Abstract. In this article, we review several historical, geopolitical and diplomatic glosses as basic elements and inputs for a future ampler comparative inter-regional study on the World War One/World War I/The Great War’s profound and lasting consequences on two neighboring regions: Europe, with the case-study of Romania, and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In particular, the nexus internal forces – external factors offer a unique and instructive approach for answering the question: “what is the imprint and legacy of this chapter of global and regional history?” Going through major turning points of 1918-2018 Century (PART I) and visiting files of particular interest in the tapestry of Romania-MENA countries’ relations (PART II) might shed light on the new “neighborhood” the two areas came to be found themselves at the end of this Century as a unique modernization period and at the gate of a new era of change. We argue that both Romania and the world of MENA are already faced/challenged by the first turning point of a new common century.

Keywords: World War One/ World War I/ The Great War, MENA, Turning Points, Neighborhood, Anniversaries, Diplomacy.
Motto: “There are no inevitabilities in history... There is no such person as History. It is human beings who decree.”¹

“The National Assembly of all Romanians in Transylvania, Banat and the Hungarian Country, gathered by its rightful representatives at Alba Iulia on 18th of November/ 1st of December 1918, decrees the unification of those Romanians and of all the territories inhabited by them with Romania.” Article 1, Resolution of the National Assembly in Alba Iulia, December 1, 1918

Instead of an Introduction: Several Hermeneutic Considerations

Motto: “The past must be understood in its own context. It cannot be seen as if its context were just like the context of the present, but with events taking place in an earlier time... The only times over which we have any degree of influence at all are the present and future – both of which can be made worse by attempts at symbolic restitution among the living for what happened among the dead...

To admit that we can do nothing about what happened among the dead is not to give up the struggle for a better world, but to concentrate our efforts where they have at least some hope of making things better for the living.”²

Besides Romania, and Europe, generally, there was another region of the Planet in particular, which happens to be located in the Romanians’ neighborhood, namely the Middle East, that was likewise strongly affected and shaped by the historical compact informed by The Great War/The First World War/World War I (WWI), 1914-1918, as well the crucial events leading to it and those which followed it, in a sense the entire 1918-2018 Century.

Against this backdrop, it could be of interest to place in a comparative perspective the analysis of the present exciting time, which is being put for some time under the tag of CENTENARY 1918-2018, a kind of evocative and meaningful shorthand in the vocabulary of academic studies and media reports, with occasional political rhetoric included. In our view, there are several tracks for productively dealing with such a subject matter:

First track, that of a triadic paradigm³: (i). CENTENARY OF THE GREAT UNION ROMANIA: 1918-2018, an invaluable “cover”/“title” for that whole “book” that “narrated” a particularly crucial century in the whole history of Romania, a history build on accruing a number of similarly invaluable “books”; (ii). FIRST WORLD WAR/WORLD WAR ONE/ WAR WORLD I (WWI): the opening and a

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³ “Concepts are understood as units of thought. This means that a concept tends to be homogeneous and closed. If a concept is viewed through the triadic paradigm then, for the purpose of formalization, a concept should be seen as a combination of objects, attributes and conditions which is homogeneous and closed.”

major “chapter” in the respective “book”; (iii). 1918: the one “page,” from that “book” & “chapter,” in which three “astral” moments were “aligned” for Romania: March 27, 1918 – Union of Bessarabia with Romania, November 28, 1918 – Union of Bukovina with Romania, December 1, 1918, Union of Transylvania with Romania, hence a “page” rightly irradiating a festive atmosphere and a celebratory mood, given “those moments that will always define history, warming hearts and arousing consciences, generation after generation.”

Due to the fact that, “The peacemakers of 1919 redrew the map of Europe from the western borders of Germany well into Russia, (and) completely reconceptualized the Middle East by breaking the Ottoman Empire...” 6, we are of the view that a similar triadic paradigm, could be relevant when looking at the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) too. Of course, not ignoring their specificities, especially in relation to the third pillar of the triad – the year 2018, which doesn’t seem to include for MENA, in comparison with Romania, too many, if any, “auspicious” big anniversaries, being “balanced,” instead by “subsidiary” anniversaries.

Anyway, the purpose of operating with an analogous paradigm would be the same: better comprehending contemporary evolutions in a neighboring region with which the Romanians had developed age-old and enduring relations, gradually intensified during the fateful common 1918-2018 century. Of course, with a necessary focus on the present juncture the Middle East is passing through, one of “bewildering composite of conflict drivers and actors that pose myriad threats to local, regional and global stability,” the region’s overall predicament being “no longer confined to it: radiating crises have started to infect relations between regional and global powers, forcing policymakers in world capitals to respond in pursuit of their nations’ strategic interests.” And all that, against the backdrop of outside powers’ perennial and multiple interests in the Middle East and North Africa: “(toward) its stability, its hydrocarbon resources, individual states’ allegiance in superpower rivalries, its markets and at times its products and its labor.” 8

Meanwhile, seeing the nexus Romania – MENA region through such a conjoint triadic matrix could help a better projection of the space at the intersection between

4 In the light of the Centenary, the WWI’s impact on the Middle East has inspired many works that effectively engage with multiple perspectives: Leila Tarazi Fawaz’s A Land of Aching Hearts: The Middle East in the Great War (Harvard University Press, 2014), Kristian Coates Ulrichsen’s The First World War in the Middle East (Hurst, 2014), T G Fraser’s edited volume The First World War and its Aftermath: The Shaping of the Middle East (University of Chicago Press, 2015), Rob Johnson’s The Great War and the Middle East (Oxford University Press, 2016).


7 With regard to Europe: “At a stroke, the dissolution of these dynastic and proprietary empires (Austro-Hungarian, Tsarist and Ottoman) opened up packages of heterogeneous peoples which had been lovingly assembled and carefully tied together over centuries.” Paul Johnson, op. cit., p. 20.

their trajectories, especially during this last leg of their common century and, as such, grasping a possible joint legacy for a future new century.

In this regard, it wouldn’t be a stretch of imagination to accept the notion of symmetry of destiny, one centered on the two sides’ interplay with a fateful time – namely the First World War. However, a symmetry embracing a kaleidoscopic profile, given its many peculiarities directly related to each of Europe’s/ Romania’s, and, correspondingly, Middle East’s, specific evolutions.

Second track, that of a quasi-paradigmatic principle: when approaching the Middle East history, as well as Europe’s/Romanian’s one, practically in all their different stages, it would never be possible to disregard the interplay of internal and external factors and forces. Against this backdrop, MENA’s situation at the very commencement of the First World War, as the crucial gate to the 1918-2018 Century, appeared to converge on the nexus between: “(i). the region’s commercial and strategic value in the international political economy of the early twentieth century, thus the struggle for influence in the Middle East which straddled overlapping and competing influences for Western-based hegemony at the local, national, regional and international levels…: (ii). the voice of the local agents of change that populated the Middle East in 1914, many of them being prominent advocates of change and reform, and contributing to a vibrant socio-political atmosphere throughout the region.”  

Third track: The pendulum between rationality and emotion, which is instilling an inherent ambivalence, as a kind of CENTENARY 1918-2018’s trademark.

Historical anniversaries, be they in Romania or the Middle East, especially when they have a centennial scale, appear highly charged emotionally, at personal, community/collective, up to the national level. Touching inner meaning of the event(s) – ethnically, religiously, ideologically, appeared compounded by the fact “today’s globalizing world is the ideal fertile ground for the blossoming or even the explosion of emotions… (a) free flow of emotions, including both positive emotions (ambition, curiosity, yearning for self-expression) and evil ones, including the angry passions that lead to hatred between nations, religions, and ethnic groups.” On the one hand, such a momentous time could connote, as in the test-case of Romania, mainly positive assessments, becoming a useful framework for celebratory happenings, hopefully meaningful ones too, and not only joyful. On the other hand, and that is in the very relation to the Middle East, almost any sectorial anniversary related to CENTENARY 1918-2018 might carry with it less favorable, even negative, evaluations, involving risks of being engulfed in sadness and melancholy, if not outright fury, and at best a “celebration with qualification.”

Even if, “in a region prone to eschatological dramas (like MENA), emotions have a habit of subsiding as quickly as they flare” some of their motivations

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11 In 2017, the UK official line was “to celebrate the Centenary of the Balfour Declaration, but not without qualification.” https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/2922/100-years-solicitude-commemorating-balfour/.
remain deeply rooted, starting with the "sense of betrayal" felt by the Middle East’s people in the context of "... the devastating consequences, still reverberating a century later, of the contradictory agreements and broken promises (undertaken by the European powers)." And that could strongly resonate on the other side of the "barricade" when enough "sensible" radars are operational: "(the respective feeling felt by the Arabs) should not be seen as an intention to making the European culpable in the name of a frustration more or less instrumentalized. In fact, we have to speak about the Arabs’ deep lack of understanding on how France and Great Britain could they have had adopted a policy so much most morally, and particularly so much strategically hazardous? One Century later, in the context of the Middle East’s numerous present crises, we (the Europeans) are still paying the price of our decision to subdue and dominate the Arabs, instead of having them associated to us."  

In parallel to placing the emotions’ chapter in the Middle East against the backdrop of the geopolitical historical matrix, one should not underestimate the critical fact of "the Middle East being the cradle of the three monotheisms which had conquered large parts of the world, and as such, a major source of emotions and passions."  

Consequently, conceptual and organizational work aimed at preparing and unfolding activities under the umbrella of the CENTENARY 1918 – 2018 would be seriously subverted unless all those involved mastered well their emotional dimensions. So much more for the specific Middle East region: "We have to find a way to deal with emotions – both our own and those of the people we study – since they are more potent than anything else we have witnessed in the spectacle we are currently observing in the Middle East. These emotions are just as powerful as the national sentiment."  

Fourth track: balancing the festive nature of the day(s) with the larger perspective of the century: ‘the Centennial of the Great Union must not boil down to a simple opportunity for ceremonies, whether pious or joyous. The Centennial does not mark only the moments 100 years ago, but it concerns the entire path of modern Romania and our future plans.”  

Going beyond the CENTENARY’s prevalently festive/frustrating appearance, helped by the above-invoked cooler attitude, as much as possible, would have a pragmatic goal, namely to facilitate reaching the very substance of the unfolding of an entire century of events, evolutions, trends, successful and failed policies and so on, whose background and impact, in political, geopolitical and diplomatic terms, extend far beyond a given country/region.

13 Lawrence Sondhaus, op. cit., p. 395.  
PART I

World War I as the First Turning Point of MENA’s Century 1918-2018.
Subjacent Centenaries Instead of an (Impossible) Overall Anniversary

Motto: “Seeing the First World War through Sorelian lenses, as ‘the forge in which the world will be hammered into new limits and new communities’.”18

“The world has always been unstable and the future, by definition, unpredictable. Our current worries could certainly be much worse. If nothing else, the centenary of 1914 should have reminded us of that.”19

“It is important to place today’s Middle East conflicts in historical context: namely the current nation-states’ troubled birth in the mayhem of World War I and the death throes of the Ottoman Empire… The trauma was profound… The region is still reeling from these setbacks to its worldly and religious power.”20

A seminal book suggests that “it is possible to read the history of the Middle East over the past one hundred years as being punctuated by a series of critical turning points”21, the first one occurring between 1915 and 1922 and having The Great War as its pivotal “piece.”

The strong and durable connection between the Middle East and WWI constitutes perhaps one of the least contentious issues of the regional history. What could differ are just the terms used to define it most tellingly, with all requested care not to miss essential nuances:

1. In shorter, if not simpler sentences: “The Middle East, as we know it from today’s headlines, emerged from decisions made by the Allies during and after the First World War.”22 “When World War I ended, new countries were born and borders were redrawn in the Middle East. But those changes were marked with missteps that have led to many of the conflicts that have made it one of the most volatile regions in the world.”23 “With the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and Caliphate after the First World War the entire Middle East region was brought on course to enter the modern international state system.”24 “The Middle East played a major role in World War I, and, conversely, the war was important in shaping the development of the modern Middle East. One might even say that World War I began and ended with Middle East-related conflicts… One can even say that the roots of many contemporary conflicts in the Middle East go back to

20 International Crisis Group, op. cit., p. 3.
22 David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace. The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East, ” Henry Holt and Company, Paperback, New York, 2009, p. 7.
the Great War and the settlements that came out of it.”

“Territorially, the ending of the Ottoman Empire created the present Middle East; the former imperial provinces were handed over to the war’s victors by the new League of Nations and ruled under fictions of conditional sovereignty that they called mandates. With the exception of the as yet non-existent Israel, the map of the region that emerged in the 1920s looks much as it does today.”

“In no other region of the world are the effects of World War I as current as they are in the Middle East. The war’s dark inheritance is especially apparent in a core territory made up of five countries – Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Israel – and one seemingly permanent non-state, Palestine. Hemmed in by the stronger and arguably more stable nations of Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, this median zone is the “blood land” of the Middle East.”

“The Arab world went in totality under colonial domination at the end of the First World War. It would be needed another half of Century to go gradually to the Arabs’ independence, a fact which was the dream that had inspired the Arab revolt of 1916.”

2. More elaborate formulations, quasi-essayistic texts: “…Following the war’s end in 1918, the former Ottoman territories were drawn into the Westphalian international system by a variety of imposed mechanisms. The 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, signed with what was left of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, reconceived the Middle East as a patchwork of states – a concept heretofore not part of its political vocabulary. Some, like Egypt and non-Arab Iran, had had earlier historical experiences as empires and cultural entities. Others were invented as British or French “mandates,” variously a subterfuge of colonialism or a paternalistic attempt to define them as incipient states in need of tutelage… Each of these entities – Syria and Lebanon, which were assigned to France, Mesopotamia, later Iraq, placed under British influence, Palestine and Transjordan, becoming the British “mandate for Palestine” – contained multiple sectarian and ethnic groups, some of which had a history of conflict with each other… This allowed the mandating power to rule in part by manipulating tensions, in the process laying the foundation for later wars and civil wars… With scant experience, the societies of the Middle East set out to redefine themselves as modern states, within borders that for the most part had no historical roots. The emergence of the European-style secular state had no precedent in Arab history.”

“A century on, the First World War continues to cast a long shadow across the Middle East… it was this conflict, more than anything else, that determined the nature of the state-system which later emerged… the legacy of developments and decisions taken during and after the First World War remains a source of bitterness, contestation and conflicting interpretation of this day. This reflects the fact that the war years represented a transition of the region from the crucible of competing

25 https://cmes.arizona.edu/sites/cmes.arizona.edu/files/2.%20Overview%20-%20WWI%20in%20the%20Midd%20East_1.pdf.
26 https://www.ft.com/content/af218024-b2bf-11e4-a058-00144feab7de.
27 https://www.creighton.edu/creightonmagazine/2015smrfeaturewwi/.
28 Jean-Pierre Filiu, op. cit., p. 67.
empires to the emergence of the modern state-system with all that implied for the realization – and crushing – of national aspiration, the recasting of loyalties and the birth of grievances that have come to occupy totemic positions in regional narratives.”  

“For the European powers, mainly Britain and France, which had taken over much of the region during the nineteenth century, WWI would provide them with the opportunity to seize control of even more of it… In creating Iraq, Britain stitched together a state out of three disparate regions that had very different histories. In creating Lebanon and Syria, France did the opposite and carved up a region that had functioned as a political unit for centuries. In doing so, Paris and London took a process of nation-building that, in their own continent, had taken centuries, telescoped it into a matter of months, then imposed it on people who had not asked for it.”

“After the First World War, here were fewer borders in the wider Middle East than currently exist, and those that did exist were usually determined by geography alone... The European used ink to draw lines on maps: they were lines that did not exist in reality and created some of the most artificial borders the world has seen... prior to Sykes-Picot (in the wider sense), there was no state of Syria, no Lebanon, no was there Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Israel or Palestine. Modern maps show the borders and the names of nation states, but they are young and they are fragile... the various decisions made in the first third of the twentieth century betrayed promises given to tribal leaders and which partially explain the unrest and extremism of today.”

Notably, in the magma of the First World War and its aftermath, the very term “The Middle East” progressively gained strength, not long after its very “birth,” albeit from a Eurocentric perspective. A more definite “cradle” for the syntagm was Britain: “For British diplomats, ‘the Middle East’ was conceived to facilitate the logistics of its imperial establishment. When British interests centered on India, the area was meaningful as the Middle East. When British interests centered on the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the Levant became the center point of the new Middle East.”

In the same regard, one can speak of a “dual midwife” posture, taken by the geo-political tango players of the time – Britain and France: “In 1916, French and British diplomats sat down to draw up the map that still defines the region. In other words, the ‘Middle East’ emerged as a concept as European powers fought among themselves to control it.”

Ultimately, the overall nexus First World War – Middle East Region had been generating, all along its remarkably consequential century-long arc of time, an extremely complex narrative, in metaphorical terms one of the most charged “baggage of human history and civilization.” Structurally integral to it – the

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30 Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, p. 1.
32 Tim Marshall, op. cit., pp. 144-146.
segmental “package” of the eight years (1914-1922) lapse of time, whose uniqueness had been bequeathed by the mixing of military campaigns – which led to the defeat of the Ottomans and the subsequent collapse of the once great and entrenched Muslim Empire – with the myriad of other critical facts and evolutions “on the ground,” many behind-the-scene contacts, discussions and concrete negotiations. All had a decisive impact on the progression and conclusion of the war, as well as on the Middle East post-war profile, with an ultimate fallout experienced until today: the practical impossibility even to talk about a common/regional 2018 Middle East centennial celebration. Yet another expression of the fact that, “The region’s lack of unity at birth has remained the leitmotiv of its troubled existence.”


Other Turning Points in the MENA’s Century.

MENA’s Other Subsidiary Centennials

Motto: “Geopolitical frictions among the big players will expose small states to ever more serious geopolitical challenges.”

It is considered that a second critical turning point occurred in 1947-1948, intimately connected, by its very substantive evolution, with the first one (1915-1922):

36 International Crisis Group, op. cit., p. 22.
37 In October 1915, McMahon, the (British) High Commissioner of Egypt, wrote Hussein Bin Ali, the Arab Sharif of Hejaz and of the holy city of Mecca a letter in which he declared Great Britain’s willingness – bar a few vague reservations – “to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs within the territories in the limits and boundaries proposed by the Sharif of Mecca.” Starting with June 1916, for almost the next two years, the Arabs had fulfilled their part of the agreement, namely to revolt and fight against the Ottomans. Britain did not fully live up to its part of the deal. In no way were the British thinking of the kind of united Arab state that Hussein and his sons dreamed of: “It was evident from the beginning that if we won the war these promises would be dead paper.” T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, with an Introduction by Angus Calder, 1997 Edition, Wordsworth Editions Limited, p. 657.
38 Even as McMahon was corresponding with Sharif Hussein, “British and French attempted, through a secret deal, to resolve the tensions that their ambitions in the region were causing, a real struggle for the control of the Middle East that had been going on between them for thirty years.” James Barr, *A Line in the Sand: The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948*, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, First American Edition 2012, pp. IX-X. “Even by the standards of the time, it was a shamelessly self-interested pact,” James Barr wrote. The Agreement “had divided the Middle East into what were in effect spheres of influence.” Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, p. 112.
39 On Nov. 2, 1917, UK Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour promised the Zionist Federation of Great Britain “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” The Declaration offered the reassurance that it was “clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities.” “The Balfour Declaration and the idea of a Jewish National Home was one of the post-dated cheques Britain signed to win the Great War.” Paul Johnson, Op. cit., p. 481. In Oct. 2018, UK PM Theresa May, while stating that, “We are proud of our pioneering role in the creation of the State of Israel”, emphasized that there was still “unfinished business” since Balfour’s “fundamental vision of peaceful co-existence has not yet been fulfilled.”
40 Nayef R. F. Al-Rodhan, Graeme P. Herd, Lisa Watanabe, pp. 18-25, 79-146.
41 https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/geopolitics-eurasia/.
“... the demise of the Ottoman Empire brought the wholesale redrawing of boundaries in the Middle East and, in Palestine, the roots of the modern-day Arab-Israeli conflict, stemming from Britain’s conflicting wartime promises to the Zionist movement and Arab nationalists.”

On this critical backdrop, the region had witnessed the UN partition plan of Palestine (UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947), followed by the British withdrawal from the Mandate on May 14, 1948, without any formal transfer of powers to a new government. On the same day, David Ben-Gurion announced Israel’s independence, which caused the 1948/First Arab-Israeli war.

In the overall compound of 1914-2018 events, the 1948 moment has had a long-lasting effect within and without the Middle East. Along with century-old implications for the US and European external policies and diplomatic actions, the severe defeat of Arab militaries by Jewish troops in the first major Arab-Israeli conflict “represented a real setback for the Arab states involved (Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq)…; it shed a harsh light on the weaknesses of Arab countries and, in particular, the lack of leadership, organization and coordination of their armed forces.” And, together with the military consequences, the region was to know, in the following decades, a lot of psychological traumas, experienced by both Palestinians and Israelis: “Israeli history books call the war their War of Independence, won bravely against a numerically superior enemy bent on Israel’s destruction; Palestinian history books call the same war al-Nabka, ‘the catastrophe’. Some 700,000 to 800,000 Palestinians became refugees. The 1949 armistice agreements’ new boundaries, called the ‘Green Line’, gave Israel control of 78 percent of the territory, rather than 56 percent allocated by UN Resolution 181.”

The same kind of determinant, namely “a major defeat of the Arab armies” in an Arab-Israeli War, this time the 1967 war, materialized as the third critical turning point. It was another humiliating moment for the Arab countries, this time the war resulting from “a combination of factors, including increased tensions between Israel and Egypt and Syria, and internal problems within the Jewish state, evidenced by the anxiety of elites, demographic conditions and economic strains.”

While bringing many significant changes to the region, the third turning point also “sowed the seeds for the next crisis,” one of a radically different character: the fourth turning point, a true critical one, “which occurred in 1979 with the Iranian Revolution; the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty; the seizure of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, Saudi Arabia; the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; and the sending of troops to help the Afghans.”

The fifth turning point: “occurred between 1987 and 1991 with the First Palestinian Intifada, the end of the Iran-Iraq War, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the First Gulf War and the posting of US troops in the region and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.” Notably, “the collapse of the Soviet Union...”

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42 Lawrence Sondhaus, op. cit., p. 2.
in 1991 marked the demise of the overarching American Strategy in the Middle East, along with the unity of purpose that joined the United States with its partners there.

The sixth critical turning point: “which began with 9/11, included the invasion of Afghanistan, the Iraq War (2003) and support for US strategic partners in the Global War on Terror (GWOT).”

Notable are some characteristics of the “cluster” of those six turning points for the Middle East’s 1918-2018 Century: (i). All had, and continue to have to this day, consequential reverberations for the foreign policy of many countries in the world, Romania included; (ii). A “constellation” of relevant partial anniversaries, centennial, but not only: 2017, which was considered by Israeli analysts as “an epochal year of Zionist anniversaries” (the 120th of the First Zionist Conference in Basel, the 100th of the Balfour Declaration, the 70th of the 1947 UN Partition Resolution, the 50th of the Six-Day War and the 80th anniversary of the 1937 British Peel Commission Report, which first proposed a ‘two-state solution’ for Palestine); 2018 – the 70th anniversary of Israeli Independence Day see SYNOPSIS 1, as well as the 70th anniversary of the First Arab-Israeli War; the years to come – anniversaries of the peace conferences and treaties: Treaty of Versailles (1919), The San Remo conference (April 1920), which confirmed the mandate allocations of the First Conference in London (February 1920) and incorporated the Balfour Declaration of 1917 in the Covenant of the League of Nations, Treaty of Sèvres, with the Ottoman Empire (August 10, 1920) and Treaty of Lausanne (July 24, 1923).

In the particular case – Anniversary of The League of Nations mandates allocation to the two major European Powers (on Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia) – maybe a more adequate term that will be used will be “commemoration” and that because, while Britain and France were “supposed to steer these embryonic countries to rapid independence, (in fact) they immediately began to drag their feet. The Arabs reacted angrily as the freedom they had been promised continually receded before them like a mirage.” Practically, the mandates strengthened the great power status enjoyed by the British and French in the Middle East after WWI, which served quite well their interests albeit under the guise of various purposes, from the rhetorically asserted “Mission civilisatrice” of the French, to more tangible ones, such as Britain’s longing for the new wealth of the region-

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45 Ibid., p. 17: “Throughout the Cold War, the United States sought to attain six goals in the region: prevent the expansion of Soviet influence; ensure Western access to oil; secure the peaceful resolution of conflicts and foster a regional balance of power; promote stable, pro-Western states in the region; preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the state of Israel; and protect the sea lanes, lines of communications, civil aviation routes, and the likes connecting the United States and Europe with Asia.”
47 The First Zionist Conference (1897) adopted the Basel (Basle) Program, which stated: “Zionism aims at establishing for the Jewish people a publicly and legally assured home in Palestine.” “Palestine” was used at that time as a purely geographical term, with all residents, including the Jews living there, called Palestinians. (The area itself was actually under Ottoman rule). Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. http://jubilee-years.gov.il/?q=1897.
oil: “Britain received a number of important prizes, (from the Middle East) Palestine and, most important, Jordan and Iraq (including the Kirkuk-Mosul oilfields), which made her the paramount power throughout the Arab Middle East.”

Undoubtedly, such anniversaries/commemorations will have some political/geopolitical and moral relevance as a reminder of the birth pangs of a, literally and figuratively, New Middle East, as well as the region’s further anchoring in the global post-WWI civilization and order.

The Consequent 2010s – A Decade Overloaded as a Whole Century, for the Middle East, and from Here Irradiating Outside the Region

Motto: “Over the last seven years, social upheavals and civil wars have torn apart the political order that had defined the Middle East ever since the World War I.”

The birth throes of a “New Middle East” have entered a more acute, almost excruciating, phase with the second decade of the 21st Century – practically, a period integral part of the 1918-2018 Century and Centenary. Seen as a kind of metaphorical incubator, this is the period known either as a Perfect Storm, a phrase used mainly in the political and academic circles, or an Arab Spring, a mass media darling, not less for many scholars, who saw in it a sui generis Black Swan.

It remains to be seen if the events and changes which have been taking place, under such umbrellas, since December 2010, and their repercussions, would eventually be crystallized into “a new (seventh) critical turning point for the Middle East.”

As a prelude, it appears worthwhile making reference to a sort of ad-hoc taxonomy of events and evolutions taking place under such an umbrella, as advanced by that outstanding scholar of the region’s past and present who is James L.

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49. Paul Johnson, op. cit., pp. 43, 480, 487.
50. Vali Nasr, Iran Among Ruins. Teheran’s Advantage in a Turbulent Middle East, Foreign Affairs, Volume 97, Number 2, March/April 2018, p. 108.
51. The Arab Spring surely satisfies the three criteria for a black swan event: surprising, historically consequential, and rationalized by hindsight. First, its onset, triggered by the self-immolation of a Tunisian street vendor, caught the world by surprise. Second, just as in the case of other black swans, the Arab Spring’s impact was massive. In Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, the uprisings overthrew authoritarian governments and launched a period of difficult transitions. In Syria, Libya, and Yemen, the rebellions turned into prolonged civil wars with devastating consequences for civilians. The spillover effects of the post-Arab-Spring wars have been felt in neighboring countries, other countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and beyond. Third, many explanations for the Arab Spring emerged after the fact. Some of the explanations put forward were high economic inequality, the rising expectations of young people, a squeezed middle class, high food prices, lack of inclusion, and the list goes on. But since we know that this type of event is often inappropriately rationalized, it is important to ask which factors were the real reason for the Arab Spring. This will help find appropriate ways for countries to overcome their longstanding issues and set the stage for peace and sustainable development.”

Gelvin: “(i). The so-called Arab Spring was not a unique event in the Arab history; rather, it was but the latest phase in a three-decade-long struggle for human and democratic rights and social and economic justice in the region; (ii). Overall, there are five region-wide factors that made all states in the Arab world vulnerable to popular anger... from neo-liberalism, to the Human Rights Revolution, the Arab regimes’ brittleness, ... demography and the global rise in food prices; (iii). Once uprisings and protests began to break out in the region, they took a number of forms. In the main, the ones that have broken out thus far might be placed into five clusters: Tunisia and Egypt, Yemen and Libya, Bahrain and Syria, the monarchies, and Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine... Not even Israel has been immune... Of particular concern was expanding poverty, government corruption, the widespread gap between rich and poor, and the imposition of American-style neo-liberal economic policies.”

Meantime, the radically new technological background has been decisively influencing this unexpected political and social Arab “season”: “The revolutionary events that swept the Middle East and North Africa beginning in Tunisia in December 2010 – the misnamed ‘Arab Spring’ – were certainly facilitated by various kinds of information technology, even if it was probably the television channel Al Jazeera rather than Facebook or Twitter that transmitted the news of the revolution to the majority of Arabs. As happened in Europe after 1917, revolution spread like epidemic, exploiting existing networks... Monitoring Twitter hashtags became a way of anticipating demonstrations during the revolutionary event... (on the other hand) with regard to the implications of the growth of networks, for every article extolling their positive effects in empowering the young and enlivening democracy – for example, in the Arab revolutions of 2010-2012 – there is another warning of their negative effects in empowering dangerous forces – for example, political Islam.”

Eventually, if “the narrative that developed was of young, liberal, technologically savvy Arabs engaging in mass protests that were going to sweep away decades of dictatorship and bring liberal democracy to the Middle East”55, “not much of a revolution” effectively took place on the ground. A detail that was most misunderstood in 2011 as protests spread across the Arab world: “idealists and liberals were among the protesters, but the critical mass came from other parts of society. Those elements did not necessarily identify with artificial and relatively young nation-states, but rather with Islam. This does not mean that Muslims cannot be liberals, or that liberal democracy cannot coexist with Islam. In theory, it

52 James L. Gelvin, op. cit., pp. 27, 29-33, 166-167.
53 A joke circulating in Egypt, once President Hosni Mubarak was overthrown, in February 2011: “When the three of the four presidents known by Egypt during the six decades after the military coup of 1952 had met “up there,” in the sky, each one had to attest on the motives of his demise: Gamal Abdel Nasser – poisoning, Anwar Sadat – terrorist act, Hosni Mubarak – Al-Jazeera (programs and news related to causes and unfolding of Arab Spring/ uprisings).”
is possible. In practice, a liberal democracy has never existed in the Arab world... What happened in late 2010 and early 2011 was an Islamist Awakening. It was followed in short succession by a Muslim civil war that continues to rage today. The war is being fought on multiple fronts, including Syria, Iraq, Yemen, the Sinai Peninsula, Libya and the Tunisian-Algerian border. It is between multiple factions, including Shiite and Sunni, secular and religious, ethnic and tribal. And it is a war in which the Arabs are already – and will continue to be – used as pawns by outside powers.”

In this context, if we were to identify an ultimate un-erasing “regional brand,” that would be the conflict. A timely study realized by the International Crisis Group underlines that, “a historical approach to MENA conflicts suggests at least five separate conflict clusters that emerged from the trauma of World War I and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, each with its own genealogy and violent progeny: (i) the dysfunctional post-World War I state system (which evolved significantly over a hundred years but never overcame its troubled beginnings); (ii) the Israeli-Arab conflict, precipitated by the 1948 creation of the state of Israel; (iii) the rise of Iran and attendant Sunni-Shiite sectarian spiral, triggered by the 1979 Islamic Revolution; (iv) Sunni radicalization, given impetus first by the Arab armies’ defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel and then by the Saudi response to the 1979 siege of Mecca; (v) the 2011 Arab uprisings as region-wide popular challenges to the existing order/disorder, and their collapse into either regime retrenchment or civil war (with Tunisia as an uncertain exception)”.

An explanation *sui generis* on the warring and conflicting nature of the Middle East region is proposed by Yuval Noah Harari: “… knowledge has become today the most important economic resource, the profitability of war has diminished, and the wars have become, more and more, limited to those parts of the world – like the Middle East and Central Africa – where the economies are still of the old type/fashion, based on material goods.” Of course, this idea doesn’t exhaust the spectrum of answers to “the gnawing question of how a region that for half a millennium was a global exemplar of pluralism and religious harmony has become the least tolerant and stable place on the planet.”

As of the spring of 2018, with the possible exception of the State of Oman and maybe the tiny but extremely rich Kuwait, all the other states from the Middle East and North Africa – Arab ones, but also non-Arab, namely Iran and Israel – are involved in one form or another of tension, dispute, conflict, directly or indirectly, through non-state actor proxies, at a minimum suffering the effects of conflicts in their immediate neighborhood, starting with the flows of refugees which would increase to a critical mass in comparison with the population of the host-country (Lebanon, Jordan). Ultimately it is a “War of All Against All,” with

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56 Ibid.
57 International Crisis Group, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
a deep rooted motivation in the local mentality: “In Arab mythology, the al-Sada bird, or death owl, emerges from the body of a murdered man and shrieks until someone takes revenge. Today there are undoubtedly tens of thousands of al-Sada birds crying out for revenge all over Syrian skies,” and that in consonance with the “country’s in case” “growing number of identities: Assad’s Syria, Insurgent Syria, Salafist Syria, Kurdish Syria, each controlled by “warlords or armed feudal masters... What’s crucial in this whole process is that you don’t matter. You as an individual – your aspirations, your ideas about what is right – mean absolutely nothing. And that’s when you understand why people get radicalized. You completely understand why somebody would join ISIS or al-Qaeda or the Assad regime or the Kurdish groups. You are in dire need for a narrative that can justify this futility. There has to be a point. So you become radical. This suffering has to be for a reason. Otherwise it’s too painful.”

Against this backdrop, noteworthy for its comprehensiveness is Paul Danahar’s observation: “In the past, conflicts in the region were primarily about lands. In the future they will often be over the perceived will of God. Religious Zionism and the struggle within political Islam are the forces shaping the New Middle East. No one can say for sure exactly how the region will evolve in the coming years. All that can be said is that people’s faith will increasingly play bigger part in their political choices, whether they are Muslims, Jews, or Christians. People will want their societies to reflect their values.”

Only that, such a soft vision on Islam appears “complemented” by other, harder realities: “In Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other states, the repeated failure to uphold the social contract and constant efforts to suppress dissent provided space to radical interpretations of Islam as cure-all.”

More, other conflicts, some brand new, have already been looming on the horizon. On the one hand, those in the “classical category” of inter-state layout, as “the coming conflict between Iran and Israel,” “announced” by the middle of February 2018, given that: “Iran is rising inexorably, and inevitably, at least for Israel, there will be no choice but conflict.” A dangerous “pulse” as measured from Jerusalem, or New York: “In the past, Israel used to look into the Syrian conflict as some kind of a distraction in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But today, the perception of the presence of militias very close to Iran, close to the Israeli border, and the perception of a potential arc between Teheran and Beirut allowing for the enhancement of the Hezbollah capacities, seems to be a many Israelis an existential threat. Any spark can trigger the war.” A relevant warning in this regard: “In the context of the extreme geopolitical

tension in the region, the Iranian situation could well be the trigger of a much larger war whose epicenter would be the Middle East. China and Russia would not remain indifferent and for sure will deliver arms to Iran and support it so that a new American hyper-power expansion be countered.”

Not far from there, we have witnessed recently "the Cold War in the Gulf" – Saudi Arabia & allies from the region versus Qatar, otherwise, all "Arab brothers," even the richest ones, being faced today with "very complex contradictions and very complex differences of interests between them."

On the other hand, no less traditional, the competition over energy sources. That was a particular type of dispute which played a central part in shaping Middle Eastern history throughout the 20th century; and seemingly will resurface as heralded, at the beginning of 2018, by “two wars of words that have erupted – one between Israel and Lebanon, the other involving Egypt and Turkey.”

The motivation: "new discoveries (which) have shown that the Eastern Mediterranean is home to one of the world’s largest natural gas reserves – if not the largest ever... (so that) a combination of unsettled borders, diplomatic machinations and vital economic stakes might engulf the Eastern Mediterranean in conflicts no less serious than elsewhere in the Middle East. The US and Russia, the world’s largest and second-largest producers of natural gas respectively, are both poised to play a vital role in brokering (and benefiting) from the coming crises... Russia and the US may well use this arena as an additional battleground in their ever-growing rivalry."

According to the Global Peace Index (GPI) 2017, elaborated by The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the Middle East and North Africa has remained, "the least peaceful region in the world; five of the world’s ten least peaceful countries are from this region (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya and Sudan), while only one country (Qatar) is ranked amongst the world’s 50 most peaceful countries... Regional instability is being exacerbated by the intense rivalry between Shia Iran and the Sunni Arab Gulf monarchies... This enmity has contributed to the length of the devastating civil war in Syria – where the two sides have backed opposing players – and has played a direct role in Saudi Arabia’s costly military intervention in Yemen, where it has been fighting to oust the Iranian-backed Houthis.”

To complete the picture, The Global Terrorism Index (GTI) 2017, having the same institutional source, indicates that, from the first 10 countries in the world with the highest score in this field68, four come from the MENA region: Iraq (rank 1, from a total of 163 countries analyzed), Syria (rank 4), Yemen (rank 6), Libya (rank 10). Egypt follows immediately with rank 11.

65 Georges Corm, op. cit., p. 264.
68 The four factors counted in each country’s yearly score are: total number of terrorist incidents, total number of fatalities caused by terrorists, total number of injuries caused by terrorists, a measure of the total property damage from terrorist incidents. https://lnt.ma/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/global-terrorism-index-2017.pdf.
Consequently, this closure time for the “1918-2018 Century” appears, for the whole Middle East, no less dramatic than its beginning period (1914-1922), seemingly dangerously shaking its original foundations. Renowned historian cum diplomat Henry Kissinger offers a decoding of the message inscribed in the centennial “relay” which is right now passed to a new “century”: “Across the Middle East, the system of order that emerged from the First World War is now in shambles. Almost every country in the Middle East is either a combatant or a battlefield in one or more wars. The challenge in the Middle East it is to restore a legitimate structure to a wide swath of territory where state authority has deteriorated or dissolved. Conflicts are occurring on ideological grounds, as between Shia and Sunni; between ethnic groups; and against the state system. Four states have ceased to function as sovereign: Syria, where a civil war, now in its seventh year, rages; Iraq, where ISIS, though beaten back, continues to attempt to challenge efforts to reconsolidate the state; Libya; and Yemen have all become battlegrounds for factions and outside influences seeking to impose their rule. The multiplicity of contestants roils the region with ever-evolving challenges.”

Concluding, a de-construction of the MENA’s portrayal as its leaving the critical 1918-2018 Century and preparing for the qualms of a new historical period cannot be correctly read and understood except within the register of cognitive dissonance – “the mind controller’s best friend” – flattened cities, previously unknown humanitarian crises and lost generations (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Gaza) versus glittering skyscrapers occupied by wealthy people, users of latest IT gadgets; urban centers and commercial hubs in the Arabian Peninsula and the Arab Gulf, but also in Tel Aviv, i.e. not far from the countries and areas of chaos, destructions and fragmentation, inhabited by “brothers” or “cousins.” Meanwhile, “the new Royal Opera House Muscat in Oman and the brand new Louvre Museum in Abu Dhabi revive vital questions. Are these new institutions instruments of Western domination, or are such cultural spaces compatible with Muslim social life? The theorist Edward Said argued that Cairo’s Khedivial Opera House was a folly and that Aida was a colonial opera.”

71 “At the 2018 annual camel beauty pageant, held in Saudi Arabia, a dozen camels have been disqualified from for receiving Botox injections. A full, droopy lip and large features are essential to achieving camel celebrity-status in the multi-million dollar industry of camel pageantry. At veterinary clinic, camels were not only given Botox but went under the knife to reduce the size of their ears. Delicate ears are a winning attribute on some Saudibréeds. Everyone wants to be a winner.” https://www.thenational.ae/world/gcc/saudi-camel-beauty-festival-12-entrants-disqualified-for-botox-use-1.698068.
72 Adam Mestyan, Was Cairo’s grand opera house a tool of cultural imperialism? https://aeon.co/ideas/was-cairos-grand-opera-house-a-tool-of-cultural-imperialism?utm_source=Aeon+Newsletter&utm_campaign=f3119a6663-.
Romania and the Middle East, a Common Century 1918-2018 – Turning Points with Different “Ingredients” and Results, a sui-generis “Sykes-Picot (secret) Agreement” for Romania?

Motto: “There is a saying that history belongs to the winners. The victors do not just win the war on the battlefield. They win the war of narratives that follows. Their view of history becomes the view of history.”

The First World War per se and its political and geopolitical aftermath constituted undoubtedly the first turning point for both Romania and the Middle East in what one could call a “Common Century” (1918-2018). However, a closer observation of the definitive substance and complexion of this fateful historical period would reveal some radical differences as the inputs and outputs are considered.

Thus, what, in the end, was specific, and commendable for the Romanians in their drive for the Great Union of all territories they inhabited, was the prevalence of domestic vectors in their interplay with external factors and interests. Even if strategies and tactics followed were, at least sometimes, sui generis ones, the Romanians, ordinary people, in every location they had lived for centuries, in synergetic “heart and mind” with political and intellectual elites, as well as the army, strived, however hard, and managed to take themselves the initiative aimed at sustaining and having internationally recognized their national interests, as they were already being crystalizing for many decades. And this particular reality has been variously voiced, but with untouched relevance, by Romanian and foreign historians alike:

– “It is sure that, at the critical moment, the Romanians were prepared for the great act of the Union. They were animated by a national sentiment (developed along the 19th century) ... (Of course) Even so, it had been necessary that history comes forward and encounters them ... From all national constructions realized at the end of WWI, Romania proved to be the most rock-solid ... Thus an entire century of history confirmed its Union.”

– “By 1919 there could be no question of saving the old arrangements in Central and Eastern Europe. The nationalists had already torn them apart. From the distance of seventy years it is customary to regard the last years of Austria-Hungary as a tranquil exercise in multi-racialism. In fact it was a nightmare of growing racial animosity. Every reform created more problems than it solved. Hungary got status within empire as a separate state in 1867. It once began to oppress its own minorities, chiefly Slovaks and Romanians (3.3 million, in accordance with the last census of the Habsburg Empire), with greater ferocity and ingenuity than it itself had been oppressed by Austria.”

On such a backdrop, with enough ups and downs and plenty of sacrifices, the CENTENARY OF THE GREAT UNION – ROMANIA: 1918-2018 comes to epitomize a real “success story” in the modern evolution of peoples and nations. Hence, its

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73 M. E. McMillan, op. cit., p. 93.
75 Paul Johnson, op. cit., pp. 20, 37.
celebration today could also have a potential added value through its induced emotion beyond the Romanians’ homeland. Mainly having in view its ubiquitous, not so “secret” ingredients – the nexus of Romania Great Union unity and its inhabitants century-forged capability to have, eventually, the external actors’ intervention and decisions molded and shaped to the Romanians interests, including the ability to detect and exploit what a renowned Romanian historian underlined, in great frankness, as being “international favorable junctures/circumstances/framework.”

Testimony among many: the Romanian delegation’s multilayered activities “on the ground” at the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) with regard to the Peace Treaties prepared on that occasion, aimed at confirming and incorporating, directly and indirectly, the Romanians’ determination and pronouncements to uniting Bessarabia, Bukovina and Transylvania – i.e. all the historical regions whose inhabitants were ethnic Romanian majority – with Romania, and that as legitimate decisions consonant with the right of peoples to self-determination.

If there is a Romanian “lesson” in all these, as in the mirror with the happenings in the Middle East at the time, that is the ability of making, ultimately, any unavoidable external interests and forces part of the solution, implicitly extracting them as part of the problem, with at least the appearance of a win-win game, i.e., in contemporary diplomatic language, mutually beneficial partnership up to a strategic one.

Of course, conventional wisdom says that, usually a foreign intervention is part of the problem, hence, the drive to radically change it had required, realistically considering Romania’s capabilities at the time, the sturdiest diplomatic skill, with the usage of adequate components of the foreign policy “toolkit” – for instance, not underestimating the soft power of lavish dinners, as the Romanian delegation in Paris did.

Also, a fairly “innovative” way of action was to seek the help of the influential Freemasons who, being almost absent from Romania by the end of WWI, had to be approached through their particular structures abroad, mainly in France, which happened to be also a major player in the peace treaties negotiations. The initiative went up to having the main Romanian delegates to the Paris Peace Conference asking to become and being effectively received as members of those Freemasons organizations. Interestingly, the Romanian officials’ request for “initiation” is dated May 14, 1919, when at the Paris Peace Conference were manifest the first disagreements between the Romanian delegation and the Great Powers.

Eventually, the endeavor was rewarded in the sense pursued by the Romanians.

In the same context, the historians had noticed that, “the discords within the Allies ranks offered to the head of the Romanian delegation to the Paris Peace

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77 Dan-Silviu Borescu, Cum s-a folosit Alexandru Vaida-Voevod de masonerie pentru recunoasterea internationala a Marii Uniri, in vol. Tainele Marii Uniri de la 1 Decembrie 1918. [How the Freemasonry had been used by Alexandru-Vaida Voevod for the international recognition of the Great Union in the volume The Secrets of the Great Union of 1 December 1918], Integral Publishing House, Bucuresti, 2018, pp. 17-27.
78 Radu Comănescu, Cum a manipulat Ionel Brătianu Francmasoneria europeană pentru a realiza Marea Unire [How Ionel Bratianu manipulated the European Freemasonry in order to realize the Great Union], Evenimentul Istoric, No. 2, March 2018, p. 90.
Conference, Ionel Bratianu, leverages to control the 1919 events. Encouraging the disputes among the allies and the ability to use in his favor the consequences of those disagreements show that the Romanian leader was extremely skilled for diplomatic maneuverings.79 One can say that the Romanian leaders applied, successfully, a kind of *sui generis* adage of *divide et impera*.

The same maxim being concomitantly utilized by the Great Powers when targeting, for instance, the Arabs, or the Kurds.

Against the backdrop of such a particular nexus of internal – external factors in the case of Romania, at the beginning of 1918-2918 Century, one should underline another relevant dimension of the productive way in which the Romanians conceived their inherent interconnectedness and intermingling with at least some of the outside world: “There is a common feature of all Romania’s great achievements of the last century and a half: they were fulfilled by connecting our projects to the great European processes, through assimilation by the society of the western humanism values. This happened during the Great War, this also happened in the year of the Great Union that started with unifying Bessarabia with Romania.”80

Unfortunately, the new orbits and trajectories of Great Romania were not completely free of unwelcome involvement, up to harsh intervention, from other parts of the outside world. There were instances when such interventions proved perniciously dangerous and detrimental to the still new Romanian united nation. With long-term consequences, some inerasable to this day.

Later on, near the official end of Second World War, once fighting had ceased in Europe, a sort of *sui-generis* “Sykes-Picot” agreement had been imposed on the Romanians, only that it was on a tangible piece of paper (Fig. 1) – still existing in Britain’s National Archives/ PREM 3/66/7 [169] – and not on a map *per se* as in the case of the original the Secret Agreement on the Middle East (Fig. 2).

![Fig. 1](image_url)

*Churchill’s half-sheet of paper on which he divided up the Balkans into proposed spheres of influence. Stalin’s approving tick is on top right. Oct. 1944*

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At the British PM Winston Churchill’s initiative, the Romansians’ beloved country was to be apportioned to the new/post-WWII Russian/Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and that for the next 45 years. More, Romania, for unspecified reasons, was placed at the very head of the ad-hoc list: “Romania, Russia 90 percent, the others 10 percent.”

At the Tolstoy conference in Moscow in October 1944, the Britain’s Prime Minister Winston Churchill said to the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin, “Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans.” He then produced what he called a “naughty document,” listing five Balkan countries and “percentages of interest” or sphere of influence by the great powers: Romania, Russia 90 percent, the others 10 percent; Greece, Great Britain in accord with USA 90 percent, Russia 10 percent; Yugoslavia and Hungary, 50-50 percent; Bulgaria, Russia 75 percent, the others 25 percent. As his words were translated, the Prime Minister pushed the paper across to Stalin who, without comment, “took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.” It might be thought cynical thus to have settled the fate of millions, Churchill thought: “Let us burn the paper.” No, Stalin, replied, “You keep it.” It exists today in Britain’s National Archive (PREM 3/667[169]). The “naughty paper” was taken seriously enough by the two foreign ministers. Eden and Molotov haggled over the percentages as they were bargaining over a rug in a bazaar, with Molotov trying eventually successfully, to trim Britain’s figures. But Eden never spoke of sphere of influence, considering the paper a mere “practical agreement on how problems would be worked out in each country... general than precise.” From this stark display of power politics, a vast subtext has grown to support the idea that Churchill and Roosevelt at Yalta Conference, in February 1945, selling out the Balkans and Eastern Europe. Generally, leaving its peoples to a communized future. In Bulgaria and Romania which fell quickly behind what Churchill would later call the “iron curtain,” Britain didn’t even have 10 percent influence.”


Churchill told Stalin: “Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. Your armies are in Rumania and Bulgaria. We have interests, missions, and agents there. Don’t let us get at cross purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety per cent predominance in Rumania, for us to have ninety percent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia? While this was being translated Churchill wrote out on a half-sheet of paper.” http://cassidyglobalcoldwar.weebly.com/percentage-deal.html.
That tragedy for the Romanians after the Soviet Union’s ultimatum of 26 June 1940 demanding Bessarabia and, unexpectedly, Northern Bukovina from Romania, following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed in Moscow in the early hours of 24 August 1939 (but dated 23 August), which included a secret protocol dividing Northern and Eastern Europe into German and Soviet spheres of influence, anticipating potential “territorial and political rearrangements” of these countries.

It took almost half a century to have recovered the strong will of a united Romanian people, not afraid of a new turning point, this time called the Revolution of December 1989, with reverberations seemingly being felt, two decades after that, in the Middle East, through the still ongoing uprisings and transformations put under the label “Arab Spring.” And here we could have another “Romanian lesson,” one subtly defined by a renowned historian: “The Union/Unity of Romania does not depend on the past, it depends on the present. We are today one only nation because what we want is right that – one only nation. Romania is our country (of those living here today)... If, at a moment or another, the Romanians wouldn’t want any more to be one nation, they wouldn’t be...”

This Romanian message, echoing the motto put by us at the beginning of this Part II of the article, seems to resonate strongly, in the specific context, with the present situation in critical areas of the Middle East:

– Concerning the myriad Syrian groups and forces claiming the legitimacy of speaking (and deciding) on behalf of the Syrian people and nation – competing armed groups with distinct backers, ideologies, and goals, the persons involved ranging from dissident Syrians and autonomy-seeking Kurds to Sunni jihadists backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar – do they really want, in the end, a united country? How would they be capable of reaching that objective while they are far from able of getting an agreement, before anything else, on a “united negotiation table” – some of them participating to “peace talks” in Geneva, others in Astana, others in Sochi? Are those forces, and their leaders, some located in the region, others even in Europe, aware of and acquiescing to the real motives behind their foreign backers’ involvement in Syria under the guise of toppling Assad or otherwise? A list in this regard, far from exhaustive, includes: “America’s goal: mainly to undercut Iranian and Russian influence; Turkey’s motive: to expand its influence in former Ottoman lands and to counter Kurdish ambitions for territorial autonomy, if not statehood, in Syria and Iraq; Saudi Arabia wanted to undermine Iran’s influence in Syria while expanding its own; (iv). Israel aimed to counter Iran, which threatens Israel through Hezbollah in Lebanon, Syria near the Golan Heights, and Hamas in Gaza; (v). Qatar wanted to bring a Sunni Islamist regime to power;”

“fighters from Kazakhstan came to kill the Assad regime...”

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backers, while fighters from Afghanistan came to kill its rivals”\textsuperscript{84}, any clash with a “sectarian flair” being bad for any future national project in Syria.

– A similar problem is raised by the actual sectarian and religious mess in Libya and Yemen, the latter seemingly back in the secession mood that preceded the North and South union of 1990; as for Libya, it was never, even in the best of time of Gaddafi rule, coalesced into a full national unity.

– And then, the question seemingly with no chance to receiving, for the foreseeable future, a positive answer: what is the determined vision of the Israeli party, respectively of the Palestinian one, with regard to the state(s) they finally want to see in the region, as a final solution to their historical conflict, a dilemma generating the frank wondering of President Donald Trump: “Right now. I would say the Palestinians are not looking to make peace. And I am not necessarily sure that Israel is looking to make peace. So we are just going to have to see what happens. I think both sides will have to make hard compromises to reach a peace agreement.”\textsuperscript{85}

Maybe, a comparison with the Romanians’ experience can be of help in drawing a “collective” reply to so many open questions and knotty dilemmas challenging the Middle East’s future: in the making of the Middle East post-WWI, the region’s peoples and nations have been compelled, for one reason or another, to experiment a particular brand of recipe in national building and politics, namely one with a (too) high “proportion” of foreign inputs, a substantiation of foreign particular interests prevailing for too long, quite often to the detriment of local needs and interests, mainly when the time played against the region. Ultimately, “The Middle East has a knack for sucking external powers into its conflicts.”\textsuperscript{86}

Seemingly a matter related to the regional political and societal DNA, knowing that, before “the inflection point” represented by the conclusion and aftermaths of WWI (with a three plus decades of British and French influence and interventions, and “the relay” handed over to the US), the region had been under four empires – those of the Persians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Ottomans/Turks, “which was the last in time and the greatest in extent”\textsuperscript{87}, but only one, “The Arab Empire,” being a Middle East “native,” more exactly with the original roots in The Arab Peninsula.

The Arab world wasn’t the only place where borders were drawn that local populations refused to accept – it happened in Europe too, what was specific to the Middle East were “three factors which led to fatal and long-term consequences”:\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} James Dorsey, China Steps into the Maelstrom of the Middle East, International Policy Digest, 18 FEB 2018 https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/02/18/china-steps-into-the-maelstrom-of-the-middle-east/?utm_source=International+Policy+Digest+Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=46b7d844dc-5.
\textsuperscript{87} Lord Kinross, op. cit., p. 613.
First: Whereas many Europeans had begun to develop national identities and political classes by the beginning of the 19th century at least, WWI yanked Arabs out of their historical reverie. The Ottomans took a relatively hands-off approach to governing their Middle Eastern provinces, but they also did little to introduce any kind of political structure to the region or to promote the development of an intellectual or economic elite. On the contrary, at the first sign of a progressing national identity, the Ottoman rulers would banish or execute the movement’s leaders. This heritage weighed on the Middle East at the dawn of the 20th century, and the region’s pre-modern conflation of state and religion further hampered its political growth.

Second: The capriciousness with which France and Great Britain redrew the boundaries of the Ottoman Empire’s former Arab provinces left behind the feeling that a conspiracy was afoot – a feeling which grew into an obsession in the ensuing decades. Even today, the legend lives on that the mysterious buckle in the desert border between Jordan and Saudi Arabia is the result of someone bumping the elbow of Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill as he was drawing the line. That, of course, is absurd – but it isn’t too far removed from the manner in which Sykes, Picot, Lloyd George and Clemenceau in fact carved up the region.

Thirdly: In contrast to Europe, the tension left behind by the untenable peace in the Arab world was not released in a single, violent eruption. During World War II, the region was not a primary theater of war. But the unresolved conflicts left behind by World War I, combined with the spill-over effects from the catastrophic World War II in Europe – the founding of Israel, the Cold War and the race for Persian Gulf resources – added up to a historical burden for the Middle East. And they have resulted in an unending conflict – a conflict that has yet to come to an end even today, almost 100 years after that fateful summer in 1914.

Today, whatever the strength of the drivers behind continuing foreign/external interests and interventions in MENA remains not less powerful: “The region’s divisions are attracting yet further foreign interventions which generate yet further divisions, as well as conflict. Generally resource-rich but institutions poor (with a fair degree of variance between individual states), the region has been unable to ward off outside domination and exploitation.” 89 More, “in many of the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East – Libya, Syria, and Yemen, let alone address the Palestine-Israel issue, foreigners have had far more influence than Arabs.”

Hence legitimate calls for a balanced approach domestic-external affairs: “While the Arabs should continue to engage with the outside world and strengthen their strategic relationships and alliances, they also must become less dependent on others. They must take charge of their own agenda, and become the primary force defining their future and that of their countries, developing their own

89 Tackling the MENA…. p. 22.  
national-security capacities and address regional problems and preventing military conflicts.”

Now, at the beginning of 2018, there is an ironic reverse of that “centennial” trend, and that in what appears, in some Western Europe, namely France, as an “unbearable” foreign influence in their domestic affairs, with sources in Arab/Muslim world: president Emmanuel Macron expressed his intention to proceed to a complete reorganization of the Muslim cult in France, aiming at “reducing the influence of Arab countries which hinder the entrance of the French Islam into modernity. Imams’ financing and formation being among the most sensitive issues to settle given that they are two ways through which foreign influences are exercised on the French Islam, namely contribution by the Persian Gulf and Maghreb to the construction of mosques in France, plus the fact that the 300 French Imams are paid as clerks by foreign states.”

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