran and the rest of the world who go hungry and are powerless.[17] While this description fits the disillusionment with modern development mindset of pre-revolutionary Iran, it also can apply to the Young Turk Revolution. As mentioned previously, Ottoman territories had enormous debts to western powers leaving the empire poverty stricken and militarily inferior while the west was rich, modern, and powerful. In most Muslim revolutions of the 19th and 20th century, there is always a divide; there is an "us" which is good, civilized, and superior, and a "them" or "other" which is an enemy of the people and a threat to the survival of the Muslim state.[18]

In the age of globalization, the line between what is local and what is international has been blurred beyond recognition. Yet as this study shows, the border between the international system and the domestic state has been an obscure yet high activity site in the period leading up to a revolution. The pilfering of sovereignty, whether through direct colonization, foreign aid decrees, or developmental "assistance" was a pungent theme across the Young Turk Revolution, Algerian Decolonization, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. But even more than these small intrusions, changes to the international structure bestowed unique and unforeseen opportunities on the revolutionaries. Polarizations of identity allow revolutions to congeal around common themes, identities, and enemies even as it heightens tension within the international system. Although internal factors are important in determining the grievances and structure of a revolution, it is the international system that gives a Muslim revolution its passionate willpower, and the "it's us or it's them" mentality and determine the perfect time in which to strike. It's not a few zealous Islamic fundamentalists that diplomats should be worrying about. It's the fact that "wealth and poverty, power and impotence, knowledge and ignorance, prosperity and desolation, and civilization and savagery have become polarized in the world."[19]

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[17] Jalal Al-e Ahmad*, Gharbzadegi (Weststruckness),* Trans. John Green and Ahmad Alizadeh (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1997), 12

[18] Chirot, Daniel and Clark McCauley, *Why Not Kill Them All: The Logic and Prevention of Mass Political Murder,* 2nd Printing, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), Print, 81-87; Hinton 33

[19] Al-e Ahmad 13

It's not a question of if but of when and to whom the international system will award its favor and who will be the next target. Revolution and the international system can be a dangerous combination.

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