

Lycée Ermesinde



# Relations between the West and the Arab-Muslim world

A question of political, cultural and economic coexistence

Individual paper, 2014-15

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I confirm that the work presented in this essay is my own and that I have written everything by myself.

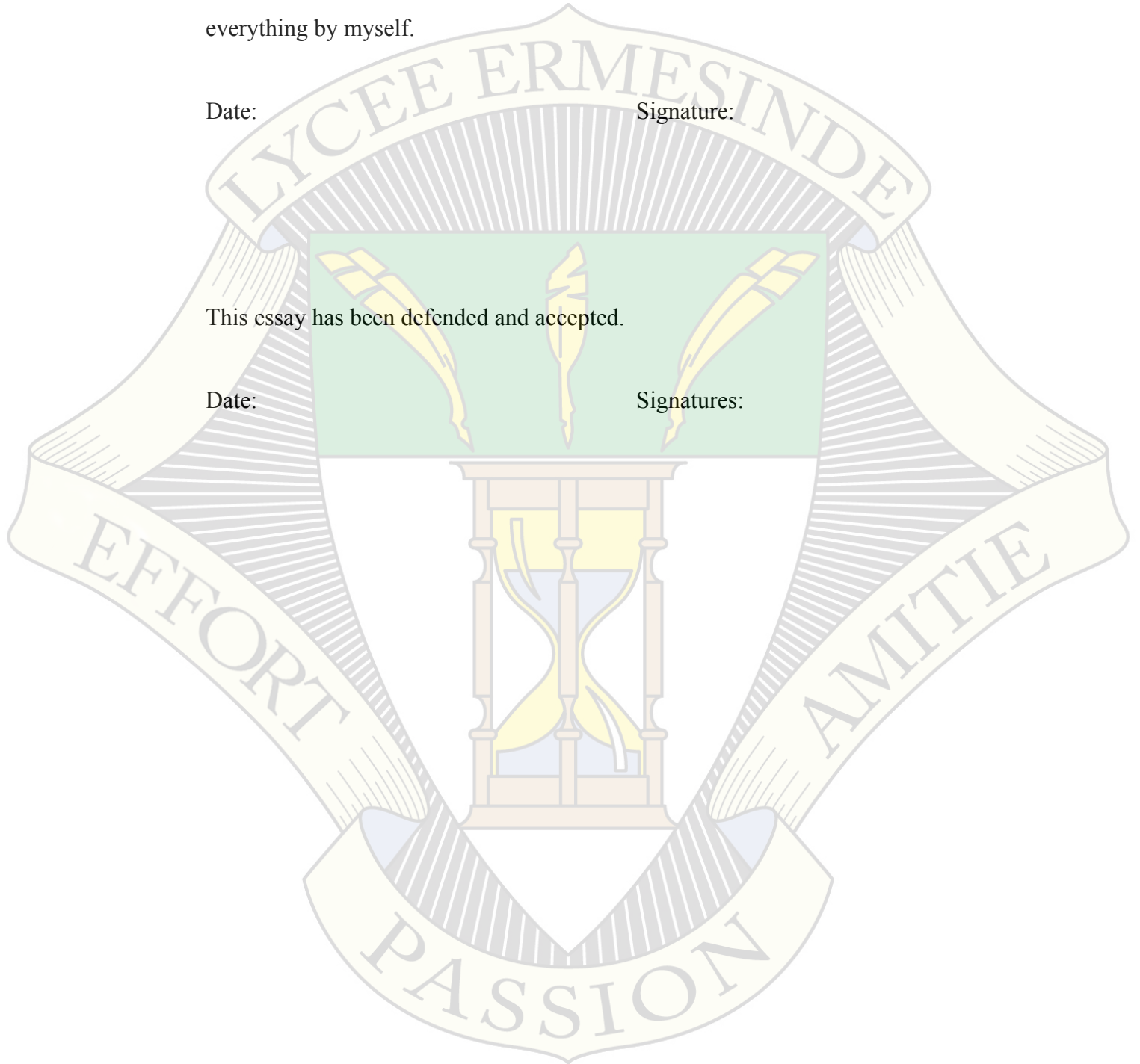
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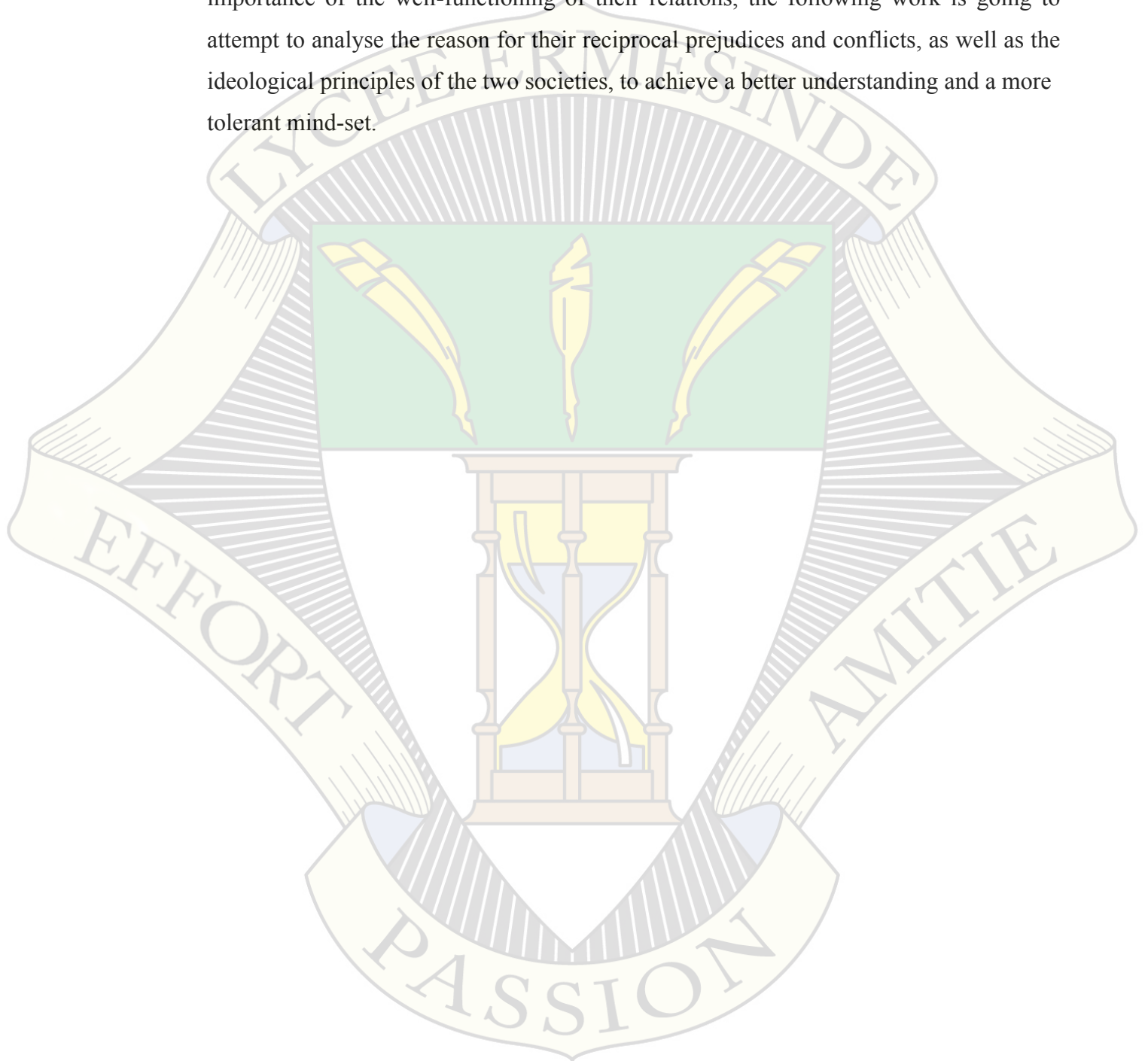
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## Abstract:

The West and the Arab Muslim world are two communities of different nature, ideologies, cultures and religions that are confronted with each other in our current, economically globalised world. Given the international economic and political importance of the well-functioning of their relations, the following work is going to attempt to analyse the reason for their reciprocal prejudices and conflicts, as well as the ideological principles of the two societies, to achieve a better understanding and a more tolerant mind-set.



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# 1. Introduction:

The West<sup>1</sup> and the Arab-Muslim world<sup>2</sup> often suffer from mutual misunderstandings and prejudices, due to the considerable contrasts and disparities between the two components. However, the interaction and the improvement of the relations between the West and the Arab world have an international relevance not only for the present but also, or especially, for the future of our world. The interconnected relationship plays a primary role in the global politics and economics, but is also fundamental on an ideological level.

It is indeed important to first look at the roots of these misbeliefs and perceptions of both civilisations by analysing their common history and their interlinked relations.

Secondly, one must realise that Islam was and still is an active and indispensable part of the Arab world that influences, by playing a substantial role in the everyday life of most of the people living in the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa), the political and the economic behaviour of the Arab world. Trying to understand the Islamic principles by looking at their fundamentals, is thus one of the major needs to seize the Arab world. Therefore, the comparison between the Western principles, coined by Christianity, democracy and capitalism and the Islamic principles provides a necessary framework to understand the complex contact. Indeed, it is helpful to examine if Western and Muslim ideologies are compatible and if it is desirable or not to apply Western systems to the Arab world, or vice-versa.

After realising that there exists a significant link between the West and the Arab world, it's useful to consider a few questions: What is their common history? What are their economic and political ties? What will be the future of the Western-Arabic relations? Is Islam compatible with the Western understanding of democracy?

By providing historical background and an insight in recent political, economic and military actions, this paper will attempt to understand the Arab world, Islam and their relations with the Western world. Two civilisations are compared with each other; the

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<sup>1</sup> The Western world includes Europe, several countries of European colonial origins, the Americas and Oceania. In this case, I'm focusing on Europe and the US, the main economic and political leaders.

<sup>2</sup> The Arab world or the Arab Nation consists of the 22 Arabic-speaking countries and territories of the Arab League, which is located in the MENA region, containing the countries of the Middle East (Southwest Asia) and North Africa (and the Horn of Africa).

one largely Islamic, situated in the Arab region, the other influenced by the Judeo-Christian ideology, but mostly secular and Western.

I want to clarify, that none of the information that will be provided can be generalised because the countries of the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) are full of ethnical, religious, cultural and geopolitical differences. The West and the Arab world are no singular entities; each broad geographic region includes many diverse cultures and traditions.

Nevertheless, it is important to take an interest in worlds that are different from those we are living in. In everyday life, we receive all kinds of inputs from our environment, media and many other actors that shape our opinions. Every one of us stands under the influence of the cultural environment he lives in; without even knowing it, our mind is formed by the impact of our community. On that account, it is even more indispensable to get an overview of a dissimilar society by trying to maintain a certain distance.

The goal of the following work is to make people considerate a different view on the world, one that cannot necessarily be compared to our own notions or explained by our own terms.

## 2. How Westerners and Muslims see each other:

Since the foundation of Islam, more than 1400 years ago, the relationship between the West (or back then, the European Christians) and the Arab-Muslim world has been difficult. There exists a deep divide between the two adherents of different principles that has progressively been created by numerous historical events. These events engendered stereotypes and misunderstandings between two populations, dragged along for generations and increased by propaganda, false and exaggerated accusations or a lack of information and knowledge on both sides. On that account, a few terms and perceptions have to be rectified.

### 2.1 Western perceptions of Islam and the Arab world:

First of all, people speak of an ‚Islamic society‘ and a ‚Western society‘. By opposing a religion to a civilisation, we mirror today’s situation of the two societies. The Arab world remains a region whose culture and society (not their politics) is fundamentally influenced by the religious ideologies of Islam. The West, even though its religious background is Judeo-Christian is mostly secularised and religion plays a rather secondary role in political and economic affairs. „The West“ and „The Arab-Muslim world“ can thus be confronted with each other as two civilizational definitions of the societies they describe.

Westerners commonly connect the Arab world with Islam and speak of Muslim people when they mean people in the Arab region. The Arab world is thus often generalised as a homogeneous Islamic region, whereas there exist so many ethnical differences and not everybody adheres to the religion of Islam. That does not mean that „Muslims“ and „Arabs“ are the same. We have to distinguish between Arab people who belong to an Arabic-speaking population that is tied by common linguistic, cultural and political traditions, which is not necessarily Muslim and Muslims, the adherents of the religion of Islam that live throughout the world, not necessarily in the Arab region. Even if Arabic is the official language of Islam (the Quran and other Islamic writings are written in Arabic), only 15 percent of Muslims are Arabs and live in the Arab world. Islam is the main religion in the Arab world, but not every Arab is Muslim.

Nevertheless, if we talk of the misperceptions of the West against the Arab world, we



talk of the misperceptions of the West against Islam, exactly because of these common generalisations and misinterpretations. For that reason, it is appropriate to look at some basic notions.

### Is Islam that different from Christianity?

Even if Islam and Christianity have profound differences and want to convey their own message, they are clearly linked through their common Middle Eastern, Judaic and Hellenistic<sup>3</sup> background. They are both considered as Abrahamic religions, which trace their common origin back to Abraham and the Middle East. They shared the Jewish ideas of monotheism, prophecy, revelation and scripture, the attachment to Greek philosophy and science, the respect of Roman law and government and even a common territory (Southwest Asia, Northern Africa and Mediterranean Europe)<sup>4</sup>.

They are both monotheistic faiths. The difference is, that Muslim believe in strict monotheism: „The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only the Messenger of God, and His Word that He committed to Mary, and a Spirit from Him. So Better is it for you. God is only one God. Glory be to Him. (He is) above having a son.“ (4:171) and Christians in Trinitarian monotheism: „All authority in heaven and on earth has ben given to me (God). Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.“ (Corinthians 13:14). This means that they worship the same God, but in Christianity, God is divided into the Holy Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

They have different fundamental scriptures (the Quran for Islam and the Bible for Christianity) to transmit their beliefs and deliver the task of final revelation to the world. The word of God has been given to Muslim people through Muhammad, their prophet, and to Christians through Jesus (the Son of God for Christians, seen as a prophet of God by the Muslims). Muslims believe that Christianity and Judaism have been interjacent religions to the final religion of Islam.

This idea that there is a single truth for all mankind and that those who are in possession

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<sup>3</sup> „The Hellenistic period is the period of ancient Greek and eastern Mediterranean history between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the emergence of the Roman Empire as signified by the Battle of Actium in 31 BC”. - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic\\_period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic_period)

<sup>4</sup> From a passage of Islam and the West, Bernard Lewis



of this truth have the duty to share it, was introduced by Christianity and pursued by Islam. They have always been in rivalry because they believe that there is only one possessor of truth.

Christianity and Islam were consecutive, not at once concurrent. The difference between a religious view on a previous or a subsequent religion, may explain the attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards each other. At medieval times, Christians tolerated Jews and the Judaic religion because, for Christianity, Judaism was a predecessor, a religion that was not fully complete and therefore replaced and corrected by Christianity. As mentioned above, Christians initiated the idea that there is only one religion sharing God's truth. Christianity and Islam shared this idea that every succeeding religion of theirs would be incorrect and intolerable. For Christians, Islam was a subsequent religion and therefore seen as false and corrupt, that's why they couldn't accept Muslims right from the start. For Muslims however, Christianity, like Judaism, was a predecessor, whose truth had been rectified and replaced by the Islamic truth. Hence, Christianity was an out-dated religion and Muslims believed that its followers had to be submitted to God's final truth - Islam. That's why Christians and Jews deserved to be tolerated in the Muslim society, but were still pushed to submit to Islam and recognise God's „true, final and eternal message to humanity“. Christians and Jews are mentioned in the Quran as „People of the Book“. This means a certain tolerance and autonomy was accorded to both faiths in Islamic societies. Muslims represented the New Testament and the Torah as being revelations of God, corrupted by human transmission.

However, this notion of tolerance as it can be found in the Quran, has definitely not always survived in the struggle for religious transmission. Christianity and Islam soon became rivals, leading numerous conflicts. Even though they shared so many traditions and beliefs, they never recognised the other as a suitable and right religion. „*The two civilisations have been divided by their resemblances far more than by their differences*“<sup>5</sup>.

#### Violence:

The members of the Islamic religion are often seen as violent, fanatic and lacking tolerance towards other religions from the Western world, especially Christianity and

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<sup>5</sup> Extract from the preface of Bernard Lewis' book *Islam and the West*



Judaism. Media portrays them as hating non-Muslim people and threatening worldwide security.

An essential argument against Islam is that the Quran preaches violence. The most popular verse quoted to emphasise this notion of violence is the Verse of the Sword: „Fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them: seize them, beleaguer them and lie in wait for them in every intolerance of non-Muslims.“(9:5). Even if violence is evoked here, the verse is taken out of context. The Pagans, a hostile Arab tribe, were surrounding Medina, where the prophet Muhammad was trying to build an Islamic city-state. The tribes attacked Medina, so Muhammad and its followers defended the city, supported by Allah.

We can notice here, that the Quran clearly legitimates the use of violence for the sake of the Islamic rule. Defensive war or self-defence is thus allowed in the Islamic religion. Fighting in defence is even „a duty that is to be carried out at all costs“, where „God grants security to those Muslims who fight in order to halt or repel aggression“ (22:39-42). God justifies wars to protect the Islamic communities against an internal or external threat by other religions or communities. Muslims have to defend themselves against those who „violate their oaths“ by „breaking a treaty“ (9 42:39).

Even if defensive violence is permitted, there are limits: „Fight in God’s cause against those who fight you, but do not transgress limits (in aggression); God does not love transgressors“ (2:190)

Moreover, there are no verses calling for unfounded, causeless obligation to fight the unbelievers: „If your enemy inclines towards peace, then you should seek peace and put your trust in God“ (Quran (:61)

Jihad, which is often used as a reference for the duty of all Muslim people to fight against nonbelievers in a holy war, does not necessarily assist the idea of forcibly converting other people to Islam. „Jihad“ means „struggle“ or „resisting“, and is used to describe, „striving in the way of God“ („al-jihad fi sabil Allah). The Quran does not explicitly say that Jihad has to be an armed struggle against non-believers or transgressors. For most Muslims, „jihad“ has a very personal meaning; striving to be a moral person and preserving Islam by spreading faith and defending the community without violent means. However, there are extremist Muslims that justify their attacks on non-Muslims by jihad and verses of self-defence in the Quran.

Islam has a different approach and perspective to violence than Christianity. Although Islam only supports using violence in case of self-defence, Christianity prohibits it, as stated in the New Testament<sup>6</sup>. In theory, Christians advocate peace and compassion even if the enemy offends them: „Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.“ (Ephesians 4:32). The words of Jesus, the „son of God“ preach forgiveness and love towards your enemies: „But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you.“ (Luke 6:27) In practice however, the Church has never ceased to resort to violence to convert or to attack.

#### Tolerance:

The 9/11 attacks or the recent ISIS proliferation and its subsequent hostile portrayal of Muslim people created a negative Western view of Muslims. They have often been accused of intolerance against non-believers. Historically however, the religious tolerance towards other religions such as the Jewish and the Christian one has been a part of the Muslim belief. Muslim communities have been more tolerant towards other religions than the West has been. The Quran preaches, „Say to the disbelievers (that is, atheists or polytheists, namely those who reject God) „To you, your beliefs, to me, mine“ (109:1-6) and tolerates the beliefs of the „People of the book“.

In the early period of Islamic conquest, Islam expanded its territory without trying to convert the people of conquest cities. The Christian European states however, saw the Muslim population as their principal enemy, trying to conquer their possessions. After the upswing of the European, Muslims suffered from the Crusades and Christian intolerance, later Western imperialism and colonialism. The Inquisition, the Wars of Religion and anti-Semitism have all been executed in the name of conversion to Christianity. This provoked a negative view of the West in the Muslim world, triggering extremist and terrorist actions against the West, like 9/11 in the United States (this will be further elaborated in the following chapters).

#### Western propaganda against Islam and the Arab world:

Since the 12th century, the Christian Church has searched to discredit Islam by falsified translations of the Qur'an, distorted facts of Muslim history and condescending

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<sup>6</sup> We must remark here, that the New Testament has set the basic principles for the Christian religion, adopted by the Church. Opposed to the preachings of Jesus in the New Testament, the Ancient Testament supports all sorts of violence (‘Let death steal over them ;let them go down to Sheol alive ;for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart.’-Psalm 55 :15). The Ancient Testaments is still a part of Christian doctrine but is barely used in recitings or prayers.

connotations. In medieval Europe for example, it was commonplace to see images of Muslim or „Arab tyrants“ and „Arab Sheiks“ in their harem<sup>7</sup> surrounded by concubines.

Later, Dante and Shakespeare, Byron and Shelley used insulting words to describe the Quran and the Prophet, like „Moors“ and „Saracens“. Europeans called the Muslims by their ethnic name (Saracens, Moors, Turks; Tatars) to avoid calling them by their righteous religious name, in order to reduce their status and depict Islam as something local not global. The most common reciprocal term applied to describe each other was „infidel“.

However, in the European Renaissance (from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century), given that Europe had overcome the Islamic world in terms of economics, trade, culture and politics (see chapter 2.2), Islam was no longer seen as a threat but became a subject of intellectual study. European scholars analysed the religion with scientific curiosity rather than suffering from fear of being attacked by it. This scholarly interest however, was anything but positive; Islam was seen as a “barbaric” religion, which provoked the rise of “orientalism”<sup>8</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the 1970’s, Western media began reporting thoroughly about Arab and Islamic life. By principally focusing on Islamic traditions and moral issues that were most different and therefore strange to Western societies, like the status of women, the media contributed to spread negative prejudices. The re-emergence of Islam in the Arab world in the last decades, released a long existent Western fear of being robbed of their hegemony and security. By portraying Islam as „fundamentalist“ and as a threat to the West, the Western media reinforced and still does, many stereotypes and negative images of Muslim people. The news almost exclusively report about extremist and terrorist actions of Islamic groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS and violent attacks and never mention the good aspects of the Muslim community. Negative or threatening aspects of Islam are thus more prevalent than positive outcomes of the Muslim religion, which leads to increasing generalisations, making the whole Muslim community responsible for actions they didn’t commit and associate them with ideologies they don’t support.

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<sup>7</sup> „The definition of a harem is the quarters in a Muslim home where wives, concubines and female servants live, or a group of women who share one man.”

<http://www.yourdictionary.com/harem>

<sup>8</sup> „Orientalism is a term used by historians and literary and cultural studies scholars for the imitation or depiction of aspects of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures by writers, designers and artists from the West. (...) The West essentialises these societies as static and undeveloped.”  
[en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalism](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orientalism)



## Historical reasons of Western perceptions of Islam and Islamic societies:

### The Birth of Islam:

Around 400, Christianity was known as the dominant religion of the declining Roman Empire and had gained notable territories and many adherents. In 622, the Arabian spiritual Muhammad was forced to exit Mecca and had to flee to Yathrib (Medina). This was the traditional date for the birth of Islam. After the Quran, the spiritual and religious prophet Muhammad (born in Mecca, present Saudi-Arabia) had received his first revelation from Allah in around 610 CE and had started to spread the „holy words“ at a young age. The belief in one God as the creator, were recorded as a text, the Holy Quran, which constituted the basis of the new-born religion of Islam. The people of Medina welcomed the prophet and accepted Islam as the only truth. His followers considered Islam a community as well as a religion. After gaining support for his religious views and resolving many of Medina's internal troubles, Muhammad started expanding the territory of Islamic religion.

### Islamic civilisation and Muslim conquest:

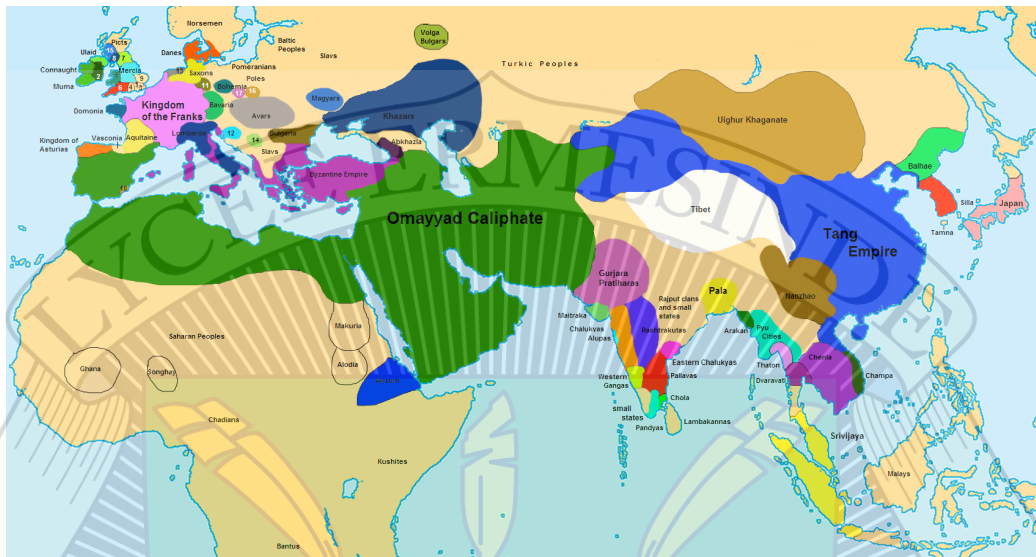
From the 7th century onwards, Mohammed himself and after him, Islamic leaders (caliphs), conquered a world empire, extending Islam over three continents<sup>9</sup>. Many different civilisations became part of the Islamic empire. Consequently, Muslim society made use of the philosophy and the science of Greece that they had conquered. They were responsible for the preservation of Eastern Christian and Byzantine heritage, the import of the decimal notation of numbers (from India), as well as the use of paper (from China), all of which had an immense impact on the sciences, the government and business of the Islamic world of that time. The Islamic society with its rich culture, its resources, economics, and governmental organisations, combined with their adherents' feeling of unity through one faith and the common Arabic language<sup>10</sup>, clearly predominated the Christian population of Europe. The conduct of *jihad* incited Muslims to expand their frontiers and to spread Allah's message throughout the world to convert the „infidels“. After the death of Muhammad in 632 CE, the Islamic religion needed only half a century to conquer the entire Middle East, North Africa, Persia and parts of Southern Europe and become a new world religion, one of the most intellectually and

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<sup>9</sup> The Islamic empire reached from central Asia to central Spain

<sup>10</sup> The Arabic language was the language of government, commerce, science, philosophy, religion and law which had no equivalent in premedieval Europe

scientifically advanced and culturally diverse civilisation on earth. At the height of the Omayyad Caliphate<sup>11</sup> and the Arab power in 750 AD, the Islamic empire looked like this:



The religion of Christendom in contrast, occupied a small region, inhabited by a poor, divided, largely illiterate and disorganised civilisation, clearly backwards, compared to the Islamic civilisation. Western Europe purchased luxury goods and weapons from the more advanced Muslim societies in the South. The loss of territories (Eastern and Southern Mediterranean) through Muslim conquest, further weakened and diminished their power. The Christian territories in Europe however, were the only areas, where Islam encountered resistance, in contrary to Asia and Africa that were largely inhabited by teachable barbarians.

Even if their goal was to spread and transmit their faith, Muslims didn't forcibly try to convert the people of the conquered territories, which eventually facilitated their conquests. Muslims mostly let Jews and Christians; the „people of the book“ live their religious life, by only charging them a small tax (Jizya).

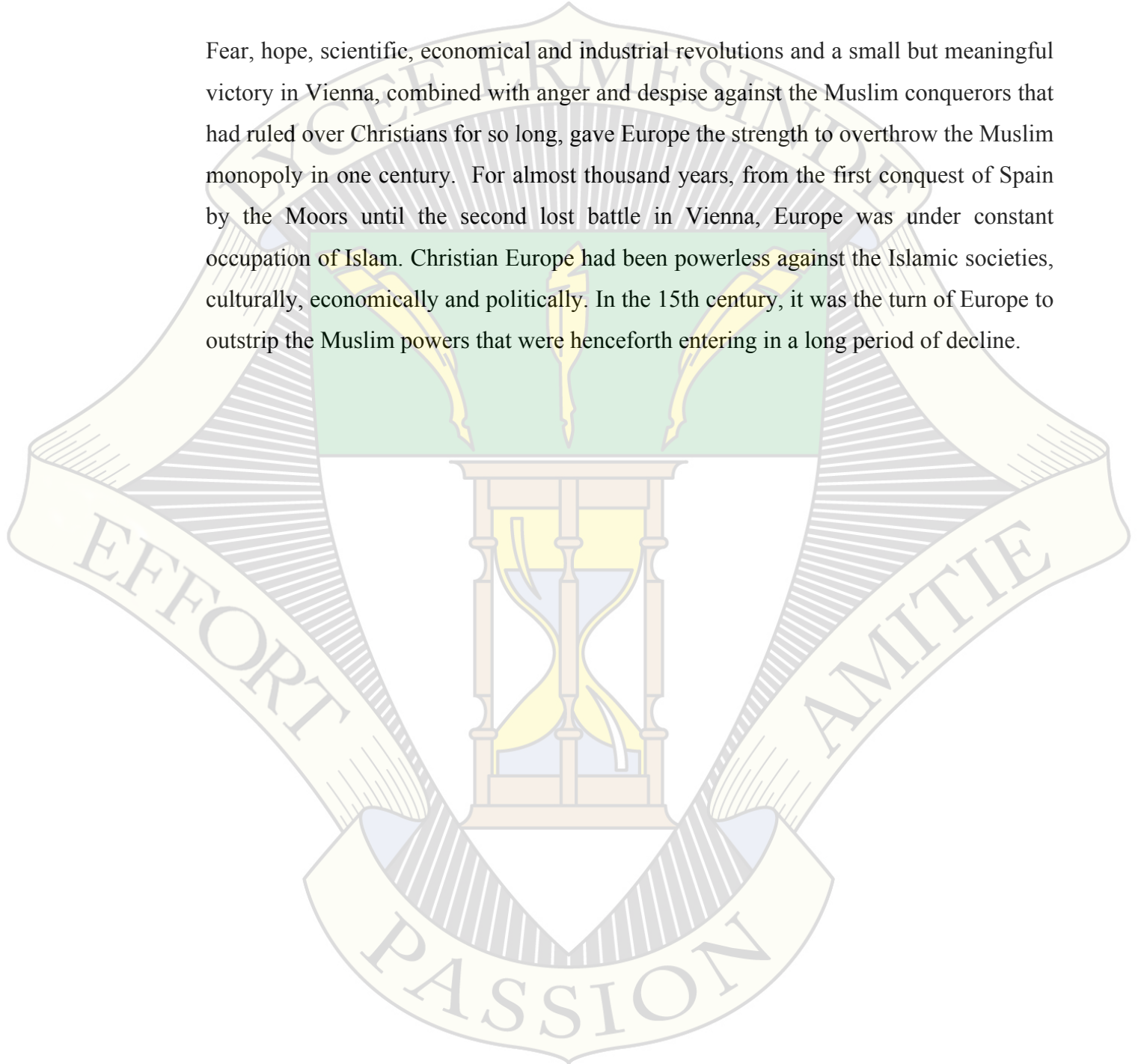
The Second Period of Muslim Conquest was marked by the rise of the Turkish power after about 1000 AH, a new Islamic power. Two dynasties, first the Seljuks, then the Ottoman sultans extended their power as far as the Byzantine Empire, Western Asia and North Africa. They created one of the most powerful and enduring Islamic empires. In the 15th century they became masters of the Balkan Peninsula, where a great number of people converted to Islam. In 1453, they captured Constantinople, which led to the

<sup>11</sup> A « caliph » was a leader of the Islamic community



collapse of the Roman Empire. Constantinople, now Istanbul, became their new capital from where further expeditions were led into Europe. From 1683 onward, when the Turks tried for the second time to overtake Vienna, and lost this battle, Muslim powers started to deteriorate and European states started to rise. The second Turkish siege of Vienna was a turning point to the success of Muslim conquest all over the world.

Fear, hope, scientific, economical and industrial revolutions and a small but meaningful victory in Vienna, combined with anger and despise against the Muslim conquerors that had ruled over Christians for so long, gave Europe the strength to overthrow the Muslim monopoly in one century. For almost thousand years, from the first conquest of Spain by the Moors until the second lost battle in Vienna, Europe was under constant occupation of Islam. Christian Europe had been powerless against the Islamic societies, culturally, economically and politically. In the 15th century, it was the turn of Europe to outstrip the Muslim powers that were henceforth entering in a long period of decline.



## 2.2 Muslim and Arab perceptions of The Western world:

Given that the Arab-Muslim world was politically and economically superior to Europe for almost a millenary, the loss of this preponderance in the 15th century was an all-changing setback for the Islamic community. Certainly, it created dislike for the West that had „stolen“ their world power and was now taking the same progressive path than the Islamic community had been going centuries ago. But as also many Arabs and Muslims hold prejudices against the west, it is needless to say that one has to look at the Christian point of view too.

### Tolerance

The Bible preaches to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you"<sup>12</sup> and tolerance for other religions was represented as follows: "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into (your) house, neither bid him God speed."<sup>13</sup>

In reality however, Islam was often represented as a heresy:

"Islam was at best a heresy preached by a deluded or misguided prophet, and at worst a direct challenge to Christian claims and mission: 'the combination of fear and ignorance produced a body of legends, some absurd and all unfair: Muslims were idolaters worshipping a false trinity, Muhammad was a magician, he was even a Cardinal of the Roman Church who, thwarted in his ambition to become Pope, revolted, fled to Arabia and there founded a church of his own'".<sup>14</sup>

Both religions claimed to hold the universal truth and especially Christians were not ready to share this worship of God with a different religion. Since the foundation of Islam, it was clear for Muslims that Christians would not accept supremacy of Islam.

### Violence:

While the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) contains many violent verses and passages, the New Testament strictly prohibits any violence against enemies:

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 6:27

<sup>13</sup> John 1 :10-11

<sup>14</sup> quoting Albert Hourani, *Europe and the Middle East*, Berkeley 1980, p. 9.

"Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you".<sup>15</sup>

"But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."<sup>16</sup>

Whereas Christians are adherents of the New Testament and its values, these preachings of non-violence against enemies have not always been respected in history. Christians often violently affronted Islam to reconquer and expand their territories. Memories of Christian hostility towards Islam, like the Crusades in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, imperialism, colonialism and violent conquest, have been enforced the Islamic view of a violent, militant Christianity.

#### Wealth and morals:

A large part of Arab information and news about the West are provided from Western media like American movies, commercial music and Western television shows, which contribute a lot to the spread of stereotypes. Americans for examples are often assumed to be selfish, rich and greedy, judging from the high standard of living reflected on popular TV and movies.

Moreover, there are essential differences between the moral values of the West and the Arab world. Especially the Middle Eastern family values differ from the Western ones. The high divorce rate, the fact of putting older relatives into a nursing home and that not more than two generations are living in one house is seen as evidence that American people don't value their family enough. In addition, the West is a sexually permissive society, which allows spreading images of sexual activity or near nudity. To Muslims, this is a sign of the over-sexualisation of the West.

#### Historical reasons of Muslim perceptions of the West:

##### The Crusades:

During the age of Muslim ascendancy over Europe and Christianity in the High and Late Middle Ages, the Latin Roman Catholic Church decided to direct military campaigns against Muslims. Led by Pope Urban II in 1095, the First Crusade was

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<sup>15</sup> Ephesians 4:32

<sup>16</sup> Matthew 5:43-48



executed with the goal of restoring the “Holy Land” <sup>17</sup> of Jerusalem and its surroundings for Christians. After the First Crusade, two centuries of struggle for the control of the holy places followed. During this period, six major successive crusades and several little ones were carried out to overthrow the Islamic power and conquer Jerusalem. The battle ended with the Christian failure in 1291. The Roman Catholic Church united thousands of men and women of all classes and all over Western Europe, led by the anger of Muslim occupation of their “rightful” territories. Pope Urban II promised forgiveness of all sins to all people taking the vow to execute the Crusades. The Crusades signified total devotion to God for Christians and if violence was necessary to restore their lands, God would allow them violence. The Crusades reinforced the collective and hierarchic nature of the Latin Church under the leadership of a Pope and provoked the first real Muslim hatred against Christians. Never before, had they been threatened and attacked like this.

#### Imperialism and Colonialism

The 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century introduced a new age of great European discoveries and voyages and changed the relation between the Muslim world and the West. The Indian historian K.M Panikkar, named it the “*European penetration, infiltration, influence and final domination*”. The European Christians were starting to make progress to restore their homelands from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In the centuries to come, they would expel the Muslim peoples, who had occupied and controlled their territories. This expansion would transform Christian Europe from a society of reconquest to an empire.

The voyages of discovery were taking place almost temporary at both ends of Europe. The Spaniards and the Portuguese invaded Africa (in 1492, the French and the Spaniards destroyed the last Muslim state in Spain), and the Russians entered into parts of Asia. Even if Muslim counterattacked several times under the Turkish rule and the Ottoman rule and managed to strengthen the Muslim power in the Mediterranean, they had less and less prospects to win the battle against Europe.

By discovering new lands and imposing the European rule and influence on the respective nations and cultures, Europe gained and disposed over an increasing amount of wealth and resources. This gave the people of Europe new strength to resist and

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<sup>17</sup> Holy sites near Jerusalem (in today’s Israel) that have a special relevance to Christians, related to the New Testament or Jesus, like for example the city of Betlehem (the birthplace of Jesus) or Nazareth (Jesus’s hometown).

throw back the Muslim power.

In this long and bitter struggle of European reconquest, two different kinds of domination can be distinguished. In Northern Asia and North America, the European conquerors encountered lands with undeveloped communities that didn't resist to their conquest, where they could create their own societies. However, in Asia, parts of Africa, Central and South America, Europeans came across regions that were inhabited by ancient and advanced civilisations (especially China, India and the Arab civilisations). It was thus harder for the Christians to impose their religion and culture, because they were confronted with resistance. Indeed, there was another difference between the Asian countries and the Muslim communities in North Africa and the Middle East. The culture of China remained regional; the religion of Buddhism was local and not universal, in contrary to Islam and its advanced civilisation.

Another particularity shaped the encounter between Islam and Europe. In contrast to other civilisations, these two societies had lived side by side since the beginning of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Even if they became enemies and fought each other, they lived as neighbours. They had already developed an image and stereotypes of each other, because they thought they knew everything about the other culture. When the Europeans entered India or China, they knew nothing about the civilisation and were therefore more open-minded towards these unknown people. They never attempted to colonise their territories or convert their inhabitants. It is necessary to understand this clash between two already familiar societies to comprehend the whole European imperialist idea and its impact on Islam.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in 1683, the second battle of Vienna represented a turning point in the relations between Europe and Islam. When the Turkish (Muslim) armies camped outside Vienna for the second time to conquer the strategic point and were defeated once and for all, the withdrawal was not only a clear victory for Austria, but for the whole Europe.

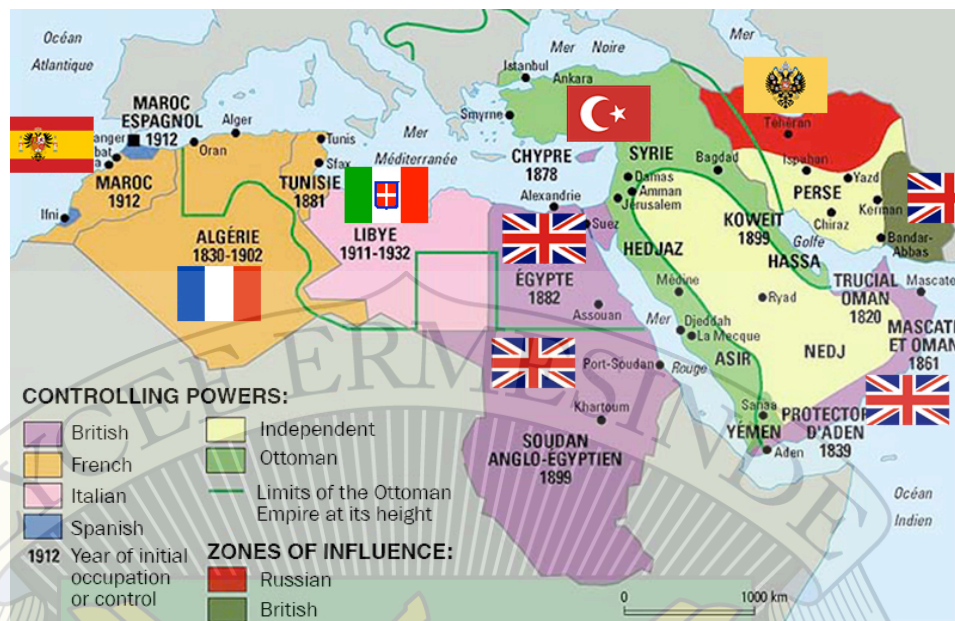
For centuries past, the Ottoman sultanate had been the leading power of Islam. Even if they had been in conflict against the Western Christians and they were becoming stronger, they still prevailed Europe in every aspect. However, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, their power in relation to Europe declined in a rapid fashion. The former invincible Ottoman armies were falling behind their European adversaries in weaponry, military science, discipline, skill and economics.



The 18<sup>th</sup> century confirmed the decline of the Muslim power despite some exceptional successes. European armies attacked from every side, the Muslim frontiers were pushed back quickly. Austrians threatened the Ottoman armies in the Balkans; Russian penetrated the Turkish Empire, Asian provinces and the Ottoman sultanate and won freedom of trade in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. This penetration of the Middle East meant its occupation, domination and annexation. Europe tried to impose their culture, language and religion.

In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the age of the second colonisation, the British and French introduced a new wave of conquest. First, the British naval gained freedom of trade in the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea and annexed Egypt in 1882. Then, the French occupied Algeria (1830) and Tunisia (1881). Slowly, the European powers colonised the whole Arab world. The Ottoman Empire was the only part left.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more exactly in 1911, the Russian put pressure on Persia. After the outbreak of the First World War (1914-18), the British and Russian domination of Persia followed. Moreover, Italy declared war to the Ottoman Empire in September 1911. At the end of World War I, Western Europe, more powerful than ever, had changed Africa, including the Arab states of North Africa, into colonial possessions. The entire MENA region was now ruled by Europeans or divided into European “zones of influence”, such as Iran and several countries of the Arabian Peninsula. Even the little region that was left of the Ottoman Empire was erased and split amongst the Europeans. There were clear frontiers between these new won European empires. The lines between French, Italian, Spanish and British colonies are essential to understand the character of the region today. Not only were they ruled with a different policy and from a different culture, the frontiers between the European empires became the boundaries of the independent countries as we know them. Without any regard to ethnical or cultural differences between the population, Europeans traced their boundaries in their own interest as we can see on this map of the Arab world in 1914:



From the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Europe encircled the Islamic Middle East with its expansion at both ends. During the First World War, with the defeat of the Ottoman Empire, these ends were coming together; Europe was closing its fangs. After the First World War, the territories of North Africa and parts of the Middle East were divided between the Allies and its associated powers. After the Second World War (1939-45), when the associated powers dispersed, the colonies of the MENA region were released and replaced by “sovereign independent states”, still under close observation of European and American rule, influencing Arab societies and polities.

In terms of economics and trade, the Middle East had become far weaker. Science and technology, cultural and intellectual life of the European society had little or no counterpart in the Islamic world.

The age of European colonialism and imperialism didn't change the Muslim perception of Christianity as a religion, Muslim still thought of it as an undeveloped version of Islam and a superseded revelation. What changed was the attitude towards the European society and the people of the West.

When the Turks replaced the Arabs as rulers of Islam and the Franks replaced the Byzantines as their Christian enemies, the Turkish Muslims were willing to adopt, imitate and learn from the military techniques (the weaponry), the technology, naval construction and the practice of medicine of Europe with the goal of developing their society and rebuild their army. By acquiring the Western techniques, they wanted to rescue their declining society. The problem was that it was strictly forbidden to adopt

any cultural association with the European civilisation; their culture, their languages, their arts, their letters, and their history, because they were determined by religion.

During its flourishing age, the Muslim society had always been nourished and maintained by a continuous flow of conquest and colonisation. When this process stopped, with the economical retreat of Islam, the Arab world suffered from crises and was finally confronted with the fact of their vulnerability. This weakness reinforced the change in attitude towards the West. Europe and the rest of the West had never been a threat to the people of Islam. Now that it was overtaking Islam, their perception to Christian Europeans changed from disdain to dislike and even hate because of the European acculturation and exploitation of the Islamic societies. The people of Europe had developed their society and were getting more and more strong. This awareness of European achievement, released growing concern. Europeans were no longer barbarians; they were a source of danger.





### 3. What is the political and economic role of Islam in the Arab world and how does this concern the West?

After analysing the origins of our contemporary reciprocal prejudices and stereotypes, I would like to focus on the economic and political connection between the Arab-Muslim world and the West to understand their relations today.

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, change has been shaping the Middle East and North Africa. During this wave of successive upheavals autocratic leaders that ruled the Arab world were toppled (see chapter 4). After this collapse of various autocratic governments, an important number of people in several countries of the Arab world chose to elect or to support parties/groups, inspired by Islamic principles and the Sharia law. In Egypt for example, the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>18</sup> took over after the resignation of President Hosni Mubarak. Even if, after many critics and protests, the MB was toppled by its opponents by a military coup on 3rd July 2013 and Egypt finally chose to elect the military officer Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in 2014 as president, an increasing number of Islamists groups have been gaining ground in the MENA region, which raised the question if and how important the presence of Islam will be in the political and economic future of the Arab world. In fact, the emergence of Islamism (the term will be further explained in chapter 3.3) goes back to at least the 1940s, but hasn't really been acknowledged by the West until the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which overthrew a pro-Western monarchy. Since then, the role of Islam in politics of the Arab world has clearly increased.

The outcome of the evolution of politics and economics in the Arab world is uncertain. What will be the outcome of the political transformation of the Muslim countries? What types of government will arise? What role will Islam play? Will religion be separated from or combined with the government?

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<sup>18</sup> *The Society of the Muslim Brothers or Muslim Brotherhood is a transnational Islamist organisation which was founded in Egypt in 1928. (...) The Arab Spring brought a substantial amount of success for the Brotherhood and it was legalised in 2011 when the government of Hosni Mubarak was overthrown. As the country's strongest political organisation, it won several elections, including the 2012 presidential election when its candidate Mohamed Morsi became Egypt's first democratically elected president, which was one year later himself overthrown by the military as a response to civil unrest across the country. Today, the organisation is once again declared as a terrorist group.*  
([en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim\\_Brotherhood](http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Muslim_Brotherhood))

Western policymakers insist on democratising the Muslim countries, which would imply secularisation, thus the separation between religion and government. Many politicians and economists of the West fear the interference of religion in forms of government like democracy, meaning the institution of the Sharia law and economic means corresponding to Muslim values. The West is often sceptical and rather pessimistic about the idea of Islam intervening in political means in the Arab world. Especially since the appearance of radical and militant Islamists like Al-Qaeda and the ISIS that confirmed the Western prejudices about Islamists fighting by means of violence and acting against the idea of democracy.

Muslim thought implies the cohesion of religion and state in contrast to the secular societies in the West. The West nowadays increasingly insists on the incompatibility of religion and state. That's why the increasing presence of Islam, not only in the Muslim societies, but also in the Western ones, releases concern and fear amongst them.

As the question of the implication of Islam in politics and economics of the Muslim countries has become increasingly important with the expansion of Islamism in the last decades, it is useful to take a look at the roots of the Islamic principles. The Quran and the actions of Muhammad indicate many political and economic values that can help us to understand the growing influence of Islam in political affairs in contrast to the diminishing authority of other religions like Christianity in governmental matters.



### 3.1 What are the traditional political and economical Islamic principles?

The teachings of Islam extend to every aspect of a Muslim's life. Material, political as well as economic aspects of Islam traditionally originate from the Quran and the Sunnah (the sayings and the life of Muhammad). Certainly, external actors have influenced the Muslim way of life, but we have to look at the basic Islamic principles to understand its evolution.

#### The political system of Islam:

##### Three foundations:

The political system of Islam is based on three, hierarchical principles:

- *Tawhid* (unity of *Allah*):

*Tawhid* means 'union', or 'combination' in Arabic and describes the notion of monotheism. It's the belief that there is only one God, one Creator and Master, named *Allah*. He is the only one who has the power to forbid and command and only his words are to be obeyed. That's why the Quran (the revelations of God), which expresses the absolute truth, constitutes the foundation of Law in Islam. It is not the human beings that have legal and political independence, but it is Allah that rules and sets the law.

- *Risala* (Prophethood):

*Risala* means 'message' in Arabic and is the link between Allah and humankind. *Risala* is the medium through which the law of *Allah* is sent to humans. This means these are the scriptures revealed through a Messenger<sup>19</sup> to the people. In the Islamic context, it describes the Qur'an (the book where *Allah* has explained the Law) and the Sunnah (the teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad during his lifetime, which indicates a way of life exercising the Law). The combination of these two elements is called the Shari'ah, the Islamic law.

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<sup>19</sup> The Messengers are those prophets in Islam who have received a Revelation, like Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus and Muhammad.

- *Khilafa* (Caliphate):

Khilafa means 'succession', or 'representation' in Arabic and describes the human representative of Allah on earth. It's a political and religious leadership that is embodied by a caliph, the successor of Muhammad. His task is to lead the caliphate and the Muslim community by applying the laws of God.

The unity of law:

There is a tight connection between religion and politics, a stable coordination of profane and sacred means. The social notion and the right execution of Muslim life is valuing coherence. Every member of Islam has a personal responsibility towards his community. The individual is set into a greater frame; he is surrounded by a greater 'whole' - the Muslim community. As a result, the same universal laws and restrictions apply to every Muslim, no matter his rank, class, language or birthplace. This implies that the Quran forbids any priorities by reason of race; it's a common ideology and there is one entity, one law.

The Caliphate:

After the Quran, Muhammad was the Messenger of *Allah*. In the 7th century, when Islam was founded, Muhammad was the spiritual, but also the economic and political leader of the Muslim community. He held double power; the Prophet was simultaneously the prayer leader during service in the Mosque and the head of state in profane and earthly matters. Mohammed always insisted on the importance and necessity of the communal life and made no difference between religion and state: „One who dies without recognising and honouring the caliphate (Imâm), dies as a heathen.“ or „One who separates himself from the caliphate, goes to hell.“

In the tradition of Muslim politics, there was thus no separation of religion and State, the leader of the State was at once the religious and held political responsibilities, which unified the communal life with the spiritual life and created a connection between the profane and the sacred. This is one of the reasons that the process of secularisation in Muslim countries is so difficult; religious and political means have simply been one and the same for centuries.

After the death of Muhammad, power was passed on to his successors and the law that he had proclaimed as the Messenger of God was disposed to the new generations.

#### History of the caliphate:

The caliph cannot be an autocrat, at least with regard to the law; he is a constitutional leader who is subdued to divine law just as every other citizen.

The Quran indicates the political notion of a caliphate, a kingdom, but does not describe any type of government. Muhammad too, had left no instructions for his succession. There were two possibilities: either choose the new caliph by means of heritage, which means the direct descendant of Muhammad (which would have been Ali, the cousin of Muhammad) or elect a new caliph, chosen by the Muslim community or their representatives. The former model created the Shia Islam, today a rather small denomination of Islam (10-13 % of the world's Muslim population), compared to the latter method of election, giving birth to Sunni Islam (87-90% of the world's Muslim population), the largest branch of Islam and the world's second largest religious body after Christianity.

Given that the majority of Muslims decided to elect a new caliph (Sunni Muslims) the caliphate was a combination of a constitutional monarchy and a republic; the caliph was elected (republic) for a lifetime (monarchy). At first, there was only one caliphate, but when the Muslim community expanded, caliphates multiplied and a diversity of caliphates were established in different parts of the Muslim empire. The Turks brought a new element to the caliphate: the soldiers became commanders then leaders of the State, provinces became independent with the creation of „dynasties“. Several decades later, the caliphate of Kairo was the first caliphate to be dissolved and to be passed on to a dynasty of Turkish leaders. The Spanish caliphate had no choice but to deliver their territories to the Christian conquerors. The Turkish caliphate in Istanbul was disposed by its own inhabitants, who chose a republican form of government and the power of the caliph was transferred and assigned to the parliament of Ankara.

Today there are no caliphates anymore, but the tradition of religion being a key player in sacred as well as in profane affairs in the Arab world has never faded.

#### The Muslim State:



Four branches constitute the division of work inside a Muslim State: the executive (military and civil affairs), legislature, justice and the administration of culture.

Legislature (law) in an Islamic state is directly indicated by the Sharia. The teachings of *Allah* and His Prophet are to be accepted and obeyed. No legislative body can modify the constitution.

Justice declares equality of all human beings in front of the law. The head of state is no exception; the government as well as the caliph have to obey to the law.

In the history of international law, Muslims were the first and until now the only society that recognised the laws of every foreign, non-Muslim community without differentiation or exceptions.

### The economic system of Islam:

The Quran and the Sunnah have offered quite detailed regulations about the economic practices in a Muslim community. Islam puts favour upon commercial activity, limiting itself to forbid certain practices, seen as immoral. The central features of an Islamic economy are neither socialist, nor capitalist, but they put importance on moral foundations and values coming from the Quran. To analyse the basic components of the Islamic economics, we have to learn about some indispensable notions first.

#### Basic Notions:

- *Zakat*: Zakat is a tax that is laid upon the income and wealth of a Muslim, such as currency, gold or harvest, to allocate the outcome to help the poor and the needy<sup>20</sup>. It is a form of obligatory charity in the Muslim society. *Zakat* is demanded of all Muslim that possesses an income above the minimum amount of *nisab*.
- *Riba*: *Riba* means „usury“ in Arabic. It is acknowledged as one of the main sins in the Islamic economics, because the act of gaining money in trade or business

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<sup>20</sup> There are eight groups of people mentioned in the Quran that have the right to receive Zakat:

*"The alms are only for the Fuqara' (the poor), and Al-Masakin (the needy) and those employed to collect (the funds); and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam); and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah's Cause, and for the wayfarer (a traveler who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise."* [Al-Quran 9:60]

by making profit without providing any services, as well as speculation (Maisir) is seen as unfair and unequal. That's why all sort of *riba* is prohibited in Islam.

- *Gharar*: *Gharar* means „uncertainty“ in Arabic and describes the presence of any element of uncertainty in an economic contract. *Gharar*, implying short selling, speculative transactions like day trading or any other transactions where the two components are not certain, is prohibited in Islamic economics.

#### Trade:

The Quran favours economic activity, the search of profit and trade, the support of production in a market economy, etc. The Prophet is alleged to have said: „The merchant who is sincere and trustworthy will (at the Judgment Day) be among the prophets, the just and the martyrs.“ (Darimi, Sunan XVIII,8) and „The trustworthy merchant will sit in the shade of God's throne at the Day of Judgment“.

In Islam, conducting trade is nothing to be ashamed of; it is a virtuous way of gaining possessions. But if one has won enough to build himself a decent way of living, he can give a fraction of his earnings to the poor (*Zakat*): „The Prophet heaps praise upon those who, far from being parasites, enrich themselves so as to be able to help the deprived.“ Nevertheless, a member of the Muslim community should never deprive himself from the well being that he has earned to help others out: „O messenger of God! I have in commodities everything I need; but I prefer, to give it to the poor, instead of spending it for myself.“ „No! God wants to see the traces of the beneficence that he has given his servant near him“.

In several verses, the Quran specifies that it's necessary and inevitable for a human being to respect its own well being: „One must not forget one's portion of this world“ (28/77).

Even if the Quran encourages the prosperity of all Muslims, the hoarding of wealth is strongly discouraged: „(...) that this wealth doesn't stay in the ring of riches“.

Every Muslim has to find the balance between the “minimum necessary” and the “desirable plenty”.

There are certain commercial practices that are forbidden in the Sunnah:

- Divine prohibitions: usury (riba)<sup>21</sup>, gambling<sup>22</sup>, hoarding of wealth
- Moral restrictions: begging, stinginess<sup>23</sup> and waste<sup>24</sup>
- Government restrictions: Islam allows the government to intervene where it feels appropriate, but these restrictions are temporary.
- Prohibition of any selling with an element of uncertainty (*Gharar*), such as sale by auction
- Trade with goods seen as impure: wine, pigs, animals that have died otherwise than by ritual slaughter, or goods that are considered as common to everyone: water, grass, fire, speculation of foodstuffs

In Islam, there is thus no contradiction to combine the practice of religion with material life, trade and private property. It accepts markets as the basic coordinating system of economics, allows competition and bans price-fixing. Islamic markets support freedom of exchange, private ownership and security of contract, just as it happens to function in capitalist markets.

#### Property:

##### - Private property:

Every Muslim has the right to private property, since the Quran specifically indicates rules for inheritance, and how to maximize profits. The Islamic scriptures even advise that inequalities amongst human beings should not be challenged and revoked. The differentiation in social conditions is conceived as a natural phenomena being instructed by God: „See how we have given them preference one over the other, but the Hereafter has greater degrees (of honour) and greater preferment“ (17:22/21).

Nevertheless, this does not exclude the denouncement of excessive wealth, its uselessness in regard to God's judgement and the temptation to neglect religion that wealth brings.

<sup>21</sup> „Those who devour usury will not stand...Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury...Allah will deprive usury of all blessing, but will give increase for deeds of charity...“ (2:275-6)

<sup>22</sup> „O you who believe! Intoxicants and gambling sacrificing to stones, and divination by arrows are an abomination of Satan's handwork.“ (5:90)

<sup>23</sup> „(The Servants of Allah are) those who, when they spend, are not extravagant and not stingy, but hold a just balance between those extremes“ (25:67)

<sup>24</sup> „O Children of Adam! Wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer. Eat and drink, but waste not by excess, for Allah loves not the wasters“ (7:319)



- Public property:

Natural resources (forests, pastures, uncultivated land, water, mines, oceanic resources, etc.) are common property and every human has equal rights to use them. That is why they are under control of the Islamic state.

- State property:

A Muslim has certain duties towards the greater community - the society and the State. That's why he has to pay taxes (Zakat) that are used at the community's best interest and allocated by the government. The amount of taxes to pay varies according the different categories of income. This mutual aid is organised within the community in order to compel the rich to participate in the society and help those who need it.

Banking:

Islamic banking is based on the values of Islamic law, the Sharia and its practical application. There are two fundamental principles: the sharing of profit and loss and the prohibition of interest.

Islamic banking encourages the concept of participation in a transaction utilising the funds at a risk on a profit-and-loss-sharing basis. The relationship between the investor and the client has thus to be based on confidence on a risk-sharing level (see chapter 5).

Islamic Economic History:

In the Middle Ages, the capitalistic sector of the Muslim society was well-developed in many aspects. Especially the commercial development of a capitalistic trade had been growing during the Muslim period of supremacy.

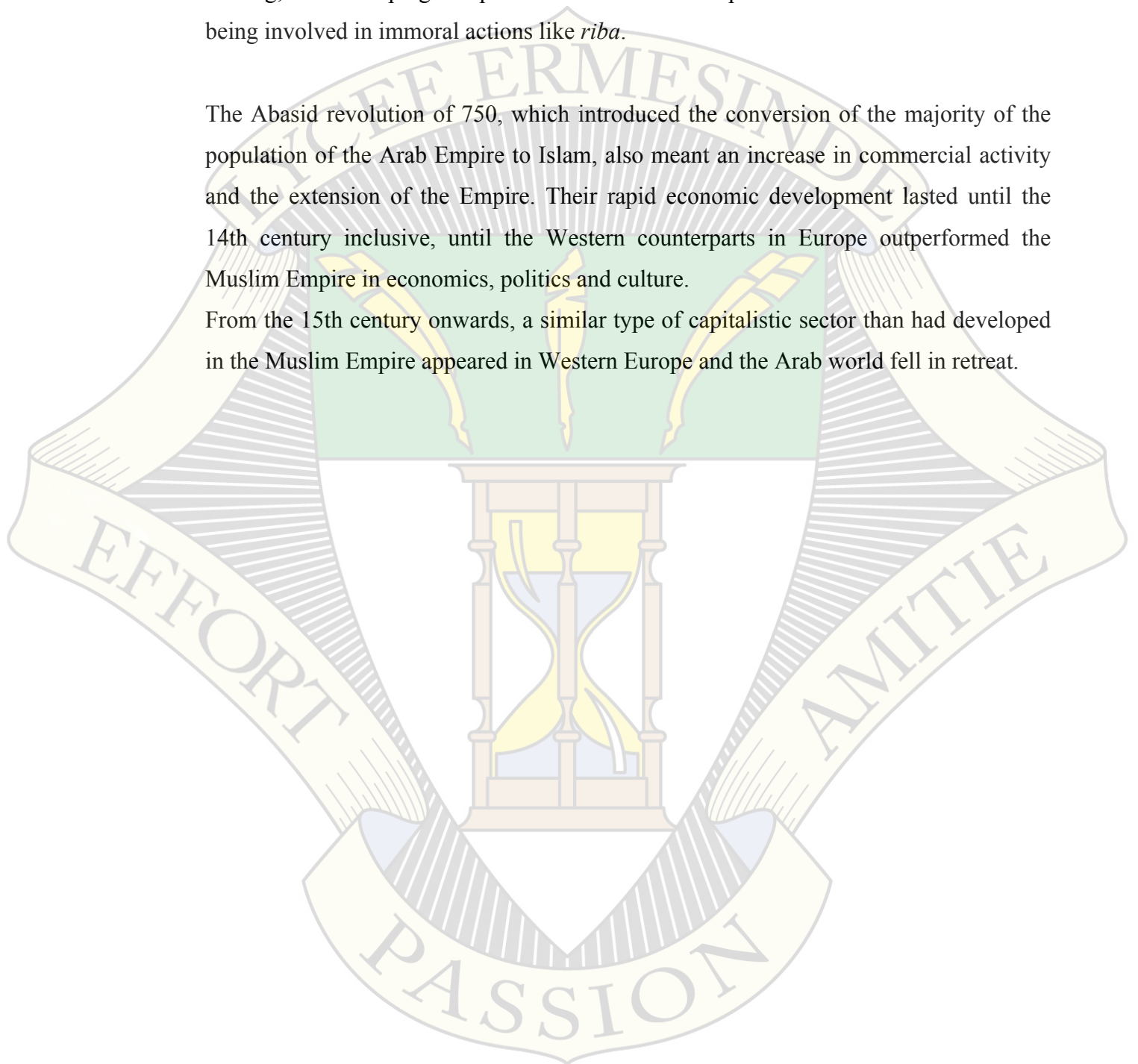
Islam was born in the 7th century in Mecca, which had already been a centre of capitalistic trade. This fostered the contact between Islam and economics and finally influenced the Muslim community to increase their capital through trade, buying and selling products by means of money. Islam was born into a form of a capitalistic market that possessed the opportunity for profit, supply and demand, and promoted internal relations.

The peninsula of Arabia maintaining a rather undeveloped economy, slowly transformed itself into a flourishing and reliable economy. During the transition period,

the Arabs made themselves masters of an enormous empire. Expanding their territories implied making profit simply by receiving, directly and indirectly, a share of the tribute given by the peoples and countries they had conquered. The Muslim conquerors made contact with the captured people and allowed them to engage in trade and money lending, while keeping the profitable administrative positions for themselves without being involved in immoral actions like *riba*.

The Abasid revolution of 750, which introduced the conversion of the majority of the population of the Arab Empire to Islam, also meant an increase in commercial activity and the extension of the Empire. Their rapid economic development lasted until the 14th century inclusive, until the Western counterparts in Europe outperformed the Muslim Empire in economics, politics and culture.

From the 15th century onwards, a similar type of capitalistic sector than had developed in the Muslim Empire appeared in Western Europe and the Arab world fell in retreat.



### 3.2 A comparison between Western and Islamic economical principles: Are we really that different?

By looking at the traditional economical and political principles of Islam, we can find several similarities with the predominant Western economic system of capitalism. At first sight, the two economic systems have nothing in common. The former is a branch of the Islamic jurisprudence, based on a religious ideology, which gives importance to moral values and which fundamentals are religious scriptures (Qur'an and Sunnah) and the latter is a secular economic and political system, characterised by a free market for goods and services controlled by private owners. The first originated in the Middle East during the Middle Ages, is interconnected with the religion of Islam, the second was founded in the European/Western society during its rise to power after the decline of the Arab Empire. But to realise that we can find numerous commonalities between the two systems, we have to confront the Islamic economics with capitalism.

Let's first define the notion of capitalism:

“Capitalism is an economic system in which trade, industry, and the means of production are largely or entirely privately owned and operated for profit. Central characteristics of capitalism include private property, capital accumulation, competitive markets and wage labour. In a capitalist economy, the parties to a transaction typically determine the prices at which assets, goods, and services are exchanged.”<sup>25</sup>

“Capitalism is an economic system in which investment in and ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange of wealth is made and maintained chiefly by private individuals or corporations, especially as contrasted to cooperatively or state-owned means of wealth.”<sup>26</sup>

We can conclude that the principal features of capitalism include the unrestricted private ownership of means of production, thus free trade and enterprise in a free, liberal market of competition without any government intervention, the strive for the increase of capital and profit being the principal aim of the capitalist economic activity. Capitalist banking includes the presence of lending with interest and the capitalist

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<sup>25</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism>

<sup>26</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/capitalism>



systems foster the uneven distribution of wealth; the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer.

It's easiest to compare capitalism with the Islamic economics by using the methodical analysis of a table to take a look at their basic economic concepts. It is important to note here, that these economic concepts are theoretical principles of the two models that may end up differently when put into practice:

<b>Economic concepts</b>	<b>Capitalism</b>	<b>Islamic economics</b>
<b>Private ownership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- right of private ownership as the foundation of the capitalistic system</li> <li>- unlimited, unrestricted: everyone can own as much as they want</li> <li>- private ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange are controlled by individuals</li> <li>- concentration of wealth of a minority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- legal private ownership by the individual is recognised in Islam</li> <li>- not unlimited or unrestricted: moral obligations to share wealth and give alms</li> <li>- not all the means of production are placed under private ownership, public ownership of certain things (like water, fire, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>Competition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free competition</li> <li>- establishment of monopolies is allowed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free competition</li> <li>- establishment of monopolies is forbidden because it kills competition</li> </ul>
<b>Market</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free market economy</li> <li>- non-interference of the state in the economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- free market economy</li> <li>- State involvement in special cases</li> </ul>
<b>Profit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- profit motive and striving being the foundation of capitalism, unbridled power to profit-earning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- profit motive acceptable to a reasonable extent</li> </ul>
<b>Banking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- lending with interest</li> <li>- bank and client being two</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- prohibition of usury/<i>riba</i>,</li> <li>- profit-and-loss-sharing of</li> </ul>

	different entities, no personal or financial interference except paying back money	bank (investor) and client
<b>Distribution in wealth</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- inequitable distribution of wealth</li> <li>- wide economic disparities</li> <li>- concentration of wealth in a few hands</li> <li>- huge majority of population is deprived of necessities of life, poverty, unemployment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- adapted distribution of wealth</li> <li>- avoiding wide disparities by giving alms:</li> <li>- pay <i>Zakat</i> to the poor and needy</li> <li>-provision of basic human needs such as food, clothing and shelter</li> </ul>
<b>Economic freedom</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Unrestricted economic freedom</li> <li>- every individual can freely establish an enterprise, earn and spend as much as he likes</li> <li>- business practices such as speculation, profiteering, hoarding and exploitation, such as gambling, are allowed to make money</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- allows economic freedom, liberty to earn wealth</li> <li>- own it and spend it at discretion</li> <li>-not unlimited</li> <li>-means of earning wealth such as interest, bribery, gambling, games of chance, speculation, etc. are not allowed</li> <li>-consumption of wealth on luxurious and wasteful living is forbidden</li> </ul>

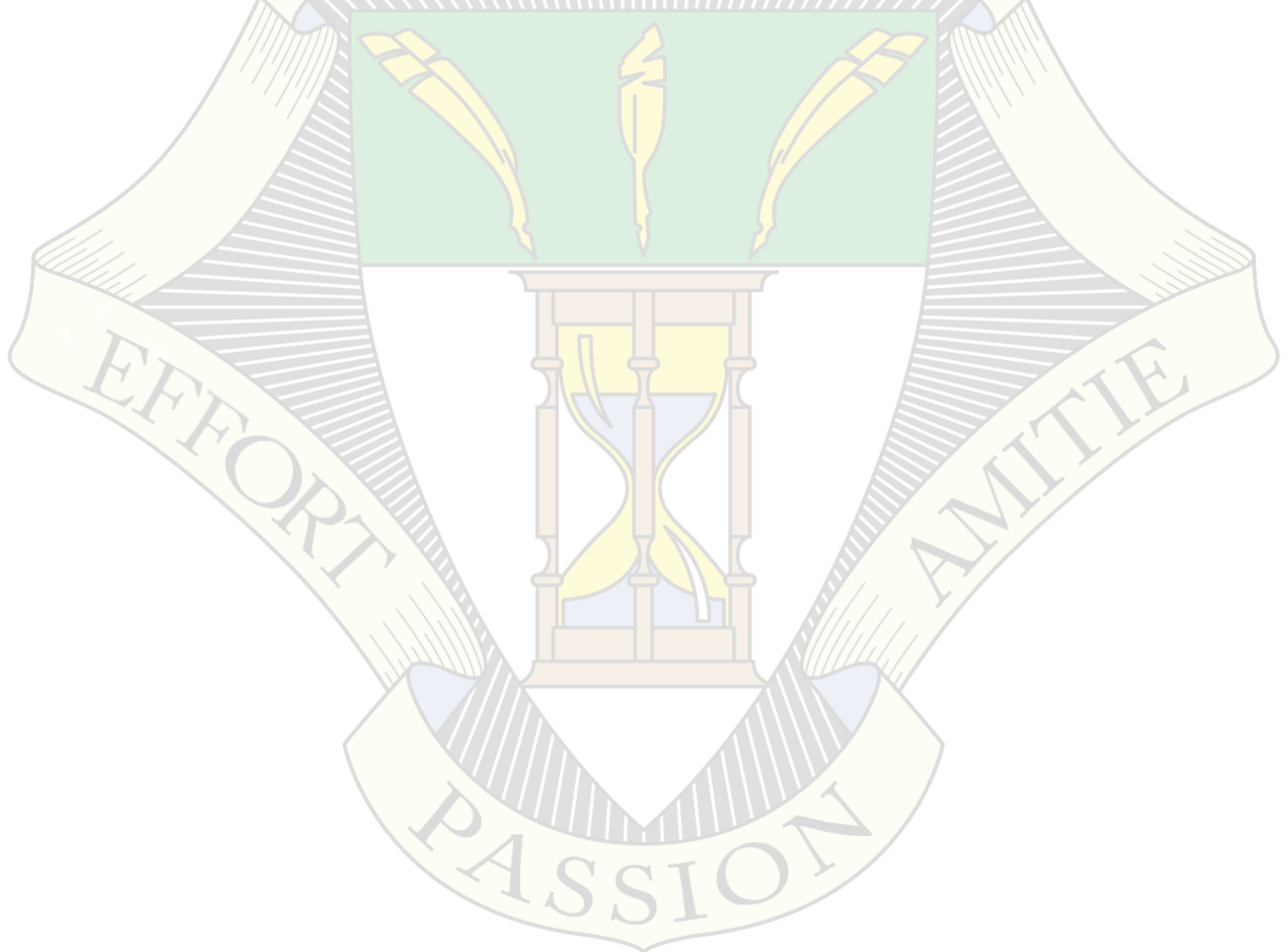
A good example of a traditional Islamic economy are the economics of the Muslim Empire during the Middle Ages, which more or less resembled today's capitalism: the merchant strived everywhere to get money, precious metals were being employed as the necessary measure for exchanges between goods and services, great development of trade, people practising *riba* despite the Qurans prohibition. This kind of economy created the density of commercial relations within the Muslim world, a sort of world market of unprecedented dimensions, that we look back on today.

However, the main difference between the capitalist and Islamic economy is that secular capitalism gives unrestrained power to profit and private ownership. No moral

restrictions or prohibitions control the capitalist market, which creates many inequalities.

Even though many features of capitalism are reflected in Islamic economics, such as profit making, private property, competition and a free market, the second and essential component of commerce in Islam is God as a moral institution, which is missing in capitalism. As a result, people often forget moral values in their human striving for more.

After we have compared the economic principles of the Islamic religion and, we will look at a comparison between political Islam and the Western notion of democracy.





### 3.3 Islamism in the age of Western democratisation: A revival of Islam in politics?

The contemporary doctrine of *political Islam* or *Islamism* exists for over a century. Its defenders' and adherents' aim is to introduce an Islamic state responding to the Sharia law and Islamic economics in the Muslim countries. Different Islamist groups have been created, have gone along a turbulent path and have undergone considerable changes and adaptations to form strategies to transform the secular political status of the Arab world into a collaboration between Islam and the government.

Two powers are being confronted with each other, the Western will to impose democracy and secularisation and the Islamists' desire to involve religion in politics and economics and create an Islamic state. The question that is raised here is which form of government will be applied in the Arab countries in the future? Democracy, an Islamic state, or maybe a balance between the two of them? Is there a possibility to combine Islam and democracy, to create a Muslim democracy?

In order to understand how the two trends of democratisation and political Islam evolved and how they will interact in a Muslim context, we must analyse both Islamism and democracy/democratisation. Moreover, we have to look at the history of the MENA region and the involvement of Islamism in it.

Democracy is defined as a *government by the people*. This means that it is a *form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system*.<sup>27</sup> A democracy thus demands free and competitive elections, the protection of civil liberties (freedom of speech, press, etc.) and the absence of authorities that have not been elected but practice a political influence (militaries, monarchies, religion). The Western doctrine of democracy insists on this secular execution of a democratic government. The process of a democratisation represents thus the transition of a country ruled by a different political system to a democratic country.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/democracy>

As said before, religion and state have always been interconnected in the Muslim society; there never existed such a thing as two different entities. How Ernest Gellner<sup>28</sup>, a scholar of the Arab-Muslim world said: „no secularisation has taken place in the world of Islam, because the hold of its believers is as strong and in some ways stronger than it was 100 years ago. Somehow or other, Islam is resistant to secularisation.“<sup>29</sup> (1991) He sees Islam as an „exception to the patterns of secularisation“ because a „church/state dualism never emerged“ and „(Islam) was a state from the very start.“ This influential role of religion, notably the Islamic religion in the Muslim-majority countries, is the most contested factor in the light of democratic polities. It's difficult to apply a liberal secular democratisation process to countries that have always lived in a society shaped by religion. That is why democracy in the Muslim context will probably differ from a Western-style democracy, because it is likely to allow religion to have a role in politics. Nader Hashemi<sup>30</sup> points out that „In societies where religion is a marker of identity, the road to liberal democracy, whatever other twists and turns it makes, cannot avoid passing through the gates of religious politics.“<sup>31</sup> This view is hard to accept for Western scholars because they insist on secularisation as the essential argument of democracy and Islam playing a role in politics being antithetical to democracy. This strictly secular view of democracy has been adopted during almost every process of democratisation around the world.

The first wave of global democratisation took place in 1974 with Portugal's popular revolution against its autocratic regime and has spread through the world ever since. One by one, authoritarian democracies and dictatorships transitioned to democracy and a more liberal government. The „democratic revolution“ transformed parts of Latin America, southern Europe, Asia, Africa and parts of the former Soviet Union.

The Muslim-majority countries of the Arab world however, have not taken part in the process of „Western-style democratisation“ until recently. In the last decades, countries like Morocco, Algeria, Egypt and Yemen, have engaged in governments called „electoral authorities“ that offer elections but still remain authoritarian by violating

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<sup>28</sup> Ernest Gellner (1925-1955) was British-Czech philosopher and social anthropologist whose interests extended to Islamdom

<sup>29</sup> From Ernest Gellner's study *Muslim Society*

<sup>30</sup> American professor author, expert and research of the Middle East and Islamic affairs, religion and democracy, secularism and comparative politics, Islam-West relations

<sup>31</sup> From Nader Hashemi's book *Islam, Secularism and Liberal Democracy, towards a democratic theory for Muslim Societies*, Oxford University Press, 2009

liberal principles, such as human rights and freedom of speech. These are generally systems that indeed allow elections, yet only accept single parties or leaders to form up for the elections, like in Egypt (Mubarak, Irak (Saddam Hussein) and Tunisia (Ben Ali). This allowed the government to be systematically tainted by manipulation and corruption. These „liberalised autocracies“ never really allowed a multiparty election or global human rights.

This however, does not mean that there haven't been any attempts of a more serious democratisation in the Arab world. But these Muslim democracy experiments didn't and still don't adhere to the Western notion of the separation of church and state. Muslim-majority countries are very likely to democratise and get more open to Western ideas, but there will have to be adjustments to find a balance between religion and democracy. It's vital that the process of democratisation adapts its goals to the social, political and ideological context of the country and its people. Not every society can execute democracy in the same way. As a result, Muslim democracies will probably differ from Western ones, as Whitehead<sup>32</sup>, an English philosopher, points it out: „longstanding assumptions about supposed Arab or Middle Eastern regional *exceptionalism* or entrenched resistance to democratisation impulses have proceed as unfounded here as they turned out to be in Latin America in the 1970s. It is not the Muslim world that is exceptional as regards democratisation, but rather the Western model and its experience that is the exception. Democracy is a universal idea, but the Western form is based on its unique historical evolution through the Renaissance-Reformation-Enlightenment sequence and therefore cannot be reproduced elsewhere. All societies will follow their own course.“

### Islamism and democracy:

Historically, the contact between Western modernisation and the Arab-Muslim world brought out two differing trends responding to the secularist democratisation model: (1) the will to adapt to Western ideas of a secular democracy in order to save the existing economic and political models from stagnation, (2) the will to establish the Sharia Law instead of a constitutional democracy based on the principles of common law and shield the Arab-Muslim traditions from the Western ideals. This means that the secularists



consented to the Islamic faith being a part of the private life, in contrary to the Islamists who think that religion should be given an appropriate role in political matters and reject the Western principle of separation of church and state. In the past four decades, an on going conflict between conservative Islamists and secularists has reigned over the Arab world. The society has been torn between the secular autocratic way of government and the Islamist opposition.

It was in the 1970s that Islamists actively began to oppose secularists. This was the beginning of the upsurge of Islamism that we can still see today. Soon after the rise of Islamism, internal tensions started to emerge and give birth to three different Islamist tendations. Kamran Bokhari and Farid Senzai divide them as follows in their book *Political Islam in the age of democratization*: they define *participators*, *conditionalists* and *rejecters*.

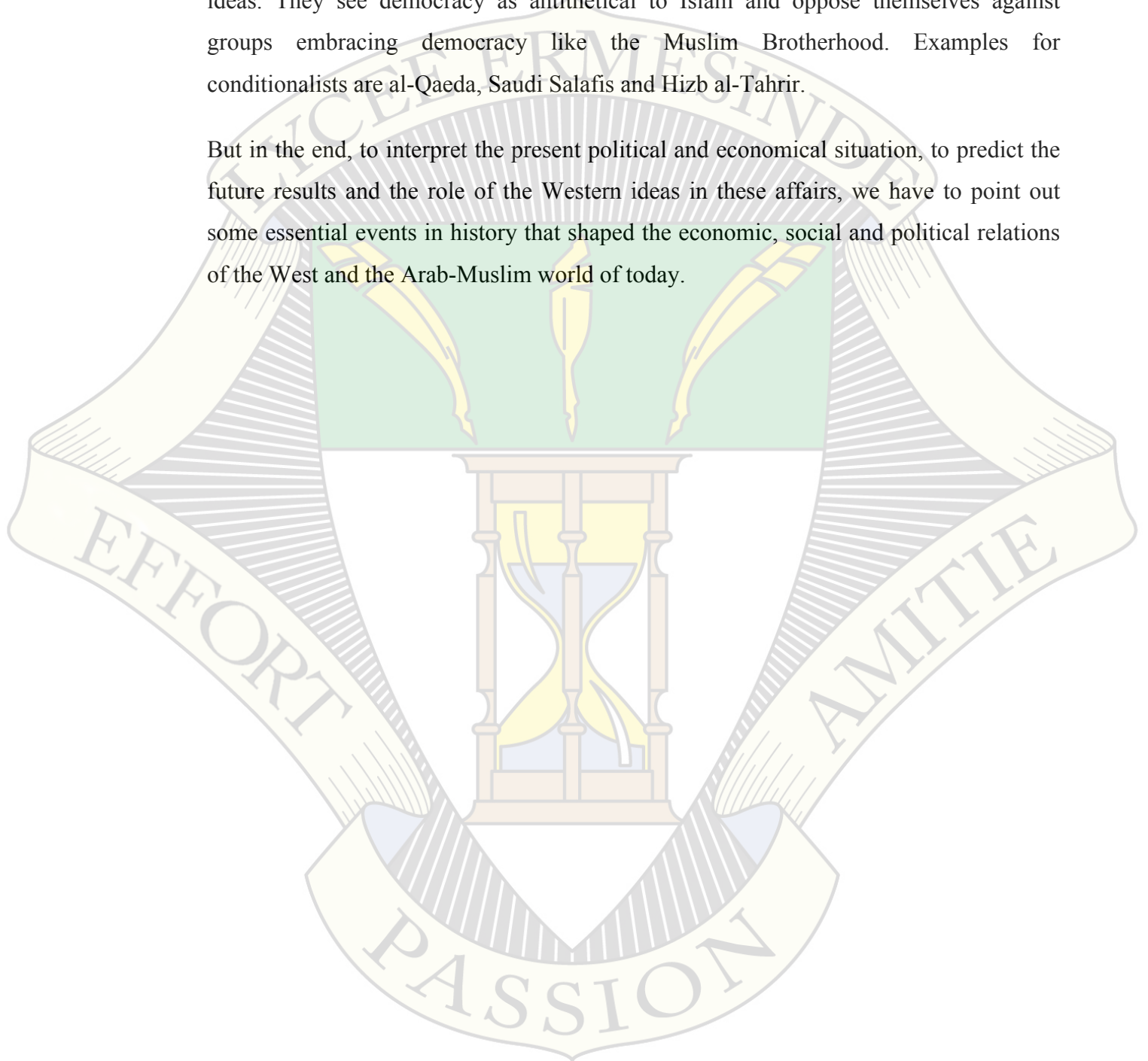
*Participators* are representatives of the idea that Islam and democracy are compatible, that it's possible to combine the two entities. Examples for *participators* are the Muslim Brotherhood, Ennahda, and the Jamaat-e-Islami. Rachid Ghannouchi, a prominent Tunisian Islamist intellectual and leader of the Ennahda Party explained their view in 1992: „If by democracy is meant the liberal model of government prevailing in the West, a system under which the people freely choose their representatives and leaders, in which there is an alternation of power, as well as all freedoms and human rights for the public, then Muslims will find nothing in their religion to oppose democracy and it is in their interest not to do so.“ The beginning of the *participator* Islamists can be traced back to the 18th century in the Ottoman Era, where Ottoman intellectuals travelled to Europe to get an education and return to their home country with their gained knowledge and Western inspiration. These ideas of military, political and economic matters were used to reduce the gap between the advanced Western society and the stagnant Muslim societies. They were the pioneers of today's participatory Islamism that wants to create an Islamic order by joining the ideas of the Islamic primary texts with those of the Western democracy. In the post-colonial era, their goal was to democratise the Arab-Muslim states that had fallen under the power of authoritarianism without rejecting Islam.

*Rejecters* opposed themselves to participators in a way that they accepted democracy, but only with certain conditions. Their main problem was that democracy allocates power to humanity and not to God. *Rejecters* want Islam to be part of every aspect of

collective life. Groups of rejecters are Egypt's al-Nour party, Gamaa al-Islamiyah, Tanzeem al-Jihad, which want to return to the original teachings of Islam and even want to reinstate a caliphate.

*Conditionalists* insist on the imposition of Islamic law and are the most radicals in their ideas. They see democracy as antithetical to Islam and oppose themselves against groups embracing democracy like the Muslim Brotherhood. Examples for conditionalists are al-Qaeda, Saudi Salafis and Hizb al-Tahrir.

But in the end, to interpret the present political and economical situation, to predict the future results and the role of the Western ideas in these affairs, we have to point out some essential events in history that shaped the economic, social and political relations of the West and the Arab-Muslim world of today.

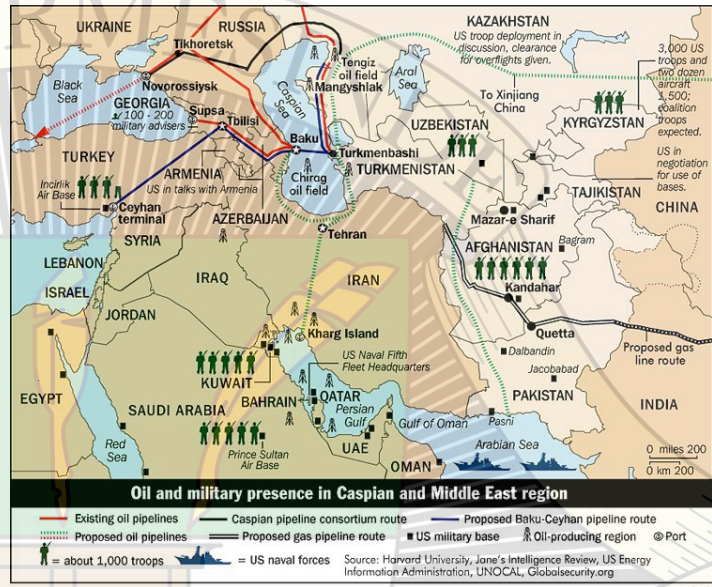


#### 4. Economic, political and military interference between the West and the Arab world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Since the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Western military forces and political entities have played an essential role in the Arab world. During the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, a major part of the transformations in the region have been either supervised or directly and indirectly monitored by the West. European colonialism created new, artificial borders of the Middle East and North Africa regions after the First World War, the regions being colonised during the 18<sup>th</sup> and

19<sup>th</sup> century by France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy. After gaining their independence in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, U.S. bases and Western-supported dictatorships were forcibly inserted into many states. Ever since these allegedly gained independences, the Arab world, where the world's major oil reserves are located, has never stopped being a major target of Western interference and intervention.

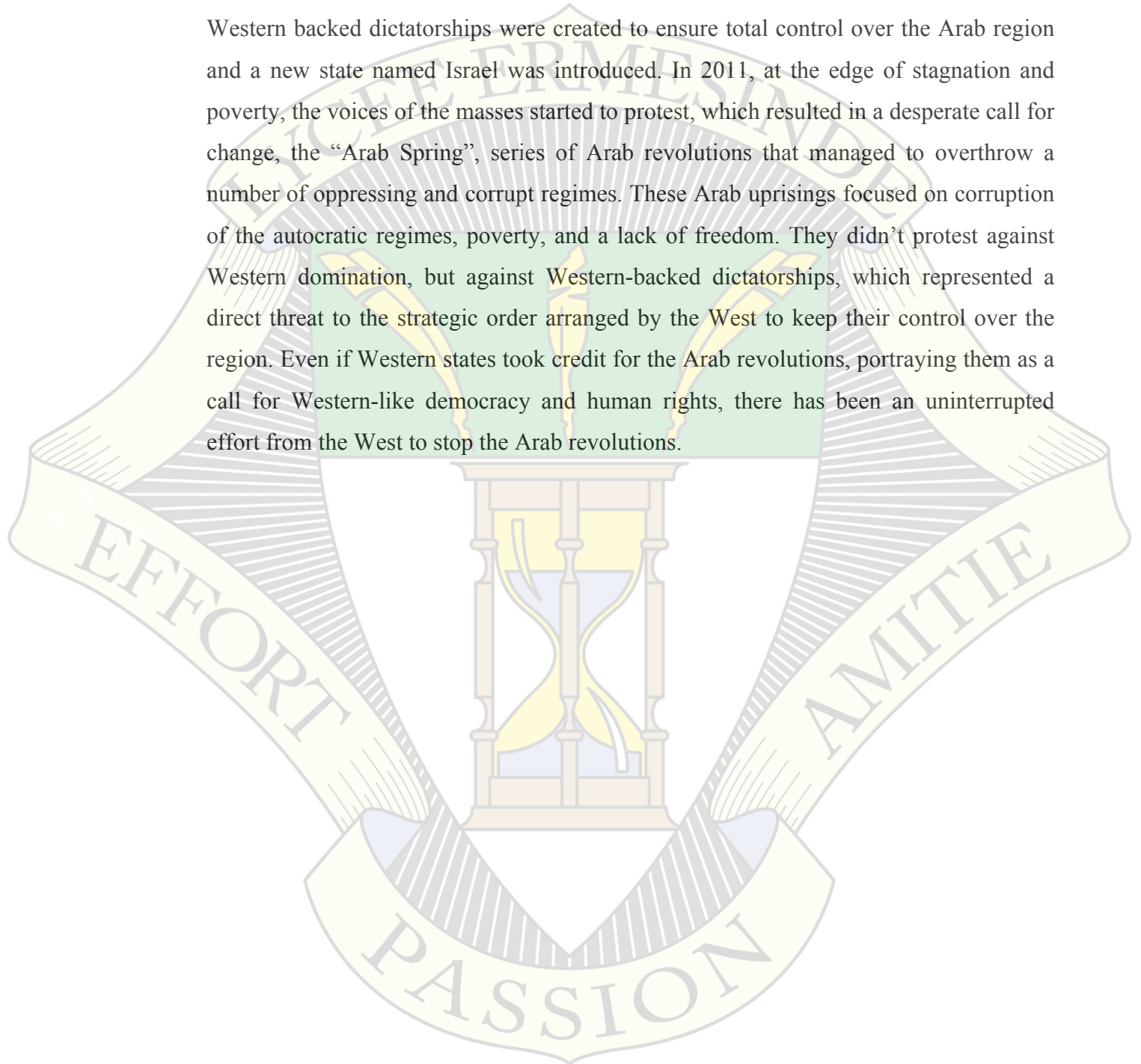


Another conflict, the Cold War, changed and reorganised the region, with the United States taking control of a big part of international and national political affairs in Arab countries. This is how the United States became the most important player of the Arab world. After the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1989, a new divide emerged, the clash between the Muslim-Arab world and the Judeo-Christian-Western world. Globalised mass media helped to nurture this divide and increase the perception of threat that they both feel until today.

After 9/11, the US heavily increased their presence in the region and interfered in many conflicts, for example in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Lebanon. The U.S. relationship with the Arab-Muslim world changed from an inconvenient concern to a national preoccupation. To get to their goal, which was and still is ensuring maximal



security from this “threat” that represents the Arab-Muslim world, the U.S. didn’t stop from toppling regimes, making alliances with human rights offenders, or intervening in national affairs of technically independent states. Every opponent of the Western ideologies was directly or indirectly defeated by the Western forces, starting with Nasser in Egypt, continuing with Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and Arafat in Palestine. Western backed dictatorships were created to ensure total control over the Arab region and a new state named Israel was introduced. In 2011, at the edge of stagnation and poverty, the voices of the masses started to protest, which resulted in a desperate call for change, the “Arab Spring”, series of Arab revolutions that managed to overthrow a number of oppressing and corrupt regimes. These Arab uprisings focused on corruption of the autocratic regimes, poverty, and a lack of freedom. They didn’t protest against Western domination, but against Western-backed dictatorships, which represented a direct threat to the strategic order arranged by the West to keep their control over the region. Even if Western states took credit for the Arab revolutions, portraying them as a call for Western-like democracy and human rights, there has been an uninterrupted effort from the West to stop the Arab revolutions.



## 4.1 The Western involvement in Middle Eastern affairs:

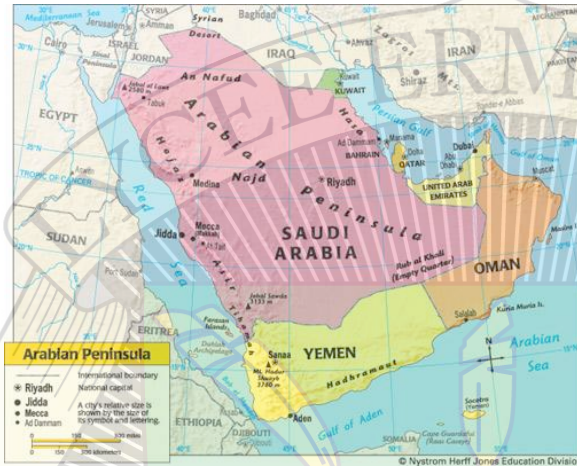
To find out the reason of Western interference in the Arab world and the consequences of this imperial domination that has been going on during the last century, we need to take a look at the different events that took place in the Middle East and North Africa in which the West played a key role. I've selected five periods of the Arab modern history that, in my eyes, particularly influenced the region and therefore shaped the Arab world: the (second) colonisation-period, the creation of the new Jewish nation-state of Israel, the Iraq War, the consequences of 9/11 and the Arab Spring.

### Colonisation:

The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries represented a period of major change in the history of the Arab world. European colonisation started to spread and plunge the Arab world into a time of humiliation and subjugation. Even if the age of European expansion began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it wasn't until the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Europe managed to dominate and subordinate many states. It meant the emergence of a new world order, led by Great Britain, France and Italy. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the Muslim-Arab world was subjugated to the European powers; imperialism and exploitation had been diffused in the region.

When Turkey, head of the Ottoman Empire since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which controlled parts of Europe, North Africa and the Fertile Crescent back then, was defeated and its empire crumbled apart because of the superiority of European powers in World War I, the Arab world was entirely exposed to the grips of the European powers. Even if Turkey itself remained independent, and re-established a Republic under Atatürk in 1923, countries of North Africa, like Egypt (British colony in 1882, British protectorate in 1914, under British tutelage in 1922, independent after 1956), Tunisia (French colony from 1881 until 1956), Algeria (French colony from 1830-1956) and Libya (Italian colony from 1911-1945) didn't manage to become independent until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The same applies to the countries that had been part of the Ottoman Empire until World War I, like Syria (French colony from 1918-1946) and Lebanon (French Mandate from 1918-1943) that had been divided between Britain and France after World War I.

The Persian Gulf States<sup>33</sup> (see map on the right<sup>34</sup>) and the Arabian Peninsula States<sup>35</sup> (see map on the left<sup>36</sup>) were mostly newly formed states that were founded in the 1960s and 1970s. They were founded out of a region of British



control where British troops were stationed since the 1830s. Colonisation didn't really affect these states until geologists discovered oil in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## Palestine and Israel:

There are many reasons for the nationalism and anti-Semitism that emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe: the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, the following expansion of secular forms of government and nationalisms, the conflicts between the different countries of Europe, etc. The dangerous combination of nationalism and anti-Semitism created the horrors of World War II, in which thousands of Jews were humiliated and executed.

The Zionist Movement was a *nationalist and political movement of Jews and Jewish culture that supports the reestablishment of a Jewish homeland in the territory defined as the historic Land of Israel (Palestine or Holy Land)*<sup>37</sup> that was created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in reaction to the growing anti-Semitism. After the atrocities of World War II, Europe and its Allies searched for a way of forgiveness to the Jewish people and

<sup>33</sup> The Persian Gulf is a Mediterranean sea in Western Asia. The Arab states of the Persian Gulf are the seven Arab states that surround the Persian Gulf, namely Kuwait, Bahrain, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/images/201%20Iran%20Southern%20Ports%20Persian%20Gulf%201%20Map.jpg>

<sup>35</sup> The Arabian Peninsula is the largest peninsula in the world, at 3,237,500 kilometers squared. The Arabian Peninsula consists of the countries of Yemen, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates as well as parts of southern Iraq and Jordan.

<sup>36</sup> <https://mods-untuned.com/uploads/image/image/54d716a2767073050bc90000/ArabianPeninsula.jpg>

<sup>37</sup> [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zionism](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zionism)

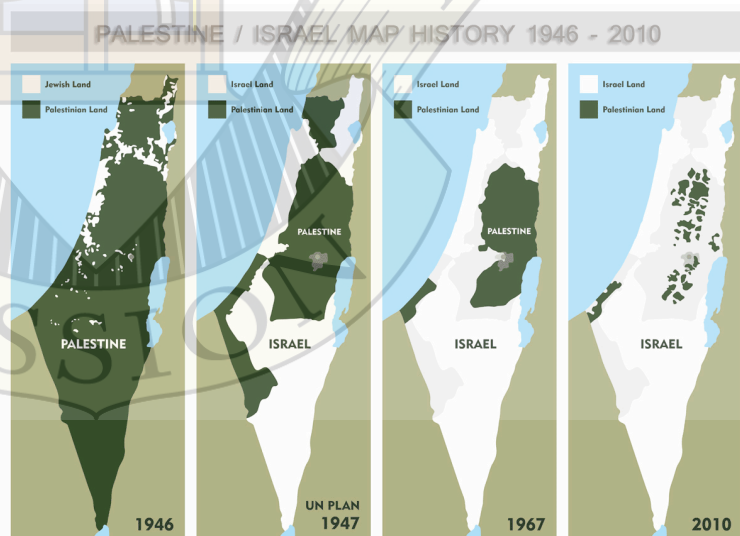


supported the Zionist movement. They were convinced that the Jews should be given a real, own State in compensation of the European Jews' fate in Nazi Germany.

The Arabs however, were not in the same situation as Europe and were not responsible for any Jewish execution, thus didn't share the same kind necessity for forgiveness. Arab states couldn't understand why the Jewish people should get the chance to return to their ancestral land that is located in the middle of the Arab territory to compensate their suffering in Europe with which the Arabs had nothing to do. They argued that Palestine isn't exclusively the holy site of the Jewish religion but of all three monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) and that their compensation site should be located inside Europe and not inside the Arab world. The idea of a nation-state in Palestine, exclusively reserved for Jews seemed unfair and politically unacceptable for the Arabs.

The Arab resistance to the formation of the State of Israel didn't stop the Western powers, led by the United States, to found the new Jewish state of Israel. The borders were indicated by the U.N. (United Nations), which also developed the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. The establishment of the new state was set on 14 May 1948, when the British Mandate for Palestine (that existed since 1923) ended. David Ben-Gurion, the Executive Head of the Zionist Organization declared "the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel, to be known as the State of Israel". No neighbouring Arab country recognised Israel as a state at the time of its foundation. Shortly after the creation of the country, Arab armies invaded Israel.

Until today, the Arab states and Israel haven't come to an agreement of peace. Since the establishment, of Israel, many wars have been fought with its Arab neighbours. From 1948 onwards, Israel increasingly expanded its surface and took over territories from Palestine (see map<sup>38</sup>). It



<sup>38</sup> <http://www.palaestina-portal.eu/bilder-1/palaestine-israel-karte.png>

periodically occupied several territories like the West Bank, Sina Peninsula (1956-57, 1967-82), a part of South Lebanon (1982-2000), Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. During all this time, the United States has never stopped to support Israel, even though many U.N. resolutions have been violated (for example Israel's occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories).

In the last decades we have seen that Western decision-makers tend to turn a blind eye on what concerns international law enforcement on the State of Israel. International principles and values are frequently violated and the borders defined in 1948 not respected. The separation wall built between Israel and Palestine is a total rupture with the U.N. agreement. Moreover, no international sanction has been mounted against Israel when it broke the Security Council resolutions of a withdrawal from occupied territories. Military protection has been laid upon suffering populations for example in Namibia, Bosnia or Kosow, but nothing has ever been done against the Palestinian suffering for over 75 years. Thousands have died from the weapons that the United States has continually been providing Israel and policies concerning weapons of mass destruction disregarded (they are only applied to other Arab countries as for example Iraq). Any resistance to the occupation on the behalf of Israel is being ignored or stated as not legitimate. There are many questions that can be asked here, for example why is the U.S. still backing Israel with large-scale military, financial and diplomatic support even though it has to proceed to violations of international law and human rights? Is there something else behind the moral purposes of the establishment of the Jewish state?

For more than 75 years, Israel and the U.S. have been linked through a close relationship. Over \$3 billion in military and economic aid are sent to Israel every year by the United States. Other Western countries agree with the strong support the U.S. is giving Israel but they have neither provided arms, nor given any diplomatic support.

The backing of every Israeli government from the U.S. cannot only be the consequence of a moral commitment that the West gave Israel years ago. Too many financial, military and diplomatic means have been invested in the affair. The proof that it's not only Israel's security interests that is at stake here, is that the major part of U.S. military and economic aid began only after the 1967 occupation war. After Israeli forces proved to be stronger than the Arab armies, the U.S. started to see Israel as a real ally in a "hostile" territory. Suddenly, the United States had other strategic interests than only the survival of Israel. There are a few reasons that support this theory:

Radical nationalist movements in Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine have been contained with the help of Israel. It has for example prevented Syria, which was an ally of the Soviet Union during Cold War, from attacking. Moreover, the United States had the chance to test American arms by providing Israel with their arms in its wars. Israel has weaponry, particularly its air force that is predominant in the region and possesses a nuclear arsenal that could reach as far as the former Soviet Union.

These are only a few examples of interventions of U.S. forces in Israel. Since 1967, the increase in aid hasn't stopped. The U.S. high-level support for Israel is thus also in the United States' best interest. Israel's military dominance over the region is very convenient for the United States.

Today, Israel is defined as a Jewish and Democratic State with a parliamentary system. It's a developed country and a part of the OECD. It has the highest standard of living in the Middle East and the 5<sup>th</sup> highest in Asia, even though no peace treaty nor an armistice has been agreed upon between Israel and Palestine.

#### U.S.-Iraq relations:

Iraq was recognised as an independent state in 1930 after the British mandate ended. Since the declaration of independence of Iraq after World War I (see map of Iraq<sup>39</sup>), the relations between the United States and Iraq have changed constantly. American involvement in Iraq appeared in forms of included cooperation, but also confrontation and war. In the aftermath of World War I, the interaction between the U.S. and Iraq can be divided into five phases that have to be put into a changing context of growing interest:

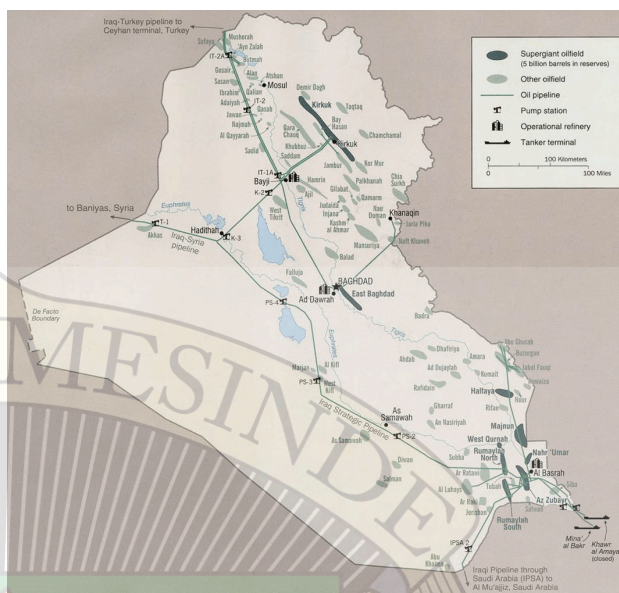


<sup>39</sup> [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle\\_east\\_and\\_asia/iraq\\_pol-2009.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/iraq_pol-2009.jpg)



- The birth of U.S.-Iraqi Relations:

The first contact between the United States and Iraq, which was at the time a British mandate, was when U.S. oil companies searched for commercial opportunities in the 1910s and discovered oil fields in Iraq (see map of Iraqi oil fields <sup>40</sup> ). However, besides



building some oil pipelines and a pro-Western monarchy in the 1920s and 1930s, American involvement in Iraq was limited. Post-World War II and the Cold War increased the relations between Iraq and the U.S., because the Americans were scared of the spread of communism in the Middle East. When the British were unable to maintain their mandate, Iraq became independent and the United States tried everything to stabilise the Iraqi government by providing economic and military aid. With the military coup against the pro-Western, British-built monarchy in 1958 however, the U.S had to accept its first failure in the country.

- An instable period between 1958 and 1979:

After the fall of the Iraqi monarchy in 1958, instability reigned over the country. Other nationalist revolutions followed with the goal to further remove foreign imperialism. The United States continually tried to stable their relationship with the government of Iraq and prevent the expansion of communism in the country. No attempts of introducing a democracy in Iraq were shown. In the late 1960s, relations declined.

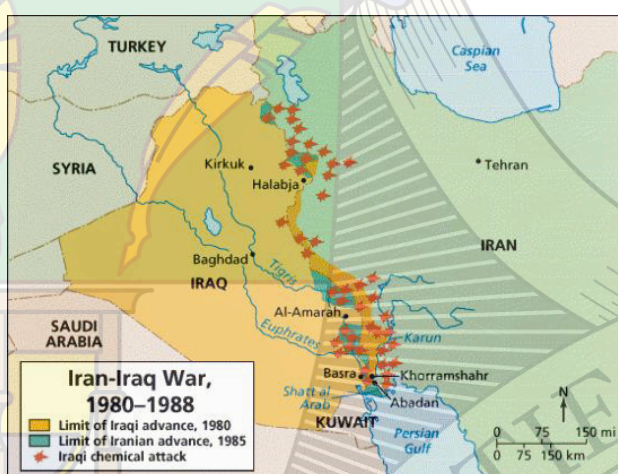
- The presidency of Saddam Hussein and the Iran-Iraq War, 1979-89:

<sup>40</sup> [http://esplift.com/iraq\\_oil-map.jpg](http://esplift.com/iraq_oil-map.jpg)

- In 1979, when Saddam Hussein took power over Iraq and became the fifth President of Iraq (serving from 1979-2003), the U.S.-Iraqi relationship immediately worsened. Hussein, who played a key role in the 1968 coup of his party, started to nationalise oil and banks in the 1970s, which allowed the economy to grow. When he rose to power, he executed all national rivals and suppressed several movements of opposition. In the West, he was known for his brutal dictatorship. He invaded Iran in 1980 as a result of a tension between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ba'athist Republic of Iraq.

What most people don't know is that President Ronald Reagan, when mutual attacks on oil tankers on the Gulf started, gradually started to interfere in the

Iran-Iraq War (see map of the Iran-Iraq war <sup>41</sup>). From 1982 until 1988 of the Iran-Iraq War <sup>42</sup>, the U.S government supported Saddam Hussein. The alliance started because of an



Iran attack on oil tankers that carried Iraqi oil (controlled by the U.S.) to the world markets. In 1988, a ceasefire was instored with the goal of re-establishing stability. Until then, the West ignored Saddam Hussein's human right abuses to protect their relationship with Iraq and its resulting oil business.

- The Gulf War and the U.S. Containment policy, 1989-2003:

The Iran-Iraq war however didn't lead to peace, but gave place to the Gulf War (1990-91), a short war that was characterised by the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait that lasted seven months and led directly to an intervention by the United States. Iraq was internationally condemned by its invasion of Kuwait. When the mounting tensions started to become a threat to the oil market and to the territories beyond the occupied Kuwait, such as Saudi Arabia, George W. Bush

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/images/187%20Iran-Iraq%20War%201980-1988%20Map.jpg>

<sup>42</sup> The reason for the Iran-Iraq War was the emergence of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Iraqi fear that the Shia majority, repressed from the Sunni minority in Iraq, would rebel. Moreover, Iraq wanted to replace Iran as the dominant Persian Gulf state.

decided to assemble troops from other Western and Arab countries (key players in this coalition were the United States, Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Egypt) to defend Saudi Arabia, the main retender of oil, and create the largest military alliance since World War II. 34 forces, led by the United States collaborated against Iraq in reaction of its invasion and annexation of Kuwait<sup>43</sup> in August 1990. It led to economic sanctions against Iraq by members of the U.N. Security Council. The daily news, especially in the United States, reported live pictures from the war. The Coalition forces finally won the conflict and managed to make the Iraqi troops back down from Kuwait and introduce a cease-fire. However, the U.S didn't advance into Iraq to depose the aggressive and corrupt Hussein. They were still in fear of an end of the international oil alliance, that's why they let him reign, as long as he wasn't making any trouble. The containment policy, which included sanctions and restrictions, lasted until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.

- Iraq and the United States after 9/11: U.S. invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, 2003-2011:

After the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2001 (see *The post-9/11 world, Bush's "freedom agenda" and the Obama administration*) terrorist attacks on the United States, it didn't take long for George W. Bush to send an American army to Iraq with the goal of destroying the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein. The 9/11 attacks triggered a vague of insecurity amongst the people of the United States and the image of a new enemy, Al-Qaeda and later Islam in general, was created. Saddam Hussein became thus a direct threat to the American security that George W. Bush had to eliminate. Still shocked from the 9/11 strike, the Congress and the American people gave the president green light to pursue his plan of radically and violently toppling Hussein's regime. For the 18<sup>th</sup> months that followed 9/11, Bush gradually prepared America to go to war with Iraq, by giving speeches, distributed by mass media, portraying Saddam Hussein as a major danger source for the United States that would motivate other terrorist groups and entail other terrorist attacks on the U.S. 64% of Americans supported George W. Bush in his decision of military action against Iraq. The build-up to war became reality when the United States and several allies invaded Iraq by a

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<sup>43</sup> The official cause of the invasion of Kuwait by the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein was that Kuwait apparently stole Iraqi petroleum, but it's very likely that Iraq had other reasons.



“shock and awe” surprise attack in 2003, without the U.N. approval. The goal was, after George W. Bush and the British Prime Minister Tony Blair "to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction (Iraq was in alleged possession of nuclear weapons, which was later proved to be wrong, another manufactured consent of propaganda against Saddam Hussein), to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people." The invasion of Iraq lasted from the 19<sup>th</sup> March to the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2003. It was the start of a long-term conflict between the U.S. and Iraq, later known as the Iraq War. A coalition of American, British, Australian and Polish troops attacked Iraq and brought down the Saddam Hussein government. An American military court executed Saddam Hussein three years later. Among 1000 soldiers had died by September 2004 and 3000 by January 2007. The initial operation and the following American occupation of Iraq that lasted until 2011, cost the U.S. annually \$51 billion in 2003 and \$102 billion in 2006. The conflict continued for a decade because of the emerging opposing forces and the power vacuum that Saddam Hussein's deposal had entailed. A conflict between Shias and Sunnis and a long-term revolt against the U.S. and coalition rose in post-invasion Iraq. After the Baath-Party that was Sunni, had to abdicate, the Shias were installed in the government by the U.S.

The U.S. began to pull back its troops in 2007-2008. President Barack Obama accelerated the withdrawal and by 2011, the troops formally left Iraq, even if some remnants still remained.

- Reconciliation? 2011-2013:

Despite the departure of U.S. troops from Iraq in December 2011 and the suppression of a repressive dictatorship, the previous American invasion and the following occupation of the country increased sectarian division between Sunni's and Shia's and different rebel groups. The Iraqi population's displacement during the time of American occupation is estimated of around 2.3 million people in 2008 and of the same amount of people leaving the country. Poverty stayed the same, but the invasion led to the government of Nouri al-Maliki that resulted from the multi-party elections in 2005 and remained in power until 2014. It also introduced policies that had an effect on the sectarian tensions, disadvantaging the Sunni minority. Moreover, it allowed Iranian arms to be transported to the Syrian regime in time of war, which again, placed Iraq and the U.S. on different sides of a war. This created

political and ethnical instability in Iraq and a frustration of the “Islamist conditionalists” (see chapter 3.3)

- ISIS, 2014-2015

In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) set in motion a military offensive in Northern Iraq and declared a worldwide Islamic caliphate. In the summer 2014, President Obama announced the return of U.S. military to Iraq to stop the ISIS<sup>44</sup> forces, which are defined as a “terrorist organisation” by the United Nations, the EU, the United Kingdom, the U.S. and many more. Many countries are directly fighting against the expansion of ISIS that is taking a worldwide scale. The group’s alliance to al-Qaeda and Iraqi insurgency troops following the 2003 invasion of Iraq makes ISIS a constant and major threat to the West. Led by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS first sent its delegates to Syria in 2011 during the Syrian Civil War and created an alliance with a Syrian jihadist group. ISIS is known for having a broad propaganda on social media and on the Internet. They disperse recruitment videos and beheadings of soldiers, civilians or journalists. At the end of 2014, ISIS gained key western-backed cities in Iraq, territories and alliances in Syria, Libya, Yemen and Afghanistan by fighting against government forces, supported by the West. In January 2015, it was confirmed that ISIS members had infiltrated Europe. With several stories about ISIS, jihad and Islam, the media spread and still spreads fear amongst the population of the Western countries, which supports an increasing division between Muslim people and Non-Muslim people.

The reason why the Iraq War has been described in detail in this chapter is because it’s a good example of the involvement of the West, especially the United States, in Middle Eastern affairs. The control of the Arab East is a long-held goal of the West. Iraq represents the heart of the Western “threat” to worldwide security and has been dealt with by means of cruel international actions. Alliances from all over the world interfered in Iraq’s history. The Bush Administration of the post 9/11-period has never

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<sup>44</sup> „The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL /'arsəl/) is a jihadist rebel group that controls territory in Iraq and Syria and also operates in eastern Libya, the Sinai Peninsula of Egypt, and other areas of the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. (...) On 29 June 2014, the group proclaimed itself to be a Worldwide Caliphate and renamed itself the Islamic State. Many Islamic and non-Islamic communities judge the group to be unrepresentative of Islam. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was named its "Caliph". As caliphate it claims religious, political and military authority over all Muslims worldwide and that "the legality of all emirates, groups, states, and organizations, becomes null by the expansion of the khilāfah's (caliphates's) authority and arrival of its troops to their areas".”  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_State\\_of\\_Iraq\\_and\\_the\\_Levant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant)

even tried to introduce diplomatic relations between Iraq and the United States. After 9/11, it was clear that Al-Qaeda was the enemy, that it had its foundations in Iraq and that the Saddam Hussein government had to be toppled. These actions were based on the assertion that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein's government represented an immediate threat to the United States and its allies. Later, after the invasion, no proof for the presence of nuclear weapons in Iraq has been found. Many decisions in the invasion of Iraq and the Iraq War have been inconsiderate, unfounded and baselessly violent.

### The post-9/11 world:

The September 11 attacks<sup>45</sup> represented a serious turning point in the relations between the United States and the Arab world. As Chas W. Freeman<sup>46</sup> explains it:

“For most of this period (the sixty years before 9/11), most Americans didn't pay much attention to the Arabs except when the price of gas went up or the Israelis bombed them or some Arab bombed Israel back. Now our involvement in the Arab world is direct continuous, expensive, overwhelmingly military, traumatic, politically, divisive, highly problematic and sometimes fatal. We are stuck in what the Bush administration briefly named “the long war”. This is a war with an enemy we are having trouble identifying and whom we clearly don't understand.”

Quickly after the terrorist attacks, al-Qaeda and its leader Osama Bin Laden (who denied it at first) fell into suspicion. In the aftermath of the terrorist actions U.S. troops were sent to Saudi Arabia, an increased support was granted to Israel and severe economic sanctions were launched against Iraq. The United States invaded Afghanistan in 2003, supported by close allies, to stop al-Qaeda and depose the Taliban power, which was discovered to be the base of al-Qaeda. Many countries in the West especially the U.S. and its key allies reinforced their anti-terrorism policy.

After the attacks, 90% of the population approved with President Bush's decisions, who

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<sup>45</sup> „The 9/11 attacks were a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks (two planes crashed into the North and South World Trade Center towers in New York City, a third crashed into the Pentagon, headquarter of the United States Department of Defense and a fourth plane was targeted at Washington D.C. but failed its mission) by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The attacks killed 2,996 people and caused at least \$10 billion in property and infrastructure damage.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September\\_11\\_attacks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks)

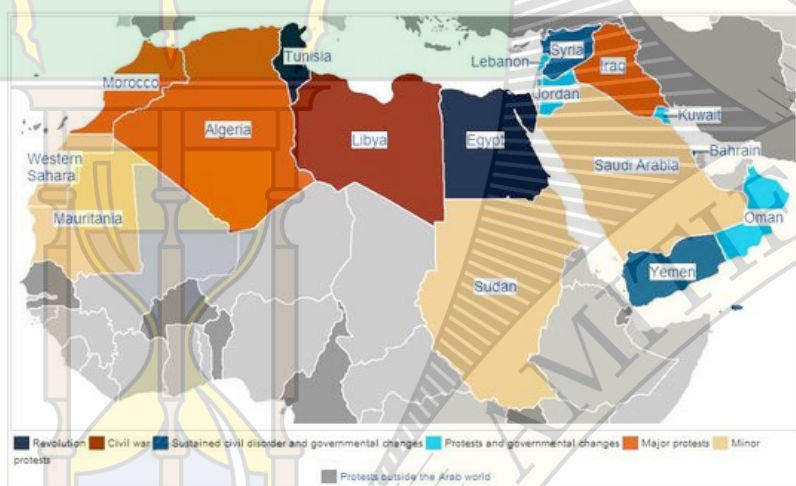
<sup>46</sup> From the former United States Ambassador of Saudi Arabia (1989-1992) Chas W. Freeman, Jr., past president of the Middle East Policy Council, in his speech *American Foreign Policy and the Arab World, Remarks to the Summer Institute of the Washington World Affairs Council*



led a coalition with other allies to destroy al-Qaeda and other militant extremist organisations. George W. Bush named it the “War on Terror”, with the slogan: “You are with us or against us”. Even if the U.S. argued that it was a global initiative against terrorism in general, mostly Muslim countries and Islamic terrorism were targeted. The difference between Islam and the Muslim population in general and the extremist Islamists terrorist organisations was often blurred and Muslim discrimination in the United States and in the West clearly increased. After Bush’s speeches and mass media, attitudes toward Muslims deteriorated. There were many hate crimes against Muslim Americans and negative stereotypes upsurged in the society. Muslim people in the United States had distinct disadvantages compared to Non-Muslim people. How George W. Bush dealt with 9/11, fuelled discrimination and fear against Muslims, and a new enemy came into being.

### The Arab Spring:

The “Arab Spring” or the “Arab uprisings” began on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2010 in Tunisia. Following the successful uprising in Tunisia against the former dictator Zine El



Abidine Ben Ali, a wave of similar anti-government protests (non violent and violent demonstrations) spread throughout several countries of the Arab League. By January 2015, many rulers have been toppled and deposed: in Tunisia, in Egypt (twice), in Libya and in Yemen (twice). Civil revolutions rose through Bahrain, Syria, major protests emerged in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Israel and Sudan and minor protests in Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara and Palestine (see map<sup>47</sup>).

The civil resistance in form of protests, demonstrations and marches against the repressed regimes they were living in (which were Western-backed) was organised with the help of social media as a tool of communication, which raised awareness of the repressive governments throughout the population, previously impossible because of

<sup>47</sup> <http://tommytoy.typepad.com/.a/6a0133f3a4072c970b014e890e3a5a970d-550wi>

censorship.

But on the contrary of what the West claims, since Hosni Mubarak fell in Egypt, the West and their Gulf allies tried everything to buy off, crush or hijack the Arab revolutions. Long standing U.S. interests in the Middle East were in danger in each country the Arab spring took place. The uprisings of early 2011 had a negative impact on U.S. objectives, long term energy balance, security imperatives in the Gulf and progress in counterterrorism.

The Arab Spring displayed the limits of American power in the Middle East. Aaron David Miller, an American Middle East analyst, author and negotiator reflected in July 2011 on the impact the Arab Spring will have on U.S. interests in the Middle East:

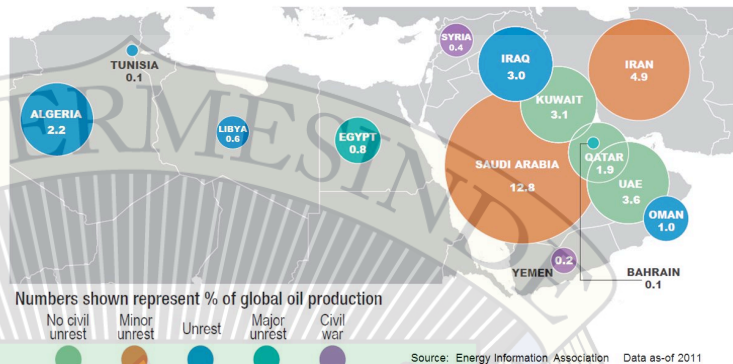
“Democracy, or whatever strange hybrid of popular government, weak institutions and elite control replaces the autocrats, will be a double-edged sword. And American policies, already marked by contradiction and challenge, won’t escape its cutting edge. The gaps separating American values, interests, and policies could actually grow, and the space available to the United States to pursue its policies from Iran to Gaza to the Arab-Israeli peace process could contract. The growing influence of Arab public opinion on the actions of Arab governments and the absence of strong leaders will make it much tougher for the United States to pursue its traditional policies. For America, the Arab Spring may well prove to be more an Arab Winter. “

But there is not only a negative side to the changings in the Arab world. The long pursued establishment of democracy and human rights in the region might have a chance after the repressive regimes have been toppled. Even if democracy will probably have to be combined with the Islamic religion, there will be much support for transitions to democracy, as well as from the outside of the region, from the United States, as from the inside, from the population.

## 4.2. What role has oil played in the politics and economics of the Middle East?

The Middle East has always been rich in natural resources (like natural gas, oil and phosphate) and possesses 55 per cent of the world's known oil reserves.

Today, the major part of global oil production is located in the Persian Gulf (Saudi Arabia, Iran, United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, etc., see map<sup>48</sup>).



The Arab regions and their oil reserves have already been desired in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when major European nations colonised the world. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, great powers like the British and the French took control over natural resources, especially oil of the Middle East.

The abundance of oil in the Middle East was thus already known, but Western powers didn't really care about it until Winston Churchill, the prime minister of the United Kingdom, introduced new battleships that were fuelled by oil instead of coal in 1908. That's when the Arab region became not only politically, but also economically interesting for Europe. After the new Anglo-Persian Oil Company was formed, which had to guarantee the flow of oil between the West and the Persian Gulf, world got increasingly dependant of the Arab oil. When all the old coal battleships were eliminated, oil became an even more significant source, later described by the United States as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history"<sup>49</sup>.

After The British Navy switched entirely from coal to oil in 1912 and Great Britain and used the gained oil for new technologies like automobiles, airplanes that all needed fuel, Arab oil became crucial. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the United States proved itself as an important actor in world politics, Americans found increasing interest in the Middle Eastern affairs too.

<sup>48</sup> <http://photos.osmek.com/get/96294.o.jpg>

<sup>49</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_United\\_States-Middle\\_East\\_economic\\_relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_United_States-Middle_East_economic_relations)



The United States' real interest arose in the 1930s, when American geologists found a high amount of oil in Saudi Arabia. In the following years, American powers did everything possible to insure itself the outcome of the discovered oil. In February 1945, shortly after World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt created a continual link between the Middle Eastern oil and American national security. This relationship promised to be one of the most important strategic alliances for the United States in the following decades. It consisted of Saudi Arabia supplying cheap oil to the global markets in exchange for American economic support and protection in times of war (for example in the Persian Gulf War). When more oil was discovered in the Persian Gulf, the United States tried to provide security in the region to keep the Middle Eastern oil flowing into the markets. It was among the principal political and economic concerns to retain control and power over the Gulf and thus over the Middle Eastern oil. The cost of this safeguarding has always been high in terms of money but also in terms of other necessary military actions to overcome certain difficulties. Many conflicts that needed U.S. intervention have been led since the late 1970s, when revolution and war has agitated the region.

The Iraq War was the longest, largest and cruellest intervention of American military in the Middle East. The conflict started only because of the U.S. strategic policy about asserting the flow of oil. And also in other countries of the region, Western military interventions took place because of international interests in oil. Terrorism and the 9/11 attacks surely contributed their part to the wars, but oil has always played a role in the confrontation between the United States and its allies and the Middle Eastern countries. Most of the time, war and oil were interconnected. The discovery and commerce of oil has thus shaped the Arab world and its population. Not only are the petroleum fields dominating the region's economy, they have led to many political difficulties. That's why it's necessary to take a look at what role natural resources have played in the modern economic and political history of the Middle East.

## The U.S. obsession and dependence of Middle Eastern oil:

When the British and French troops slowly withdrew from the Middle Eastern territories and lost their colonies after World War II, they gave up control over the Middle Eastern oil reserves too. The aftermath of World War II, its consequences and damage, prevented the European powers to continue their imperialism in the Arab world. The United States in contrary, a new world player, had every mean to increase its presence in the region. The United States was an emerging superpower at that time, which meant rapidly rising demands for oil.

Although the interference of the United States in the different Middle Eastern countries to control the Arab oil varies, we can perceive the same trend throughout the history of their relationship- the West that needs Arab oil and is strongly dependent of it and the Middle Eastern governments that need foreign wealth to make their economy grow. One can observe this trend on two concrete examples of countries: Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

### Iraq

Economic Western involvement with the goal of extracting oil in the Middle East took its start in 1928, when the Red Line Agreement was signed. This pact was based on the former founding of the Turkish Petroleum Company, which was created to find oil within the Ottoman Empire. When France, the United Kingdom and the United States discovered a large oil field in Iraq in 1928, they had to agree upon a way of distribution of the oil, which ended with an agreement that gave each power almost 14 % of the oil produced by the Turkish Petroleum Company. That's how the United States procured itself access to the oil market in Iraq and later to the rest of the Middle East. After World War II, the other two powers had to leave their colonies and thus their power over oil fields in the Middle East and left the U.S the lone dominance over the region, which gave them the possibility to monopolise oil.

### Saudi Arabia:

In 1933, Ibn Saud, the founder and king of the new Saudi Arabian kingdom delivered concession rights of exploiting oil reserves in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain Saudi to the American company Standard Oil for California. After the British power had fainted in the Middle East and thus also in Saudi Arabia, this gain of the concession rights was a turning point in the American relations with Saudi Arabia and later with more Middle

Eastern nations, it was the start of an alliance that was based on interdependence. The United States benefitted from the alliance to get to the Saudi Arabian oil, to stay the world's most powerful country and meet the weaponry of the USSR during the Cold War. The Saudi Arabian monarchy needed the technology and knowledge of the Americans to develop their standard of living and their economy.

The company Standard Oil of California changed its name into the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO), because it merged with Texaco and Socony and offered the Saudi Arabians 50% of the profits from oil, to keep the satisfaction mutual. This economic relationship with Saudi Arabia entailed political and military association, which meant American protection of Saudi Arabia in many conflicts and disturbances and a long-term alliance between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia.

Even though U.S. and British companies also tried to control Latin American oil, especially in Mexico, the United States soon concentrated on the Middle East and their new gained ally Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and its neighbouring countries the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain, the countries of the Persian Gulf, would soon be, with the help of the United States, some of the richest countries in the world.

With the growing fear of exhaustion of U.S. domestic reserves of oil, the need of U.S. companies for additional sources of supply steadily climbed. As a result, the American dependence and reliance on foreign and especially Middle Eastern oil grew. The U.S. foreign policy had to start initiatives to support the security of their access to Middle Eastern oil. That's why they had to stabilise pro-U.S. governments and establish strong ties with them. Any tension or potential conflict leading to blocs of oil had to be prevented.



## 5. Personal thesis: What's the real reason for the current conflicting coexistence between the West and the Arab-Muslim world?

As we have all witnessed, the relationship between the West and the Arab-Muslim world, the relationship between the non-Muslims and the Muslims has excessively worsened in the last decades. Everywhere in the world, conflicts or misperceptions between the two cultures have risen and do not cease to increase.

In my memoir, I have analysed many aspects of their historical, economic and political relations, their prejudices and misperceptions, their similarities and differences, their conflicts and times of peace. But the main question we need to ask us today, so that we can really understand the present and future relationship between the two currently most opposite cultures, is what's the real reason for the present fear and reciprocal hostile attitude between the West and the Arab-Muslim world?

One can see the problem from many different sides; there are numerous conflicts of opinion and differences of basic principles that originate from their religions and traditions, but there are a few central perceived conflicts that lead us to the main reason for the clash between the West and the Arab-Muslim world.

First, there is the Western fear of being robbed of their supremacy and seeing the Arab world as a threat, mainly after 9/11. At the very same moment that the extreme Islamists who allegedly planned the attacks broke into the Western world, Islamists and Islam in general, became a disturbing interference factor, even a real enemy that had to be kept in control. The "War on Terror" that George W. Bush initiated after 9/11 however, didn't bring peace, but divided the two worlds even more and supported their drifting away from each other. From the beginning, this was a strategic failure that fuelled the emerging divide that is still today hard to be bridged. Manipulation and ignorance amongst Americans and Europeans about Islam and the Arab world, combined with Muslim and Arab anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism following several conflicts of interest, has created a disunited world.

Instead of trying to understand the reason of this spread of terrorism, the objectives that al-Qaeda and its allies pursue and stop it at its roots, a kind of "Islamophobia" or

“Islamofascism” how they call it in America has been fostered in the West. Certainly, nothing justifies by what means the terrorists and extremists try to enforce their goals. However, rather than evaluating the problem and finding a solution that is maybe not only linked to the Islamist terrorists, but also to the Western countries’ interventions and repressions in the Arab-Muslim world, ignorance and confusion has led the world to apply unfounded stereotypes on innocent Muslims and has also brought Muslims to develop anti-Western prejudices. Even though Westerners don’t really try to overcome their differences with the Arab culture, peace, even if it’s a violently forced or repressing, artificial peace status, is an essential part of the Western dealing with the Arab world. Conflicts and war could mean the end for a constant stream of oil and the stability of prices, which would disturb the artificial Western peace and, after all, threaten the Western security, or should I say, threaten the Western neo-colonialist control.

Secondly, there’s the ideological issue that needs to be looked upon. This problem has three different dimensions-the religious, political and economic one. Let’s start with religion and the ideologies and traditions that come along with it.

Religion creates a feeling of shared identity that overcomes ethnicity, languages and nationalities. It settles and creates a value-sharing community. Those who believe in the same faith are not only linked by the same ideology and the same culture, but also by the impression of community and cohesion. A kind of solidarity is created, especially when the cultural community is confronted with discrimination, racism or assaults. The whole community perceives the injustice and humiliation, as well as the anger that comes along with it. American sanctions on Iraq and the following occupation and invasion of Iraq, the brutal foundation of Israel, the invasions of Lebanon, etc. are reasons for Muslims to perceive real rage toward its “invaders” and stick even more together. Due to the fact that Muslims, especially in times of discrimination, are very much connected throughout the world and support their counterparts in their lands of origins, the Arab Muslims anger is easily transferred to the Muslims all over the world, which is further estranging Muslims from non-Muslim Western-citizen.

The second dimension consists of the existing political differences. Even if the Arab Spring freed many countries from the grip of authoritarian (Western-backed) regimes, the West wants to prevent the increasing presence of political Islam in the Arab world. As mentioned in my memoir, the Western ideology and definition of democracy

consists of secularisation and excludes the role of religion or any other form of transcendence in politics (and economics). A form of government that is influenced by Islamic values and reined by Islamic powers, even if it would support democratic and liberal rights, is thus not accepted as a real democracy from the West.

After the Arab Spring, a new era started for the Arab world. Even if the countries undergoing political transitions still have to solve many problems, the Arab revolutions have been the catalyst for long-term change. Nobody knows what's going to be the final outcome of this, but one can clearly observe an increasing trend of political Islam. Many Arab citizens want their countries to be reigned in a way that is still linked to their cultural and religious values. Even if Islamic parties do not possess the necessary experience on the field yet and are not capable to lead the countries to a better future (as we have seen in Egypt, where the government of the Muslim Brotherhood was toppled by the army), I'm of the opinion that democracy and Islam can function together and pull the Arab world (I'm not speaking of already westernised Saudi Arabia, Qatar, etc.) out of their chaos.

But it's not only the political dimension that the West is so scared of; in my eyes, it's the third ideological dimension, the economical one that distresses the West so much.

I don't have to mention the Arab world as being the main oil exporter and the major oil provider for the United States and the rest of the West. We already know that the Arab oil influences the global oil market a big deal and that the issue represents an important reason of the Western interest in the region and their following involvement and need for control of the Arab world. The West tries to avoid disturbings and thus a disruption of exports of oil by what fits best at the moment, even if it means to throw countries into the controllership of authoritarian regimes, starting a war through false pretexts (like in Iraq) or turn a blind eye on the mischiefs and injustices of one particular Western-supported country (Israel).

Another economic interest of the West in the Arab world is their location. Countries like Indonesia, Malaysia and Iran are situated on or near the world's major transportation routes. It's not only the security of oil and gas that is at stake, but the assurance of being able to travel between Asia, an economically booming continent, and Europe, which is not possible without passing through these countries' air or sea ways. Logistics and direct access to the Arab world are thus key factors for a functioning Western trade.



Not to forget the Middle Eastern investment in the United States that is today relaunching after the tense period following 9/11 in 2001. Hundreds of millions of “petrodollars” from Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Kuwait, etc. have been stocked and invested in American banks since the 1990’s. Many Arabic sheiks invest their money in Western affairs, which creates a monetary flux mainly towards the United States.

But there is another aspect of the economical dimension, which is, in my opinion, the major reason for the Westerner’s hostility towards the Arab world and Islam. It’s not merely its fear of terrorism and its necessity for security, because none of the Arab armies or Muslim extreme terrorists have the power to overcome Western weaponry and the experience of Western (especially American) armies and the Western decision-makers know that. Neither is it only the flow of oil or the political stability that is concerning the West, even though these factors play a big role too.

In my opinion, it’s the alternative that Islamic finance advances to the liberal, capitalist system, that is really bothering the West. It’s in the West’s highest interest to expand their capitalist, profit-and-speculation based system all over the world and to prevent the rise of a different economic system that could be a threat to the capitalist economic monopoly, especially after the exclusion of communism as an alternative economic system.

I mean this in a way that almost every wealthy, well-functioning country with a high living standard that maintains more or less stable growth, functions today through the capitalist system. The major bourses like New York, London, Paris, Tokyo and Frankfurt are all based in developed, capitalist countries. And even smaller, not so important bourses, like Sao Paolo, Mumbai or Shanghai, have been growing into capitalism and try to comply with the other capitalist countries. Even China, that has been progressing and developing its economy in a pace that no other country has ever accomplished, went through the capitalist market transformation.

The emergence of capitalism was initiated following the decline of feudalism. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, industrialisation and globalisation accelerated the pace of the growing capitalist interdependence between the countries of the Western world, which was by then, mainly composed of the “Ancient triad”-the United States, Europe and Japan. These were the principal pioneers of capitalism that stood for an economic system and a mode of production, which supports privatisation, capital accumulation, competition and a liberal “laissez-faire”-policy in a free market economy. During the

20<sup>th</sup> century, liberal capitalism has become the dominant economic system in the Western world, which means the biggest, fastest and most important economic system of almost the whole world.

Its relatively new counterpart however, the Islamic economic system, that is currently growing exponentially, operates in a different way. A way that is completely devoted to the ethical framework of Sharia law, which provides the Islamic banking the necessary moral values to work with.

Since the late 1990s, the Islamic banking sector has been growing at a rate of 10–15% per year. The number of banks offering Islamic financial services is increasing and is adding large conventional banks that offer Islamic finance through their “Islamic window” to the existing small niche-banks of Islamic finance. Even if Islamic banking has been existing since 1000-1500 AD, when Middle Eastern tradesman introduced financial transactions on the basis of Sharia and Arabs from the Ottoman Empire had strong trade ties with the Spanish traders and other financial systems that engaged in a profit-loss-sharing basis, the Islamic economic system declined as the Western countries played an increasingly important role in the world economy. After the expansion of market-based economic systems and the foundation of capitalism, conventional financial banks became more dominant. Islamic banking only existed on a small scale, and was no key player in the world economy. It’s only after 1980 that its activity started to grow. The first financial company based on Sharia principles was the “mit Ghamr savings project” in Egypt.

The Sharia law which governs Islamic banking, provides not only an economical framework to finance, but is present in every aspect of a Muslim life, that’s why it’s based on general principles like fairness, honesty, avoidance of hoarding, being part of a community and the prohibition of *riba* (usury) *gharar* (uncertainty) and *maysir* (speculation) (see chapter 2).

*“Sharia is about universal, divinely inspired principles rather than national laws. (...) Islamic banking and finance can point the way forward: it is about extending choice, not restricting options. As each institution has its own sharia board, sharia compliance is effectively privatised rather than being a matter of national law.”*<sup>50</sup>

The following explanation of Islamic finance illustrates the role of religion in banking:

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?id=20284&lan=en&sp=1>

*“In the context of the Sharia framework, money is seen as nothing more than a means to facilitate trade (rather than a store of value). Consequently, in combination with the aforementioned prohibitions, it is not possible for Islamic banks to provide financing in a similar fashion to conventional banks. Instead, other structures are applied in which the bank often plays a much larger role in the financing structure and becomes a partner in the project to be financed – rather than just a provider of money. As defined in the accounting, auditing and governance standards for Islamic financial institutions, Islamic banks are founded on the concept of profit sharing and loss-bearing, which is consistent with the Islamic concept that ‘profit is for those who bear risk’. Profits are distributed according to a ratio defined in the contract, and any losses are distributed equally depending on the share in the project a party holds. The bank or financier partners with the company or individual seeking financing; the bank therefore holds part of the title to the underlying assets as well, depending on its degree of ownership.”<sup>51</sup>*

This ethical framework however, does not prevent banks to still make a certain amount of profit out of the situation, but it’s a different, more human and interdependent way to communicate and make business with each other. Values like communication, reliance and interest in what the client is doing are important. That’s why Islamic finance does not only appeal to Muslims, but also to many non-Muslims all over the world that are persuaded by values that Islamic finance provides and conveys. The economic business principles thus compel to a wide audience. That’s why a growing number of clients tie up with business partners that are committed to Islamic finance:

*“Although interest and gambling are not permitted, there is no law banning wealth creation - the capital is a factor of production and hence it is recognised that there is an associated cost. However, purely making money with money without any identifiable underlying investment (whether it be an asset or an enterprise) is frowned upon. Therefore the product structures in Islamic finance all have an underlying asset and are based on risk- and reward sharing between all parties involved. “*

So Islamic banking’s distinguishing feature is to not hold conventional interest bonds, and to link the investors with their clients, without allowing the implementation of pure speculation. Even though these are important factors of capitalism, Islamic finance has achieved to become a substantial industry during the four last decades. Islamic financial

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<sup>51</sup><http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:QntDWW3Wv1sJ:www.assaif.org/content/download/5961/34413/file/Islamic%2520Finance%2520History.pdf+&cd=1&hl=de&ct=clnk&client=safari>



institutions like the Islamic Bank of Britain, the European Islamic Investment Bank and the Lariba Bank in Colifornia, are now well established in major countries of the West and other important international banks like Citibank, HSBC Amanah, Deutsche Bank, and Ubs of Switzerland offer Islamic deposits and possibilities to act within the sharia framework.

Increasing numbers of people in the West are dissatisfied and sceptical about the banking services they have to deal with, that exploit them in unethical ways. That's why the emergence of Islamic banking with its own distinctive morality is working today. From one perspective, Islamic finance is the more moral, human little brother of capitalism. I'm not saying that Islamic banking isn't capitalist, it is, but in a more conditional and fair way. It's capitalism, with a sense of justice.

Islamic finance has become a real alternative to the conventional, ultra-liberal capitalist system. And except of being a good way of doing business, I think Islamic finance can also help both sides to overcome our prejudices and conflicts. Money and economics control the world-what better way to reunite two cultures than through economics? It can result in Islam projecting a more positive side and a different aspect from the one we've seen. Though Islamic finance is not ready to exist on its own and has to find common ground with capitalism, which is not a bad thing, it can bridge our conflicts and create a true dialogue between Westerners and Muslims that means, if the West allows it.

## 6. Conclusion

Today's clash between the West and the Arab-Muslim world has once again proved that humans have difficulties to accept those who are different to them. Even if the two cultures have common history, similar values and practices, share the same holy land, some of the same saints, even the same monotheistic God, they have headed in two completely different directions and created two disparate societies.

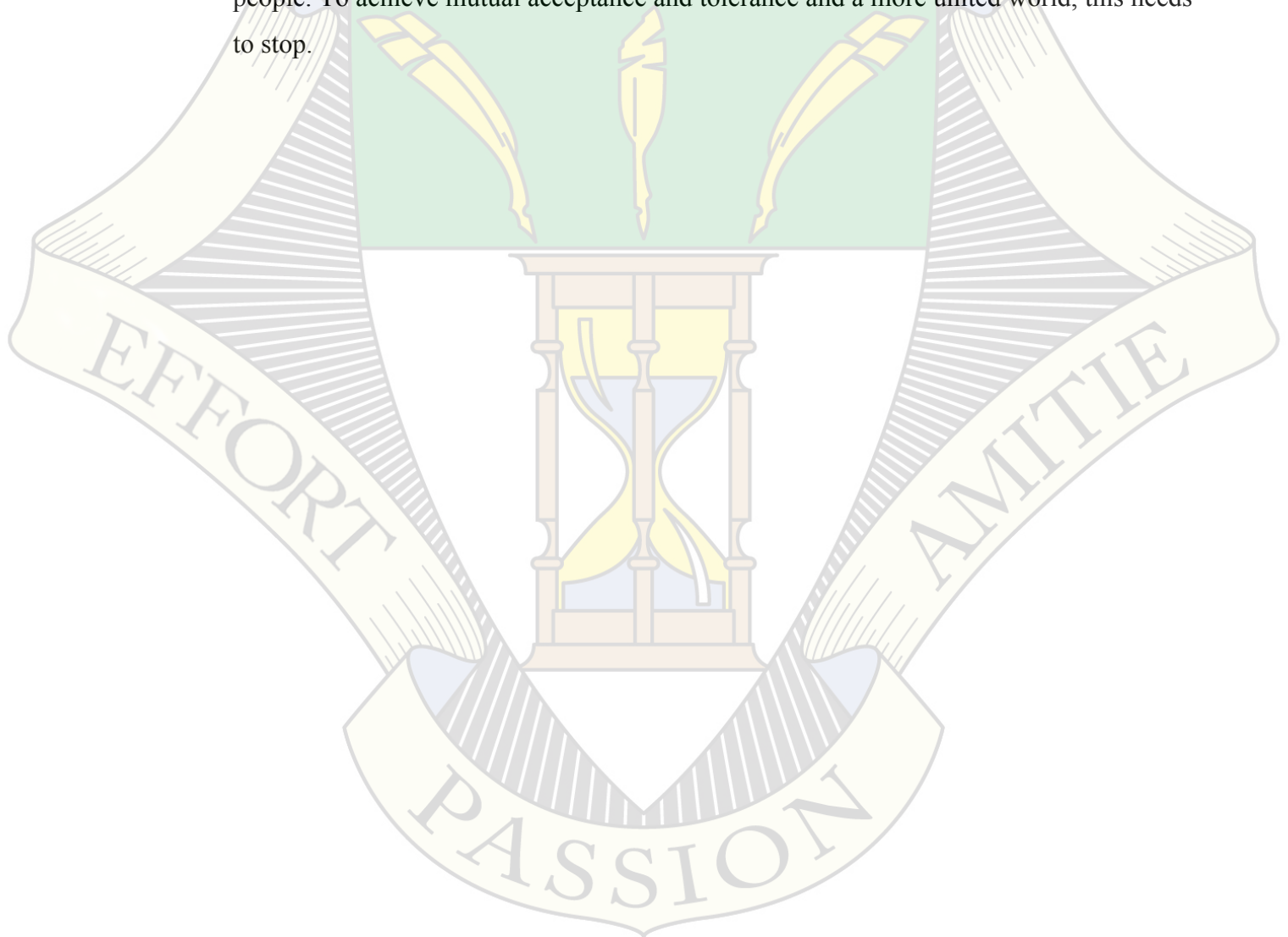
Henceforth, the West is clearly the more dominant, prosperous and influencing society. It has been expanding its free market spirit all over the world and plays a key role in the world economy. Today, democracy, the secular model as practiced in the West, has defied many other political systems and societal structures and is now seen as the most fair and compromising order. The spirit of capitalism- a certain obsession of money- reins the Western world. Money has become the new religion; transcendence and God being replaced by liberalism, capitalism and the free market. Since the rise of the Western world in the 15th century and its preponderance over the back then very powerful Arab-Muslim world, Western intervention in the MENA region has not stopped to increase. Economic and political interests have urged the Western countries to colonise, repress and decide over most of the Arab countries.

Today, the once so influential Arab-Muslim world has many difficulties to overcome, like the improvement in living standards, the chronic instability, the chaos of local economies, and bridging the deep divisions that exist between the Islamists and secular Arabs. When the Arab spring shook the Arab world, it paved the way for a change to a better future. Governments have been questioned, established methods have been condemned, but the role of Islam in society has increased ever since. Even if terrorist and extremist Islamists have stained the reputation of Islam in general and many Western decision-makers have condemned the practice of religion in politics, the rise of political Islam is irrepressible.

But back to my question that I asked myself at the beginning of the memoir: what will be the future of the Western-Arabic relations?

After analysing the past and recent relationship between the West and the Arab-Muslim world by comparing their traditional principles and societies with each other, we should

have reached a better understanding of the situation today and its evolution in history. But not everyone possesses knowledge like this and has researched the reason of the many conflicts of interest that exist today. People tend to have a very closed mind-set when it comes to tolerance of other religions or cultures. That's why we need to start dismantling the concept of the enemy, fears and preconceptions that have accumulated themselves in our minds in order to improve the relation between the West and the Arab-Muslim world. We have to try to observe things with a certain distance, by filtering the news and media we receive and give some thought about it. Many of our news like Reuters, CNN, Fox News, etc. are transmitting filtered information that consciously reinforces and confirms the perceptions that we already have about Muslim people. To achieve mutual acceptance and tolerance and a more united world, this needs to stop.





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