SOWING CRISIS
The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East

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Assessing Empire: Western Footprints and American's Foreign Policy in the Middle East
The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood

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OIL AND THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

Historians are notorious for their preoccupation with beginnings, with origins, with the starting points of historical periods. Different scholars point to different moments as marking the beginning of the Cold War. However, there is general agreement about the first indications in the Middle East of the confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union that dominated the succeeding decades. These were linked to a series of apparently grave crises that took place in 1945 and 1946 along the southeastern perimeter of the newly redefined sphere of Soviet power, drawing in the major wartime allies, the USSR, the United States, and Great Britain. These crises involved Iran, Turkey, and the adjacent Balkans, and started in the closing stages of World War II, continuing immediately after the war ended and through 1947, by which time the Middle East had been fully drawn into the Cold War.

These linked Middle Eastern and Balkan flare-ups, together with others at the same time in eastern and central Europe, were among the first signs that the precarious wartime alliance between the three major allies might not be long-lived, and are generally considered to be among the most important markers of the beginning of the Cold War. They aroused deep suspicions in the United States and Britain as to Soviet intentions, while the actions of the Americans and the British and their responses to Soviet initiatives in these regions were in turn causes for serious alarm in Moscow.

President Harry S. Truman's address of March 12, 1947, to a joint session of Congress about these developments, which came to be known as the Truman Doctrine, was a key turning point in the Cold War as a whole. It was also the culmination of the sequence of events that began with their 1945 grand alliance in the defeat of Axis powers and continued until then. The United States had not extended military and financial aid to both countries in confronting domestic communist forces and the Soviet Union (though the latter was never mentioned by name in the speech) "confusion and disorder might well spread throughout the entire Middle East."

This address, delivered less than two years after World War II ended, marked a notable evolution in the positioning of the United States in two respects. The first was vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, which was now being described publicly by the president as a rival and potential enemy. Truman's address was one of the first major landmarks of the Cold War, and showed clearly that a full-blow direct and indirect confrontation between East and West was already well under way in the Middle East. Second, this speech constituted the first time an American president had designated the Middle East as an area that was crucial to the national security interests of the United States. It thus signified that American power had become global and extended to areas never before considered vital to decision makers in Washington or to the American public. In consequence, Turkey and Greece, and later on other Middle Eastern states, became dependent on the United States, and in some measure became client states of this nascent superpower.

The United States and the Soviet Union had already become deeply engaged in the Middle East at an early stage of their participation in World War II. Although other great powers (in-
clashing (until Russia) had throughout their modern history regarded this region as being of considerable strategic importance, it is ironic in view of their later deep involvement in the Middle East that in the immediate pre-World War II period neither the foreign policy of the Soviet Union nor that of the United States laid particular stress on the region. This was the case at least until the two powers were drawn into World War II by surprise attacks in June and December 1941, respectively. Before that, leaders of both countries appeared far more concerned with events in Europe and East Asia, notably the frightening military rise of Nazi Germany and the growth of expansionist Japanese militarism. For both, the Middle East was by comparison a foreign-policy backwater through the end of the 1930s.

This situation changed dramatically immediately after the Soviet Union and the United States were attacked and thereby brought into World War II. Soon after the German conquests of the Balkans and Crete in early 1941, the Middle East and adjacent areas became the theater of some of the war's most decisive and strategically important military operations. This became even more the case starting with Hitler's 1941 Stalingrad and North African campaigns, which for a time became the focal points of the war with Germany. These two major offensives outward, combined with covert Nazi subversion in Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran, and efforts to woo neutral Turkey, constituted an attempt at a vast pincer movement, with its focus on the Middle East and the neighboring region to the north of it between the Black Sea and the Caspian. Should the Wehrmacht—which was underfunded until this point in the war—have been successful in this great gamble, Hitler's armies would have controlled the southern Soviet Union, nearly the entire Mediterranean and Black Sea basins, and most of the Middle East. They would have been in a position to dominate the Suez Canal and with it the shortest route to India. The possibility of such an extremely dangerous strategic situation emerging in 1941 naturally alarmed American, British, and Soviet leaders and military commanders to concentrate their attention on this region from an early stage of the war. The critical situation in the Middle East clarified in the most urgent possible way the vital strategic position of the region for those who might have been previously unaware of it. Given that they had focused relatively little on this area in the prewar era, the key American and Soviet strategists who directed their country's war efforts had to adapt quickly. The lessons they learned during this difficult year of the war were to inform their thinking throughout the Cold War.

From the eastern Mediterranean the Soviet Union began to focus seriously on the Middle East at this point in World War II, the region's strategic importance to them was almost self-evident, and its continuing prominence thereafter during the Cold War was easy to understand. The region lay at the juncture of three continents; it bordered four major bodies of water, the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Indian Ocean; and it lay immediately to the south of the borders of Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus, and Transcaucasia. For all these reasons it had long attracted the attention of both global powers, even if in the decades before World War II neither American nor Soviet policymakers had seemed particularly concerned with it. As soon as the war began, however, the region's geographic characteristics quickly attracted the attention of strategists in both Washington and Moscow. The vast German offensives just described, finally blunted by the Soviets at Stalingrad and by the British at El Alamein in North Africa, and the great victories for both that followed, had the effect of further undermining the region's already considerable strategic importance for leaders in Moscow, London, and Washington.

But something other than its intrinsic strategic importance
and the fact that early on in World War II the Middle East was clearly a focus of the grand strategy of the Axis powers drew
the attention of Cold War policymakers in the United States and the USSR to this region. Even before the outbreak of the Cold War, an
unsuspected symmetrical simultaneous interest in Middle Eastern oil was shown by American and Soviet leaders at the highest
level, although the oil question has won relatively limited attention from historians by contrast with other elements of the
broader strategic picture. Considerable concern about establishing access to the oil resources of the Middle East was indeed
manifested while World War II was still raging, and while both powers were focused on Germany, rather than each other, as a
vital. While linked to long-standing strategic factors that had been brought to the surface in the course of the war, such as con-
trol of the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the route to India, the interest in access to oil involved an entirely new emphasis, at
the same time as it was linked to traditional approaches of both powers. It is a minor irony that at the outset of what was soon to
become the atomic age, an earlier form of energy was to play such a prominent role in the confrontation between the two
nuclear superpowers.

The fact that as early as 1945 both the United States and the Soviet Union were paying considerable attention to Middle
Eastern oil does call for some explanation. Both powers were major producers of oil, the world’s two greatest, both had con-
siderable reserves, and both had traditionally enjoyed self-sufficiency in oil production. Indeed, in 1940 the United States
was the world’s largest oil producer, with 63 percent of world production, with the USSR second, with 10.2 percent. In this
respect they were in a far better position than all their great-power rivals during the first half of the twentieth century.

Germany, France, Japan, and Italy had limited or no domestic sources of oil, even as the development of air and land transport
and of various new forms of military technology drastically in-
creased demand for this vital commodity and made it consid-
erably more strategically important than ever before. Even the
great British Empire was dependent upon overseas supplies of oil
distant and unstable lands, notably Iran and Iraq.

World War II, however, had further underlined the crucial and growing strategic importance of oil, which was coming
to play a more vital role in warfare than it had ever had before. Now not only fleets of ships, as in earlier conflicts, but also growing
fleets of trucks, tanks, and planes were completely dependent upon oil products for propulsion. The armistice of all the powers
still used railways and animal transport, but their increasingly crucial mechanized forces were entirely dependent on oil by-
products, as were their air forces and navies. This vital nexus was increasingly apparent to all Allied war planners. It was clear
in particular to American military strategists, who by 1944 di-
rected a major portion of the U.S. Army Air Force’s strate-
gic bombing offensive against oil production, storage, and trans-
port facilities in Germany and Japan and the countries under
their occupation. Thus in June 1944, the man in charge of the
European portion of this bombing campaign, the commander
of the USAAF Strategic Air Forces in Europe, Gen. Carl Spaatz,
issued an order to his commanders to the “primary strategic
aim of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces is now to deny oil to enemy
air forces.” By this point a valuable lesson about the strategic
importance of oil in wartime had clearly been learned by the top
levels of the American military command. It was feared effec-
tively by the end of the war, American bombing of German oil
facilities had been so devastating that on both the eastern and
western fronts, German panzers could not move and the Luft-
waft could not fly for lack of fuel.

If both American and Soviet leaders and strategists came to understand the vital importance of denying oil to their enemies
in order to achieve victory, their own frightening wartime experi-
ences gave both of these allies reason to be concerned about
their own oil supplies in the future. The Nazi offensive south-
eastward toward the Caucasus in the spring and summer of 1942
had been directed in large part at depleting the USSR of its fuel
supplies from the rich Baku oil fields, the country's main source
of oil. Had the great 1942 Baku oil strike that was finally
brought to a halt at Stalingrad succeeded, it might have crippled
the Soviet war effort by depriving it of oil, and perhaps changed
the course of the war. Similarly, had the southern arm of the
German pincer, led by the Afrika Korps commanded by Field
Marshal Erwin Rommel and including Italian forces, managed
to break through the British defense in North Africa, not just
Egypt and the Suez Canal but also the oil fields and refineries
of the Middle East, on which a large part of the Allied war effort in
that region depended, would have been vulnerable.

Meanwhile, the massive German U-boat offensive of 1942,
directed in large measure against Allied tankers in the Atlantic
and the Caribbean, if successful could have had a similar effect
of cutting off the fuel supply across the Atlantic to Britain and
the Allies operations in the entire European theater. Thus dur-
ing the early years of the war, each of the three great victorious
powers had suffered serious strains relating to their own oil sup-
plies and facilities. Britain had been conscious of its vulnera-
bility in this regard since the moment before World War I when
it took the momentous decision to make its fleet (previously fu-
eled by coal readily available at home in the United Kingdom)
dependent on Middle Eastern oil supplies.1 Such issues were
new to American and Soviet war planners, however. Moreover,
by 1942 both the United States and the Soviet Union were aware
that their economies' rapidly growing need for oil, stoked by in-
crased wartime demand, might soon outstrip their respective
domestic supplies. In the case of the United States, by 1943 de-
mand for refined petroleum products was already beginning
to exceed supply (if one does not count production in Mexico,
Venezuela, and the Caribbean).2

This was the crucial background to the uneasy parallel moves
relating to Middle Eastern oil made by the leaders of both coun-
tries at the very end of World War II. Thus, on his way back from
Yalta, the ailing President Franklin D. Roosevelt met on February
14, 1945, with the Saudi Arabian monarch 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud, on
the deck of the heavy cruiser USS Quincy in the Great
Bitter Lake, in Egypt's Suez Canal.3 We have seen that Saudi
Arabia was already linked to the United States by the oil accord
signed in 1933 with ARAMCO. This consortium formed by
Standard Oil of California (later joined by a number of part-
ner companies, most of which had originally been parts of the
old Rockefeller-owned Standard Oil empire that had been bro-
ten up decades earlier by federal antitrust law)4 had enabled the
powerful U.S. oil industry to break a near complete British
monopoly on Middle Eastern oil dating back to before World
War I. Saudi Arabia's oil reserves were already known to be
great, and by 1945 Saudi production had surpassed that of
Bahrein and was approaching that of Iraq, which it surpassed
the following year, becoming second only to Iran in the Middle
East.5 By 1945 the Saudi oil production had already begun to be of
considerable help in the war effort.6

The gravely ill American president, who looks vividly worth
in photos of the encounter,7 was taking part in this unpre-
cedented meeting with the ruler of a small, faraway country for
many reasons.8 As was suggested in chapter 1, these included
the fact that starting in 1943, American military planners be-
gan to be in demand in helping rights for U.S. aircraft in eastern
Saudi Arabia (which were soon afterward to be acquired at
'Doha'), Moreover, we have seen that Saudi Arabia was one
of only two countries in the Middle East not subject directly
or indirectly to the colonial control of the European powers, meaning the United States might be able to obtain exclusive banni-
ging rights there, parallel to American companies’ exclusive oil con-
cessions.

The meeting took place essentially, however, because the war
had taught the president and his advisors the crucial strategic
importance of oil, and because it was already beginning to be
clear to them how great the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia were.
President Roosevelt himself, an assistant secretary of the navy
during World War I, undoubtedly already knew a great deal
about how vital oil was even before World War II impressed its
strategic importance on everyone in a decision-making capac-
ity in Washington. In any case, less than two months after this
meeting, Roosevelt was dead, but with this personal contact
he had inaugurated a crucial direct connection with the Saudi
regime at the highest level.13 The close link between the power
of the United States and the leaders of a country in a strategic
position, a country that contains the world’s largest proven res-
erves of oil, has continued until this day, despite repeated ups
and downs. These have occurred over issues relating to Palestine
and Israel, and most recently about the Saudi role in support
of Islamic militants in Iraq and elsewhere in the two decades
following joint American-Saudi sponsorship of such militants
in the war against the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Never-
theless, the relationship initiated by Roosevelt and Ibn Saud has
had incalculable importance for the subsequent global capabil-
ities of the United States, due to the pivotal role in the world oil
market of Saudi Arabia’s oil wealth, and to Saudi Arabia’s con-
scious direction of a huge proportion of its oil revenues into the
American economy, whether by the purchase of treasury bonds,
real estate, weapons, or other products.

STALIN’S MATCHING MOVES ON OIL

In an odd coincidence, a few months after the American presi-
dent’s meeting with Ibn Saud, in June 1944, Roosevelt’s opposite
number at Yalta, Marshal Josef Stalin, signed a decree order-
ing Soviet geologists and oil technicians to enter Iran (which
at that time was still under occupation by Soviet, British, and
American troops) and to begin exploring for oil in the Soviet-
occupied northern part of the country.14 Earlier, in 1944, the
Soviets had asked the Iranian government for a five-year conces-
sion to explore for oil in the country’s northern region around
the Caspian Sea. This request had been refused by the pro-
British, but increasingly nationalist, Iranian government of the
day.15 In defiance of this refusal, the Soviets went ahead in a sub-
iercise fashion with the oil exploration ordered by Stalin in
the northern areas of the country controlled by their occupation
forces. In the event, no oil was found by the Soviets, nor were any
significant quantities ever found in the north of the coun-
cry, all of Iran’s known reserves are in the south, along the Gulf.
Nevertheless, these Soviet initiatives were unprecedented for a
country that since the Bolshevik Revolution had endeavored to
be economically self-sufficient to the point of austerity. They testify
to both the newfound power of the USSR at the end of World
War II and to the changed role of oil in the calculations of the
Soviet leadership. After the 1944 effort to obtain an oil conces-
sion had been turned down by the Iranians, Stalin was in effect
upsetting the ante in 1945 by ordering Soviet geologists to search
secretly for oil in Soviet-occupied northern Iran, without the
permission of the Iranian central government in Tehran.

Iran at that stage was by far the largest oil producer in the
Middle East. The entirety of its oil production had been com-
pletely controlled by a state-controlled British company, the
Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC), since Britain had won an

13
14
15
exclusive concessions in 1901, secured by businesswoman William Knox D'Arcy, to explore for and exploit oil resources throughout Iran (except in the five northern provinces bordering Russia). This sweeping concession, extracted from the weak Iranian monarchy of the day, gave the British company extraordinarily advantageous terms, and allowed it to secure a massive share of the profits and an even smaller proportion of total oil revenues. In the 1930s the new, more independent Iranian government of Reza Shah Pahlavi had tried to bring the AIOC under greater Iranian control and to get a larger share of oil profits. The British company, backed by the might of the British imperial government, proved completely intransigent, categorically refusing the Iranian demands. Such a humiliating defeat and the intransigent arrogance of the British left a bitter memory in the minds of Iranian patriots that was to fuel a later Iranian government's expropriation of the British-owned company in the early 1950s.

In 1941, however, there was a new factor in Iran, where Russia and Britain had dailed for influence for over a century: American troops had been stationed there since 1941 to help send lend-lease supplies to the USSR, and American oil companies had just begun making efforts with the Iranian government (cassuming stymied by the efforts of the British, who still retained great influence over the Iranian government) to secure oil concessions in Iran. Nevertheless, the oil exploration ordered by Stalin primarily constituted a direct challenge to British predominance over the Iranian oil industry, which since 1901 had been concentrated exclusively in British hands in the southern regions of the country. This was a challenge as well to the nationalistic Iranians, who for decades had been highly sensitive when matters relating to their country's oil were concerned, and who were already chafing under the presence in Iran of troops from Russia and Britain, part of a recurring pattern of intervention by the two countries going back for many decades.

The launching of oil exploration ordered by Stalin was followed two weeks later by even more far-reaching orders from the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party to its top party official in Soviet Azerbaijan, Nizami Bagirov. The Soviet Azerbaijani party chief was ordered in early July 1941 to begin organizing a separatist movement in Soviet Azerbaijan, as well as launching similar activities in Soviet Kurdistan and other regions. Orders went out from Moscow a week later to bring leading Azerbaijani communists to Baku for consultations, to support the creation of an Azeri Democratic Party, and to promote separatist movements in Soviet Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and other regions. By September, Soviet Azerbaijani had escaped from the national government of Azerbaijan, and in November, Soviet Azerbaijan was officially proclaimed an autonomous republic, while in Iranian Kurdistan, the Kurdish Middle Republic was established in December 1941 and was formally proclaimed in January 1942. Both of these newly created autonomous regions, in Soviet Azerbaijan and Soviet Kurdistan, were preserved from the intervention of troops of the Iranian central government by Soviet occupation forces.

Beyond these clandestine and overt Soviet moves, the Soviet Union showed a noticeable reluctance to remove its troops from Iran after the war was over and they were expected to leave according to the treaty governing the presence of Allied forces in the country. Britain was similarly loath to withdraw troops, which were also obligated by treaty to withdraw within months of the war's end. Britain eventually did pull out its troops, while by the end of 1945, the United States had promptly withdrawn its much smaller occupation contingents. Together, the USSR's clandestine efforts at oil exploration and its support of separatist movements, combined with its constant growing on the withdrawal of Soviet troops, provoked the Iranian-Soviet crisis of 1944-46. Given the sensitivity of these issues, this rapidly turned into one of the first major postwar crises between the
Union in the areas of Kars and Ardzhan in the northeastern corner of Turkey (which will be discussed later), and simultaneous moves in the Balkans, notably external support for the Greek communists in their civil war with the British-backed royalists.

These were seen as constituting a pattern of aggressive moves by Stalin, parallel with others in Eastern Europe, which were hailed only because of a feint or threat of response by the West. In the case of Iran, we now know that American military planners certainly feared a Soviet push southward into the oil fields of Iran and Iraq in case of war, and were pessimistic about their ability to hold either in the face of a determined Soviet offensive. Given the growing appreciation in Washington of the importance of Middle Eastern oil, there were very serious concerns. American policymakers meanwhile were aware that a Soviet naval presence at the Turkish Straits would have opened the Mediterranean to the Soviet fleet, especially Soviet submarines. Beyond this, a communist victory in Greece would have meant the spread of Soviet influence into the Aegean and well beyond those areas to Eastern Europe that had traditionally been ceded to the USSR by Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta.

In that, serious strategic concerns were at play for both sides. It has been argued persuasively that the Soviet Union’s actions in Iran, notably support for the Amin and Kardash autonomy movement, and the reluctance to withdraw its occupation forces, were motivated by an aim to push its defensive perimeter as far south as possible. This was because the planned Dhabah air base and other Western air bases in the Middle East could be used by the U.S. Strategic Air Command to bomb southern Russian targets, notably vital and highly vulnerable oil facilities and heavy industry moved outwards and southward from the western parts of the Soviet Union during the war. The concern was not entirely fanciful. American strategic planning in case of war with the USSR did call for bombing
of oil and other industrial facilities in the swath of the country from bases in the Middle East, which was almost the only direction from which they could be reached by the heavy B-17 bombers of the day."

It may well be the case that none of these concerted Soviet moves in Iran, Turkey, and the Balkans should be understood somewhat differently than how they are presented in the standard historiography. At Yalta and before, Stalin had agreed with Churchill to accept British domination over the Greek government (in return for Stalin being granted a free hand elsewhere), and it was the Soviets who upset this early division of spheres of influence. It was primarily independent Yugoslav support—rival to Marshal Josip Broz Tito (who even at this early stage was not taking orders from Moscow)—that sustained the Greek communists against the support of Stalin. Indeed, the Soviet leader counseled compromise with the right-wing government in Athens, and later impassively stood aside and watched the Greek communists being crushed by British- and American-supported royalist forces, and their communists killed and shipped off to prison camps.56

And at least in part as a response to revision, in the USSR's favor, of the Montreux Treaty governing passage through the Turkish Straits was concerned, Stalin was acting in keeping with a tacit understanding reached at Yalta with the Americans and British in response to their inability to use this waterway to send desperately needed supplies to the USSR in the most difficult days of World War II. It was in his demands on Turkey for the reversions to the USSR of its post-World War I territorial cessions to Turkey (which is to say the hardwon to Russia of provinces that had earlier been sundered from the Ottoman Empire and were returned to Turkey after the revolution by the Bolsheviks), and his meddling in Iranian internal affairs that Stalin's behavior was the most indefensible.

Stalin can undoubtedly be said to have been following in the footsteps of the tsars in bullying both Turkey and Iran, taking advantage of the USSR's newfound power. However, overtur- ing them may have been, his government's demands on Turkey and interference in Iran may also have been a defensive reaction to the USSR's demonstrated vulnerability along its southern frontiers during World War II. If this is the case, it was prompted as well by Stalin's long-standing fear of moves by the Western powers in this region, where his own career as a revolutionary started. More specifically, the Kau-Armenian region offered the Soviet port of Batum, where many Soviet oil facilities were located, and thus, as in Iran, this attempted push southward may have involved an attempt to create a buffer around this strategically sensitive area of the southern Soviet Union. In any case, once rebuffed by the Turks over the issue of frontier revisions, the Soviets dropped the matter, which was not mentioned again after the spring of 1944.57

Stalin's aggressive initiatives were in turn interpreted by Churchill (who had first entered British public life as an MP in 1900 when the Conservative statesman Lord Salisbury was still prime minister) as a continuation of the old Anglo-Russian rivalry over these regimes dating back to the high epoch of the Eastern Question, the competition between European powers for domination over the Ottoman Empire and adjacent regions.58 And even after Churchill left office in 1945, there seems little doubt that his deep and enduring suspicions of Russia, and his virulent anti-Bolshevism, were shared by key members of the government of Prime Minister Clement Attlee, who succeeded him. As I suggested in Chapter 1, it also seems clear that these attitudes helped to influence the thinking of many American decision-makers who were new to dealing with this part of the world, and gave a aura of responsibility to the existing anti-communist positions of others in the United States, especially politically isolationist Republicans.

Nevertheless, for all the enduring strategic elements that
were at work here, the focus by both the United States and the Soviet Union on Middle Eastern oil was a new factor, and marked the beginning of a novel phase for both. Rarely had the foreign policy of either resource-rich power previously been so closely linked to attempts to achieve exclusive control over such resources outside their own territory (although the American oil industry had long dominated the oil production of the Western Hemisphere, and aggressively pursued opportunities elsewhere, including its striking success in Saudi Arabia in 1935). The two new superpowers' parallel moves regarding Middle Eastern oil, the defensive ammunitions of the Soviets regarding their own closely held domestic oil resources, and the projected targeting of the latter by United States strategic planners, were all clear signs of the coming of a new age of competition for world dominance. They marked an extension into the postwar era of both superpowers' newly enhanced strategic concerns and fears regarding what is today called "energy independence," fears born of their traumatic experiences involving threats to their own oil supplies in World War II.

The United States and the Soviet Union were in fact both acting in the Middle East (and elsewhere) in ways that marked significant departures from their previous practices. Since the foundation of the Republic, American strategies, fortified by the interests of the founders and settlers, had traditionally disdained (militarily) the enraging alliance systems and balance-of-power calculations of the "Old World." This did not mean that the United States had not been engaged in the region, and certainly had ties to the region in its own hemispheres. It was, for example, in the last years of the American industry, that it bought a large share of the tracks and sea power from expanding worldwide. Nor did it mean that an expansion of American naval and economic power into the Pacific was the flexible

"opening of Japan," the colonial seizure of Hawaii and the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, and the capture of a large segment of the China trade.

However, although the United States had become a great power, and indeed in some respects a hegemonic power, in the Western Hemisphere and the Pacific long before World War II, it was briefly acting like a major power on the rest of the world's stage. Even President Wilson's decision to bring the United States into the World War I alongside Britain and France and against Germany had been undertaken as an exception to previously accepted patterns of disdain for European entanglements. Moreover, in order to overcome the isolationist instincts of large segments of the American people, this exceptional action had to be beget by Wilson in the aftermath of a war and postwar period of the war, and it was known to be extended to the colonized countries, for example, and of the less-than-idealistic outcomes of the war as they were later hammer out at the Paris Peace Conference. Soon afterward, the United States returned to its traditional position of semi-isolationism regarding Europe and much of the rest of the world, in spite of its demoralized economic and financial power, a status that lasted throughout the span and years.

The presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and more immediately the outbreak of World War II, marked a completely new departure for the United States. Before Pearl Harbor, at Roosevelt's instructions, the United States launched a major milli-
Many bold and daring leaders, recognizing the need for a new world order, began to restructure the post-war world. The United States emerged as a dominant global power, using its economic and military might to influence the outcomes of various conflicts.

The situation in Europe was particularly tense, with the Cold War looming on the horizon. The United States and the Soviet Union, each with their own ambitious plans and ideologies, began to compete for global dominance. The arms race accelerated, with both nations stockpiling nuclear weapons, leading to a tense standoff that lasted for decades.

Economically, the post-war period was also marked by significant changes. The United States became the economic powerhouse of the world, with its allies and partners relying on American aid to rebuild their economies. The Marshall Plan, in particular, played a crucial role in this process, helping to stabilize Europe and lay the foundations for long-term economic growth.

As the world entered the 21st century, the legacy of the post-war period continued to shape international relations. The United States, still the world's only superpower, faced numerous challenges, including the rise of China, the spread of terrorism, and the ongoing struggle to maintain stability in regions spanning the globe. These challenges would require a new approach to diplomacy, as nations sought to navigate the complexities of the modern world.
applied in part to dealings with countries in the south of the USSR. Soviet relations with the states of the Middle East after the end of the Russian Civil War had been characterized by an effort to give the appearance of a sharp break from the heavy-handed imperialist practices of the tsarist regime. Generations of Russian rulers had bullied and seized territory from Iran, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia’s other southern neighbors. Even as the newly formed Soviet Union in effect re-created the tsarist empire at home in a new and different form, through the imposition of Soviet Socialist Republics on the submerged peoples of the former Russian domains, in its foreign policy and economic dealings with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan in particular, the young Soviet regime was careful to take an entirely new tack.10 This started immediately after the revolution with Trotsky, the first commissar for foreign affairs, publishing the tsarist secret treaties, including those between Russia and Britain and France for the partition of the Ottoman Empire. It continued with a series of bilateral treaties negotiated in 1920 with Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, whereby the Soviet Union renounced all tsarist commitments extracted unfairly from these countries, returned border areas earlier seized from the Ottoman Empire, and promised noninterference in their internal affairs.11 Followed by other similar treaties that reinforced this emphasis on equitable relations, these accords were by and large respected for two decades by a Soviet Union still weak from the civil war, foreign intervention, and the tumultuous internal upheavals caused by Stalin’s brutal rule. Lenin and his colleagues had succeeded Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan as friendly buffer states to the south. At the same time, they prevented any possible continuation of post-World War I British efforts to use these countries as springboards for anti-Bolshevik intervention.

With the new dangers and new opportunities World War II revealed to Stalin and the leadership in Moscow, and with the

new power the war offered them, the Soviet Union, too, began a series of radical and far-reaching departures in its foreign policy, in particular toward the countries in its immediate south. As we have seen, Iran, whose territorial integrity the USSR had promised to respect in a series of interwar treaties with that country, was invaded and occupied in a coordinated effort by Soviet and British forces in June 1941. The two powers installed Reza Shah and installed his pliable young son Mohammad Reza Shah on the throne. The newly allied powers had feared that Iran under Reza Shah would align itself with the Axis in the wake of Hitler’s invasion of the Balkans and Russia and the ongoing Nazi military successes in North Africa. London and Moscow made common cause in Iran once again, as they had so many times in the past, in spite of the rivalries between them. As in its World War I occupation of Ottoman territory in Iraq adjoining the Iranian oil fields, and in its remilitarizing in 1936 of a local force called the South Persia Rifles commanded by British officers from the Indian army and tasked with dominating southern Iran,12 Britain was also determined to control and protect the vital oil supplies it obtained from Iran and other parts of the Gulf region.

The Soviet Union and Britain had another reason for this occupation: it made it possible to turn Iran into a corridor for the shipment of millions of tons of vital military supplies to the USSR. These supplies, primarily American in origin, were crucial to the Soviet Union’s capability to wage the Nazis. The corridor through Iran was all the more necessary since, with the Mediterranean and Black Sea having become war zones, the Turkish Straits closed to naval movement by Turkey under the terms of the 1936 Montreux Treaty, the Baltic dominated by the Nazis, and countries to Soviet Arctic ports subject to constant German submarine and air attack from bases in the North Sea and Norway, Iran was indispensable as a supply route.13 Soon after Pearl
Harbus, U.S. military forces pinned what became a trilateral occupation of Iran.

None of these pressing reasons for Iran’s occupation by the three great powers made foreign military domination of their country any easier to stomach for the country’s population. Iranians were always keen of British and Russian intervention in their country, which had occurred multiple times in the twentieth century alone. Nor did these reasonable-sounding wartime pretexts for intervention change the fact that Soviet policy toward Iran had changed radically from its relatively benign course between 1911 and 1917. As we have just seen, it changed still more radically at war’s end, with the Soviet effort to obtain oil concessions from Iran, and other forms of pressure on that country, including the Soviets dragging their feet on the withdrawal of their troops, and their clandestine support for Kurdish and Azeri separatist movements and for the Iranian Communist Party, the Tudeh.

**Turkey and Soviet “Aspirations”**

Soviet policy changed toward Turkey as well. In the wake of the founding of the Turkish Republic, Moscow had established reasonably good relations with Kemal Atatürk’s republican regime, marked by the March 1924 treaty and four later ones in 1934, 1937, 1950, and 1953, and it maintained them throughout most of the interwar period. However, in 1929, just as World War II began, the Soviet Union had tried to join in an attempt from Turkey revisions in its favor of the 1920 Montreux Treaty governing passage through the Turkish Straits. Beyond this, Turkey’s isolation during the first years of World War II (which lasted the initial phase of important elements of the Turkish Republic’s political-military establishment toward the Azeri powers, and its closing of the Turkish Straits to the shipment of war materiel to the USSR, clearly had angered the Soviets by the end of the war. Typically, Stalin forgave none of this, and in 1942 he was in a far stronger position than he had been in 1939. Already at the Potsdam meeting of the wartime allies, the Soviet leader had gotten Truman and Churchill’s assent to a revision in favor of the Soviet Union of the terms of the Montreux Treaty.

This was followed at the end of the war, as we have seen, not only by an insistence on revising the Montreux Treaty in the Soviet Union’s favor, but by Soviet demands for bases in the region of the Turkish Straits and for significant dismantle revinations in the area of Kars and Ardahan in eastern Turkey. The latter demand would have meant a return to the frontiers established under the terms of the secret protocols of the Treaty of Sèvres in 1922. A major act of the new Bolshevik regime’s aggressive bolder overreaches to Turkey that had been sealed by the Soviet-Turkish treaty of March 1943. It was probably motivated by the bitter lessons of World War II, these aggressive demands for territory and for bases on the straits looked like nothing other than a reversion to old turn positions. In any case, they indicated quite a radical shift in Soviet policy toward Turkey. As in its policy in Iran at this time, the Soviet Union too was beginning to act like a traditional great power in the Middle East, and appeared to be reverting to the imperialist approach of the tsars regarding the status of its immediate south.

Two explanations stand out: one is that, as in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union was taking advantage of its newfound greater power to stoke out long-standing claims that it had been too feeble to make earlier. Claims that in some respects went beyond what the tsars had tried to do. This is said to reveal an inherent Soviet—or Great Russian—imperialist soul. But one that had somehow been slowly masked for decades as it had been hidden by the initial weakness of the Soviet regime.

Among the evidence adduced for this interpretation is language
that emerged from the Molotov-Ribbentrop negotiations in Berlin in November 1939 for a Nazi-Soviet pact in the wake of Moscow’s failure to negotiate an alliance with London and Paris. Then the Nazi leaders proposed in a draft treaty that, as part of a partition of the world into spheres of influence with Japan, Germany, and Italy, the Soviets should focus their territorial aspirations on the area to their south, in the direction of the Indian Ocean.\textsuperscript{55} Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov concentrated on other issues in his discussions with German foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, and the Soviets thereafter rejected this draft, and later responded with one of their own that focused on the matters of primary concern to the Soviet leadership, having to do with the central questions at issue in Europe between the USSR and Germany. Stalin’s spheres of influence were cordoned, his Soviet counterpart located “the center of aspirations of the Soviet Union south of Persia and Baku in the general direction of the Persian Gulf.”

Much has been made of the terminology used in these drafts, but such analyses ignore the fact that, as the political scientist John Campbell has pointed out decades before the Soviet archives were partially opened, first, the Soviets had been harried with exemplary restraint toward their southern neighbors for a full decade before this, for a variety of reasons, not least weakness. Moreover, he notes, during the Berlin talks, Molotov showed that the Soviet leadership was much more concerned about Western Europe and the Balkans than the Middle East or the vague Nazi proposals about the Indian Ocean. He suggests further that the Soviets saw that these proposals were intended by the Nazis to distract them from what both they and the Germans considered most important: Europe and the Balkans. Moreover, Campbell points out, the Nazi proposals were rejected by the Soviet side, the Soviet counterproposal was itself vague and meant nothing more than a general interest in Iran and Turkey (to which the Soviets did in fact turn their attention immediately after the war), and it was in any case rejected by the Nazis, and perhaps was meant to be rejected.\textsuperscript{56}

More persuasive than this reliance on a supposed mistranslation, which is actually quite odd, is new and concrete evidence that has emerged since the partial opening of the Soviet archives about Soviet interests in the Middle East, and in Iran and Turkey in particular, toward the end of the war and in the immediate postwar period, some of it cited at the beginning of this chapter. While, as has already been pointed out, this evidence shows that these Soviet policies involved more than just the interests of the two countries and intersecting in their internal affairs, in a manner reminiscent of the sort of behavior of the latter era, they also involved a striking departure by the Soviet Union from its previous policies. They seem as well a profound source of insecurity regarding the vulnerability of the USSR from the direction of the Middle East. This appears to provide a more convincing explanation of the USSR’s shift to more aggressive behavior toward its southern neighbors than tenacious overinterpretations of a few phrases plucked out of a barrage of texts produced during the Molotov-Ribbentrop negotiations.

In helping further to explain this major shift, some of the new evidence from the archives is quite revealing, particularly a lengthy dispatch from Nikolai Novikov, the Soviet ambassador in Washington, to his superiors in Moscow in September 1945.\textsuperscript{57} The document was sent to George Kennan’s former “Long Telegram” sent from Moscow several months earlier. Kennan’s lengthy dispatch deeply inflamed thinking in Washington about the implicitly hostile nature of Soviet behavior, and of the need to contain the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{58} An anonymous version published in Foreign Affairs a year and a half afterward under the title “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” shaped and crystallized American elite perceptions of Soviet policy.\textsuperscript{59} Given
the closed nature of the Soviet system, and the relative paucity of documentation, it is impossible to say with any assurance whether Novikov's cable had this kind of influence in the Kremlin. However, at least one historian has judged that a major shift in the Soviet approach toward the United States "was heralded by a confidential report from the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, on U.S. foreign policy trends." In his cable of September 19, Novikov is explicit in setting the United States as "a striving for world supremacy," as asserting that it had "the right to lead the world," as having "plans for world dominance," and as preparing "the conditions for winning world supremacy in a new way." Novikov could not have been unaware the United States was putting intense pressure on the Soviet Union in service of a plan for global hegemony. In his analysis, Novikov stressed the significance of the expansion of the U.S. military and of its new global role. He noted the sixteen-fold expansion of the proposed military budget for fiscal year 1968-69 by contrast with that of 1959, the creation for the first time in American history of a peacetime army based on a draft, the proposed plans for the establishment of nearly five hundred new U.S. naval and air bases inside the United States and worldwide, and the maintenance of a fleet that was the largest in the world and far larger than that of Britain. He noted that all of this "indicates the offensive nature of the strategic concepts of the command of the U.S. army and navy," and concluded that "the decisive role in the realization of plans for world dominance by the United States is played by its armed forces."

Beyond these general propositions about the expansiveness and aggressive nature of American power, Novikov pointedly stressed the vital importance of the Middle East to American strategic planning. He focused at length on American-British rivalry, and acutely noted how it related to competition for domination of the oil resources of that region. He pointed out the "thorough penetration of the Mediterranean basin and the Near East, to which the United States is attracted by the area's natural resources, primarily oil." Novikov noted that "in recent years American capital has penetrated very massively into the economy of the Near Eastern countries, particularly into the oil industry." He went on to give extensive details of American efforts that had produced "American oil concessions in all of the Near Eastern countries that have oil deposits." The Soviet ambassador to Washington noted that although it had started its efforts to obtain such concessions in the region only in 1966, the United States already controlled as percent of all proven reserves in the Middle East, excluding those of Iran. He added that "the American oil companies plan to build a trans-Arabian pipeline to transport oil from the American concessions in South Arabia" to the Mediterranean, a reference to the Tapline, completed by ARAMCO in 1969 with a terminal at Zahrani, near Sidon in Lebanon.

Having focused in his treatment of the Middle East largely on American-British rivalry and on American oil interests in the region, Novikov concluded his lengthy discussion of the Middle East ominously with reference to rivals of American interests to eastern Mediterranean ports, and efforts to gain basing rights there for the U.S. fleet. "These incidents constitute a political and military demonstration against the Soviet Union. The strengthening of U.S. positions in the Near East and the establishment of conditions for basing the American navy at one or more points on the Mediterranean Sea (Trinida, Palestine, Greece, Turkey) will therefore signify the emergence of a new threat to the security of the southern regions of the Soviet Union." In addition to signaling the importance of the penetration of the Middle East by American oil interests, Novikov was clearly warning his superiors in Moscow about what he saw as the dangers in this region and elsewhere in terms of "the string
of American strategic bases in regions from which it is possible
to launch strikes on Soviet territory. It is impossible to say whether this cable did in fact have an impact in Moscow similar to that of Kennan’s “Long Telegram” in Washington, or whether it was simply a reflection of some of the views that Novikov shared with his immediate superiors, Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, and therefore presumably those of Stalin. In either case, it is highly indicative of how much interest top Soviet officials were showing in the Middle East immediately after World War II, the high degree to which matters relating to oil were significant to them, and their deep concern about the potential of this region as one from which threats to the security of the Soviet Union might emanate. There is little indication that any of these factors diminished in the Cold War decades that followed.

In some respects these interests and concerns of Novikov, and presumably of Molotov, Stalin, and his colleagues in the Soviet leadership, mirrored those of their American opposite numbers. Moreover, it is a curious irony that in their confidential communications with their respective capitals, both Kennan and Novikov lay great stress on Iran and Turkey as potential points of contention between the two powers and Great Britain at almost the same moment. In pointing out his “LongTelegram” to areas of potential conflict with the advance of Soviet power, Kennan indeed refers to the Middle East first. “For the moment,” these efforts are restricted to certain neighboring points considered of here as being of immediate strategic necessity, such as Northern Iran, Turkey, possibly Bostanl. However, other points may at any time come into question, if and as increased Soviet political power is extended to new areas. Thus a ‘friendly Persian Government’ might be asked to grant Russia a port on Persian Gulf.”

For all these similarities, there were of course also important differences in how the two powers regarded the Middle East. While at the end of World War II, as we have seen in this chapter and the last, Stalin tried clumsily and in vain to achieve a strategic foothold and access to Iranian oil, by then the United States had already achieved both of these things, and clearly had no intention of relinquishing them. While the Soviets saw American initiatives in the Middle East as part of a move toward world hegemony, and as directly threatening the security of their homeland, the Americans saw Soviet moves there as aggressive threats not to their national security in the narrowest sense, but rather to their increasingly powerful posture in this region and to the resources it controlled, which were so vital to America’s newfound dominant position in the world. The oil of the Middle East had by this point become central to the thinking of policymakers on both sides of the Iron Curtain. It constituted a new factor for them to take into account, and increased further the already great strategic importance of the Middle East to both superpowers.
Oil and the Origins of the Cold War


2. By the end of the 20th century, the Cold War was largely defined by the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. These tensions were exacerbated by the ideological and geopolitical differences between the two superpowers. The Cold War began shortly after World War II and lasted until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was characterized by a balance of power and the threat of nuclear war. The Cold War had a profound impact on global politics, shaping international relations and influencing the development of many countries. It is considered one of the most significant periods in modern history. The Cold War ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which had been the dominant superpower in many respects. This event marked a major shift in the global power structure and led to the emergence of a unipolar world.


10. Although it is largely concerned with the role of American politics in the oil industry, the book has several chapters devoted to the role of European oil companies in the Middle East. See Frank J. Lestring, "The Eastern Crisis of 1910-11 and the Struggle of Oil Companies," Middle East Studies 19, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 3-8. See also William H. Green, "The American Policy of Financial Intervention in the Middle East," Middle East Studies 19, no. 3 (Summer 1983): 1-3.


13. In 1911, Smith met the Shah, but it was not until 1913 that a more formal agreement was reached. See Smith, America's Policy in the Middle East: The American Policy of Financial Intervention in the Middle East, rev. ed. (Praeger Publishers, 1980), pp. 11-12.

14. Smith met the Shah, but it was not until 1913 that a more formal agreement was reached. See Smith, America's Policy in the Middle East: The American Policy of Financial Intervention in the Middle East, rev. ed. (Praeger Publishers, 1980), pp. 11-12.


16. Smith met the Shah, but it was not until 1913 that a more formal agreement was reached. See Smith, America's Policy in the Middle East: The American Policy of Financial Intervention in the Middle East, rev. ed. (Praeger Publishers, 1980), pp. 11-12.


The study of international relations is complex and multifaceted, involving a wide range of actors, interests, and dynamics. Understanding the historical context and the roles of key players is crucial for comprehending contemporary affairs. This page discusses several aspects of international relations, including historical events and contemporary issues.


7. The Cold War saw a profound shift in global power dynamics, with the United States and the Soviet Union emerging as superpowers. This period was marked by ideological conflict, proxy wars, and nuclear deterrence. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 reshaped the landscape of international politics, leading to the emergence of new regional powers and the eventual reduction of the global arms race.

8. The 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by al-Qaeda operatives in 2001 fundamentally altered the United States’ foreign policy landscape, leading to the War on Terror and changes in international relations. The outcome of the 2020 U.S. presidential election, with Joe Biden ending Barack Obama’s presidency, may have implications for U.S. foreign policy and international cooperation.