

Time for a new European peace conference?

Two-thousand years of European global domination ended at the outset of World War I. A century later, Europe has yet to come to terms with it. A peace conference for the 2020s could help the continent set the course for the next century of peace

DELEGATES AT the 1815 Congress of Vienna, which 'was able to keep the relative peace in Europe for a full century.' (Pictured: Contemporary engraving by Jean Godefroy after the painting by Jean-Baptiste Isabey; Photos: Wikimedia Commons)

It's 2020! A new year, a new decade with renewed optimism for a bright future.

For us to have 20/20 vision into the years to come, we must incorporate what we've learned from the past. The 1920-2020 series of articles does exactly that – marking 100 years since the end of World War I and the Paris Peace Conference.

As we set our sights on the '20s, let us hope we can apply the lessons of history and set the course for a new century of unity and reconciliation.



• GOL KALEV

For 2,000 years, starting with the Greek and Roman empires, Europe dominated the world. Europe exerted unparalleled influence on the global economy, trade and narrative. Europe's superiority seemed natural, and was expected to last forever.

But at the outset of World War I, two radical changes took place, which a century later are yet to be fully internalized:

1. Europe was forced to give up its overseas colonies and to instead accept the concept of self-determination. Some 2,000 years of European overseas expansion came to a sudden halt, and the opposite process of retreat back to Europe commenced.

2. A swift shift of power occurred from Europe to one of its former colonies – the United States. This was on display in the Paris Peace Conference that marked the end of the war, which was led by an American president, Woodrow Wilson.

The European century of retrenchment began in 1920. But a 100 years later, many of the principles that guided Europe through the past 100 years are eroding.

This includes the principle of self-determination, a key element of president Wilson's Fourteen Points and the world order of the last 100 years. Europe has been increasingly attempting to subordinate other nations' sovereignty to international organizations in which Europe wields disproportionate influence. In addition, many Europeans across the continent feel that a European power is increasingly negating their own self-determination. This was a primary theme in a

number of elections, such as the 2018 Italian election. The EU impacts the way individual Europeans – many kilometers away from Brussels – farm, work and live. Some compare this to the overreach of European empires of the pre-1920 era.

Overseas, Europe increasingly dents the principle of self-determination by attempting to negate local narratives and impose European ones in their place. For example, we can see this in its support of organizations in the Arab world that encourage secularization, as well as by its aggressive efforts to suppress Palestinian freedom of employment and consumption by promoting a European narrative of barriers between Palestinians and their Jewish neighbors.

While Europe was meant to decolonize and entrench from its centuries-old meddling in others' domestic matters, Europe seems to do the opposite, using different methods.

Similarly, Europe has failed to come to terms with the shift of power to the United States, which has been providing Europe with security, economic stability and safety for its citizens. European leaders have recently called for the establishment of a European army that, as French President Emmanuel Macron stated, will protect Europe – including from the US. Europe is also home of the International Court of Justice, which has been eying the US's and Israel's counter-terrorism measures.

These counter-1920 European behaviors should worry first and foremost Europeans. Europe's external focus sidesteps its dealing with its mounting challenges at home, such as Europe's conflict with radical Islam, the debate about the essence of Europeanism,

the potential secession of EU member-states, Europe's battle with home-grown terrorism, rising antisemitism and Islamophobia, as well as the long list of unresolved dormant intra-European conflicts that are temporarily shoved under the European rug.

IN 1920 there was a "sick man of Europe" – the Ottoman Empire – which eventually succumbed to its illness and was dissolved. Today, there is once again a "sick man of Europe" – and that is Europe itself. Europe is in need of radical treatment.

A preemptive peace conference can bring Europe into 21st-century realities, and right-size it. It could chart the road for a forward-looking Europe of the 2020s, as opposed to a Europe that clings to pre-1914 illusory vision of itself that still dominates the world.

This is not merely a theoretical matter. Examining the recurring cycle of European history unveils a frightening danger: In every century an unexpected intra-European war breaks out, which is then followed by a set of treaties or political arrangements that provide the perception of long-lasting peace. Then circumstances change, making those arrangements no longer relevant. Then another war breaks out unexpectedly, and then another set of treaties and arrangements are made...

The 1815 Congress of Vienna was able to keep the relative peace in Europe for a full century, but by 1914, circumstances that were present in 1815 were less relevant. Consequently, Europe rapidly plunged into unexpected war. Today as well, 100 years since the 1919-1920 Paris Peace Conference, changing European circumstances make the principles that guided the 20th century less relevant.

The recurrence of this cycle begs the question if Europe must endure a war in order to achieve the peace that follows. Were the Napoleonic Wars necessary to yield the Congress of Vienna, which set the tone for 19th-century European order? Was World War I necessary to yield the Paris Peace Conference, which



ALLIES: THE Hashemite Emir Faisal and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann. The prospect of a peaceful Middle East they planned was quickly shattered by Europe with the French invasion of Syria.



A PUBLIC hearing at the International Court of Justice, which been eying the United States's and Israel's counter-terrorism measures.



"THE SICK MAN OF EUROPE" IS BEING DOCTORED AT LAST.

IN THIS political cartoon by JM Staniforth, national representations of the Great Powers of Europe 'heal' a subdued Crete, clad in the Turkish garb of the Ottoman powers, in the aftermath of the Cretan Uprising in 1898.

set the tone for 20th-century European order (even after Europe resumed its war)? Can the tone for 21st-century Europe be set without a war – by skipping straight to peace?

There are numerous challenges to an idea of a preventive peace conference, including that it is hard to set principles without clear winners determining whose principles should be adopted. Also, a preemptive peace conference could itself be dangerous, as it would resurface surpassed sentiments and dormant claims. Various arrangements made at the outset of World War I remain today safely shoved under the European rug, but once "everything is on the table" those could resurface in dangerous intensity.

The difficulty and dangers associated with a bombastic Paris- or Vienna-like peace conference can be mitigated by reversing the order of peace-making, starting with easier issues to solve and projecting principles upwards towards other aspects of the renewed Europe. One such solvable issue is Europe's disruptive intervention in Israeli-Palestinian affairs.

The aftermath of World War I produced a relatively simple reality in the Middle East, built upon president Wilson's principle of self-determination, and supported by Arabs and Jews alike: the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, next to a Hashemite Arab kingdom in Syria. The Hashemite Emir Faisal and Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann lobbied to formalize such an arrangement jointly.

But the prospect of a peaceful Middle East was quickly shattered by Europe: France invaded Syria, leading to a debilitating sequence of events. Faisal was overthrown, ending the brief period of Arab independence. The British gave Iraq to the Hashemites as compensation, and later carved out Palestine and gave the Hashemites the eastern portion of it as well. The French invasion also triggered the first casualties of what later became known as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as French-Arab warfare

leaked to the Jewish village of Tel Hai. SADLY, THE debilitating European intervention that begun a century ago continues today in full force. It is not only reflected in Europe's massive efforts to sabotage Palestinian employment and mentorship by Jewish-owned businesses, it is also reflected in Europe's funding of NGOs that openly incite Arabs against Israel, as well as in Europe's aggressive promotion of Palestinian victimhood and refugee-perpetuation. European actions systematically suppress the creative and entrepreneurial energies embedded in Palestinian society, and curtail its growth. Europe is engaging in a cultural occupation of Palestine.

Europe has a golden opportunity to advance peace simply by getting out. A prelude to a European peace conference should be charting a roadmap for Europe's disengagement from its century-old disruptive intervention in Israeli-Palestinian affairs.

This will go a long way to help Palestinians and Israelis alike, but the greatest beneficiaries of such disengagement would be Europeans themselves. European cultural occupation of Palestine is corrupting Europe. It elevates the false sense of moral superiority and European supremacism, including in the notion that Europe knows better than the Palestinians what is good for Palestinians (for example, in Europe's determining that Palestinians are better off getting fired from SodaStream than from being employed by Jews, and hence aggressively lobbying to relocate the factory to central Israel).

Europe's intervention is corrupting Europe in many other ways, including by adopting detached principles that go against core European sentiments, such as in European countries' support or abstention on UNESCO resolutions implying that Jerusalem has no Christian or Jewish history.

Europe's disengagement requires a 180-degree mental shift. Such a shift can only be accomplished in a gran-

diose manner, as in a prelude to a European peace conference. Addressing an achievable and relatively simple task of disengaging from Israeli-Palestinian affairs could serve as the "case study" that would jump-start a bigger European peace conference. It will inject honesty and truths that can then be deployed to more complicated topics at hand, as well as demonstrate that Europe can indeed abandon its old falsehoods.

No doubt, this and other aspects of a preemptive European peace conference require an enormous amount of European courage. Conditions are ripe for Europe to display this courage: The European Project generated a sense of a shared European destiny, even by Euroskeptics; the European Union provides a common platform; the 70 years of peace and prosperity created a confidence bandwidth; the wakeup calls of Brexit and immigration led to rising realization that the future of Europe should indeed be on the table.

This could all be translated into the honest, forward-looking mindset necessary for a preemptive peace conference, including the recognition that European global domination is not coming back. A peace conference can provide Europe with a golden ladder to descent from its hollow pedestal of pride – itself a contributor to previous European wars.

The 21st century could indeed be the European century, but to do so, Europe must do something daring. Like the 1815 Congress of Vienna and the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, a 2020s peace conference can turn Europe's changing realities into tools for charting its road for the next 100 years of peace, this time in an amicable and inclusive manner – and before it is too late. ■

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The European Union is young, but wise

• EMANUELE GIAUFRET

It's hard to imagine that 100 years have passed – or *only* 100 years – since the Paris Peace Conference brought together 27 nations to shape the future after World War I to set the terms for peace. This attempt to create an international order that would prevent further wars was not successful, as two decades later the continent witnessed World War II and the Holocaust, one of the greatest human catastrophes in history.

One can speculate about the reasons for the failure of the post-WWI order, including the consequences of the 1929 financial crisis, the shortcomings or perceived unfairness of the Treaty of Versailles, the decision of the United States not to join the League of Nations, and the failure of the aforementioned conference to successfully put in place conflict-prevention mechanisms. But one thing is certain: Europe's disunity and the absence of a new framework departing from the traditional power-based approach to foreign relations on the continent played a major role in allowing for the catastrophic events of the 1930's, ultimately leading to WWII.

The European Union grew out of the ashes of World War II and the Holocaust, where the idea of "victors" in war was put aside in favor of creating a cooperative and interest-based arrangement. Europe and other world powers had a second chance to create a more stable global order by being more inclusive, creating shared interests and values and establishing a robust rules-based and clear international legal framework. Likewise, the United Nations was created to be a stronger and inclusive international forum at which countries could air their differences, rather than on a battlefield.

Foundations are an important part in the chapter of European story, which over the last 70 years began to take a vastly different course compared to the days of the Paris Peace Conference.

The establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 created a nucleus for EU peace and stability. The European Economic Community in 1957 united the six founding European countries economically and politically. In the shadow of the Cold War, the countries of Europe began a revival with the full support of the US. When the Soviet empire collapsed in 1989, the EU was the central framework to achieve European reunification based on the pillars of democracy, security and shared prosperity.

Our goal is to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, in line with the objectives of the Paris agreement

The European project has evolved over times and needs to constantly adapt to respond to new realities and the demands of European citizens. There have certainly been some difficult times across the globe – a resurgence of unilateralism and "grim passions," nationalism, xenophobia, racism and antisemitism. Yet the EU and its core values and principles have demonstrated to be far more resilient than what many thought.

There were those who expected that the 2016 Brexit referendum would trigger a domino effect, with other countries following suit the British example. This did not happen. Quite on the contrary, the other 27 EU member states showed remarkable unity in negotiating the UK's withdrawal agreement. The EU reiterated this unity and stands ready to define, together with our British friends, the future shape of our relationship – which should be as close as possible in full respect of our principles, including a level playing field.

The EU project remains highly relevant today and attractive to other countries which, like us, have suffered too many conflicts in their histories. The current interest of the Western Balkan countries is an indication that the EU remains attractive to our partners in Europe. The European Union offers a unique international model for peace, stability and prosperity.

With this unity in place, now we face new challenges that require urgent action, such as climate change. Our goal is to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement, and slowing down global



'THE EUROPEAN Green Deal will cut emissions while also creating jobs and improving quality of life.' (Illustrative; Pixabay)

warming and mitigating its effects. This is a task for our generation and the next, but change must begin right now.

THE EUROPEAN Green Deal is also a growth strategy. It will cut emissions while also creating jobs and improving our quality of life. It will run through all our policies – from transportation to taxation, from food to farming, from industry to infrastructure. With our Green Deal we want to invest in clean energy and extend emission trading, but we will also boost the circular economy and preserve Europe's biodiversity.

The European Green Deal is not just a necessity; the transition to climate neutrality will be a driver for economic growth, new business models and markets. European companies of all sizes understand that everyone has to take care of our common home. They also know that if they discover the sustainable solutions of tomorrow, this will give them an advantage. The transition will bear significant costs, but the cost of non-action is much greater. The EU will mobilize €100 billion for a Just Transition

Mechanism while the European Investment Bank intends to support €1 trillion in investment in climate action and environmental sustainability in 2021-2030.

The world has become more complex and more contested. New and unconventional security threats have emerged or grown stronger: cyberattacks, terrorism, disinformation, as well as the reemergence of armed conflicts on European soil.

We need to improve our defense capacity if we want to influence global events and protect our interests. Bolstering our joint defense capabilities and investing smarter is the way forward. A strong NATO and a strong European defense are complementary, as more cooperation on security and defense will advance Europe's strategic autonomy in the long term. And if we care about peace and security inside Europe, we must deal with peace and security abroad.

While technology, science and connectivity open new horizons, they also create new challenges. Exploitation of big data will boost the economy, but only if citizens trust their privacy is respected and feel safe to share, and this is the reason behind the EU General Data Protection Regulation. Likewise, artificial intelligence will bring clear benefits, but will require an adequate normative framework to ensure that citizen rights are respected.

New technologies – just like food insecurity, climate change, environmental degradation, global security, trade and local and regional conflicts – can be effectively tackled only with efficient global solutions. Adoption of the EU Green Deal is a strong message from the EU. But even if EU is climate neutral by 2050, we only account for 9% of global emissions, and that figure is falling. After the 2019 UN Climate Change Conference's (COP25) unambitious results, EU global leadership remains crucial to tackle climate change. We need to reinforce global cooperation on climate action. This is a serious foreign and security policy challenge with geopolitical impact.

For the EU, engaging in a multilateral system based on the respect of international law, cooperation and partnership is a matter of both values and pragmatism. This cooperative approach remains the most efficient way to serve our collective and national interests, as decisions taken in a multilateral framework have proven to be more democratic and inclusive, which makes them stronger and more sustainable.

For this reason, we must continue to strengthen rather than weaken multilateralism. Multilateralism is not an ideal – it is about concrete measures for our prosperity and security. It is about creating the conditions for our economies to grow. It is about free and fair trade, about avoiding war through mediation and dialogue, and about respect. We need to reinforce global cooperation on all these subjects.

It is not too difficult, looking back 100 years, to discern that a framework based on values of equality and human rights, and common interests of economy and security, is infinitely preferable to frameworks of victories and defeats, strong and weak countries.

This has been the secret of our success. The EU is a relatively young political project, but it is already learning from its own experience. It has to continually adapt to deliver to its citizens and to face the challenges of today and tomorrow. ■

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A failed memo

Why the conclusions of a 1978 US State Department memorandum have been repudiated

• EUGENE KONTOROVICH

A full century after the international community met in Paris and San Remo to establish a post-imperial world order founded on independent nation states, the international community has, under the leadership of US President Donald Trump, begun to fully implement the promises and undertakings they made then.

At San Remo, the Jews were promised a “national home” in Palestine, and an explicit right to “settle” throughout the territory, which included Judea and Samaria. The international community did nothing to implement this promise, or ensure its fulfillment in the face of reluctance by the Mandatory government and growing anti-immigrant xenophobia by local Arabs. It was left entirely up to the Jews to translate the international promises into facts on the ground, and in 1948 they partially did so, though with much of the territory, including the holy sites, falling to the Jordanians.

After Israel retook these territories in 1967, much of the international community pretended its earlier guarantees did not exist. Far from allowing Jewish “settlement,” they claim that the areas Jordan ethnically cleansed of Jews in 1948 must indefinitely remain Jew-free zones, policed by Israeli to prevent any Hebraic infiltration.

Yet 100 years after the Paris Conference, a leader emerged who was prepared to actualize the commitments the League of Nations had then made. President Trump’s recognition of a united Jerusalem, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo’s conclusion that Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria are not war crimes represent a proper understanding of the legal significance of the League of Nations Mandate. More importantly, they are perhaps the first leaders who refuse to subordinate Israel’s legal rights to political blackmail from Arab states.

The post-World War I peace arrangements, begun in Paris in 1919 and culminating in San Remo the following year, gave rise to the states of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Israel, as well as the borders of those countries and all of their neighbors.

It is easy to criticize the artificiality of the countries established by the League of Nations. But in a world, and particularly a region, where ethnic and religious groups live intermixed and not separated into grid-like boxes, some arbitrariness of borders is inevitable. Every League of Nations-mandated territory lumped an unhappy minority in with a majority: the Muslims in with Lebanon’s Christians, the Kurds with Iraq’s Arabs, everyone with everyone in Syria. The process was imperfect, but the known alternatives are what existed before – a vast pan-ethnic empire – or every group trying to carve out its own sliver of territory, which ends up looking like Syria over the past eight years.

THIS IS why the post-World War I borders are overwhelmingly accepted as the binding sovereign borders of the countries that arose in the British Mandatory territories. Both Kurdish secession and Syrian annexation of Lebanon get no international

support because they would call into question Mandatory borders.

There is one place in the Middle East where the international community takes the entirely opposite position about Mandatory borders. And that, of course, is Israel.

While the Pompeo statement did not say anything about borders, it did reclaim the San Remo principle that Jewish settlement is not illegal. The legal basis for this deserves some discussion.

Pompeo repudiated the conclusions of a 1978 memorandum by the State Department legal advisor Herbert Hansell. The memo’s conclusions had already been rejected by then-president Ronald Reagan, but it had never been formally retracted.

The four-page memo jumped in broad strokes across major issues, and cited no precedent for its major conclusions. Indeed, in the decades since, its legal analysis of occupation and settlements has consistently not been applied by the US, or other nations, to any other comparable geopolitical facts. It was always what lawyers call a “one-ride ticket” applicable just for Israel.

A country cannot occupy territory to which it has sovereign title

Hansell’s memo had two analytic steps. First, he concluded that Israel was an “occupying power” in the West Bank. That triggers the application of the Geneva Conventions. He then invoked an obscure provision of the Fourth Geneva Convention that had never been applied to any other situation before (or since). It says the “occupying power shall not deport or transfer its civilian population” into the territory it occupies.

Hansell, without much discussion, concluded that Jews who move just over the Green Line have somehow been “deported or transferred” there by the State of Israel. In short, he read a prohibition on Turkish-style population transfer schemes as requirement that Israel permanently prevent its Jews from living in those areas that Jordan had ethnically cleansed during its administration.

Under international law, occupation occurs when a country takes over territory that is under the sovereignty of another country. This is why borders of countries arising in former Mandatory territories are those of the relevant Mandate. That, for example, is why Russia is considered an occupying power in Crimea, even though most of its population is Russian and it has historically been part of Russia. Yet due to internal Soviet reallocations, when Ukraine became independent, Crimea was incorporated into the borders of its predecessor, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. For international law, this establishes clear Ukrainian sovereignty, even over the self-determination objections of a local ethnic majority.

BUT THE West Bank was never part of Jordan. To the contrary, it was territory that Jordan itself had seized in 1949.

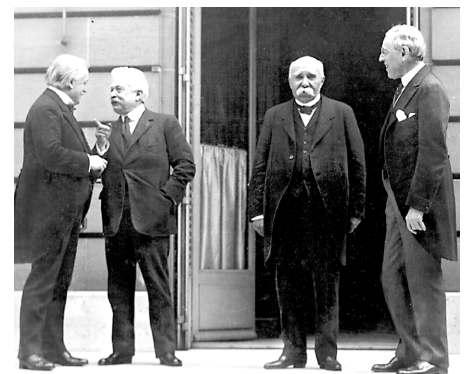
Moreover, a country cannot occupy territory to which it has sovereign title. Israel has the strongest sovereign claim to the territory. In international law, a new country inherits the borders of the prior geopolitical unit in that territory. In this case, that unit was the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. Hansell’s memo fails to even discuss this globally-applied principle for determining borders.

The Hansell memo also failed the test of history and of generalizability. The State Department has not applied its definition of “occupation” to Moroccan-controlled Western Sahara, Dutch New Guinea, or any other situation where territory that changed hands in war did not have a clear prior sovereign.

But even by its own terms, the memo’s conclusions no longer apply. Hansell specifically stated that the state of occupation would no longer exist if Israel entered into a peace treaty with Jordan. That is because the law of occupation is part of the law of war; it has no applicability in time of peace. Jordan signed a full and unconditional peace treaty with Israel in 1994, making the memo moot.

The separate notion that an occupation creates an impermeable demographic bubble around the territory has no basis in the history or subsequent application of the Fourth Geneva Convention. In an academic study, I have shown that almost all prolonged occupations of territory since 1949 – including America’s 40-year administration of West Berlin – have seen population movement into the occupied territory. In some of these cases, like Western Sahara and Northern Cyprus, the demographic effect has been huge. In none of these cases has the US, or the UN, claimed a violation of the Geneva Conventions. ■

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THE ‘BIG FOUR’ world leaders at the Paris Peace Conference on May 27, 1919. From left: UK Prime minister David Lloyd George, Italian premier Vittorio Orlando, French premier Georges Clemenceau and US president Woodrow Wilson. (Wikimedia Commons)

The components of world order in the Middle East

• DORE GOLD

Historically, at the end of major wars, the great world powers have drawn together to consider two questions. 1) What brought states to enter the last conflict to begin with? and 2) How can the same kind of war be averted in the future?

It is well known that at the end of the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the first time these questions were considered was in Westphalia, in what was to become Germany.

A similar effort was undertaken at the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, when both the victors and the vanquished initiated the Concert of Europe, which brought the European powers into a system of regular consultations that lasted for 99 years – until 1914, with the outbreak of World War I. States tended to seek an optimal solution to international problems that would address both the requirements of international justice and the realities of the balance of power. In the interwar period, those stressing justice came to be known as “idealists,” while those returning to the balance of power were dubbed as “realists.”

Former secretary of state Henry Kissinger grasped these processes in diplomacy that were emerging with defining rules of international behavior after the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the Arab Spring years later. In 2014, he penned a book boldly entitled *World Order*, which sought to encapsulate the nature of the diplomatic challenge the world was now facing.

Kissinger's timing was right on the mark. Clearly, there was a new global chaos that needed to be addressed. It can be said that states don't normally get into this level of analysis when they set their foreign policy agenda. They convene in order to put out the fires of the last crisis; asking how to stabilize the Balkans, or what to do about the South China Sea, or how to contend with piracy in the Horn of Africa. Yet every few decades a more expansive kind of diplomatic introspection becomes necessary when the past assumptions of foreign policy no longer seem applicable.

No set of global understandings was more significant for the emergence of the modern Middle East than those that were concluded at the end of World War I, when the Ottoman Empire – which once stretched from what is today Algeria in the west to Iraq in the east – collapsed. Nearly 100 years ago, in April 1920, the San Remo Conference in Italy established a state system that was intended replace the Ottoman Empire, the borders between its constituent elements, and finally how many of these states would emerge from the League of Nations mandates that the great powers insisted on using as an interim measure at the time.

The understandings reached at the end of World War I have been under an unprecedented assault in the last two decades. When ISIS came to power in remote parts of Syria and Iraq, the border separating those two countries seemed to have suddenly evaporated. But the defeat of the ISIS self-declared caliphate has not decisively repaired that situation. With the growing power of pro-Iranian militias in Iraqi territory, the border between Iraq and Iran appears to have become increasingly compromised.

The northern flank of the Middle East faces similar

problems. Turkish-backed militias have taken over whole stretches of the Turkish-Syrian border area. It is another Middle Eastern boundary that has melted down significantly. A Turkish safety zone has begun to emerge that extends roughly 32 kilometers into northern Syria. The disposition of territory from 1920 does not appear to be enduring, looking back retrospectively from 2020.

Then there is the case of Israel. The League of Nations mandate that came out of the San Remo document from 1920 spoke about the “historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine.” It called for “reconstituting” the Jewish national home. Yet today, with what is called the delegitimization of Israel, what was axiomatic 100 years ago is regularly being questioned in many international bodies from UNESCO to the UN Human Rights Council.

This history is not irrelevant or outdated. It is critical to spread if the war of ideas is to be decisively won. Ironically, this will happen if Israel understands that advancing the justice of its cause requires more than expertise in current affairs, but also a far deeper understanding of what the founding principles were which led to the eventual acceptance of the idea of Jewish statehood a century ago. ■

The writer is the president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He served as director-general of the Foreign Ministry and as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.

The understandings reached at the end of World War I have been under an unprecedented assault in the last two decades



AN IRAQI woman walks past the Iranian consulate after Iraqi demonstrators stormed and set fire to the building during ongoing anti-government protests in Najaf, Iraq, on December 3. The border between Iraq and Iran appears to have become increasingly compromised. (Alaa al-Marjani/Reuters)

THE OTTOMANS ARE BACK

Tracing regional dynamics over the last century is vital to understanding the combustible situation today



A MEMBER of the Syrian forces of President Bashar Assad gestures in front of a picture of former president Hafez al-Assad, during preparations for evacuation of rebels in Damascus in March 2018. (Omar Sanadiki/Reuters)

• SETH J. FRANTZMAN

In late November, Turkey set its sights on a new goal. In Libya, a long-forgotten civil war was raging. The government in Tripoli, often called the Government of the National Accord, was losing ground to the Libyan National Army, led by a man named Khalifa Haftar, whose forces were based in eastern Libya.

Turkey supports Tripoli; Egypt supports Haftar. It is part of a much wider struggle that represents Turkey's attempt to revive influence not seen since the end of the First World War. A century ago, the European powers thought that the Ottoman Empire could be easily chopped up and its territories given away.

Today Turkey is back, moving into areas like northern Iraq, northern Syria, Libya and even the Gulf and Somalia.

The Paris Peace Conference that ended in January 1920, 100 years ago, helped the stage for many of the issues still facing the Middle East. It is hard to remember now, but much of what we take for granted regarding the borders of the Middle East is in some ways arbitrary. They were decided on partly after World War I in a series of treaties, such as the Treaty of Sevres of 1920 and Treaty of Lausanne of 1923.

Why is Hatay province, once called Alexandretta, in Turkey, when it could have been in Syria? Why is Mosul in Iraq and not in Turkey, as Turkey once claimed it? Why do the Kurds lack a state? The recent tensions in the Middle East, the unresolved questions from Lebanon to Iraq, Libya, Turkey and Gaza, are all part of this.

LET US begin where Turkey now ends its recent ambitions – in Libya. Libya was once the setting for a quiet proxy war that reflects divisions in the Muslim world between the Muslim Brotherhood, which Turkey's ruling party has roots in, and countries that oppose the Brotherhood.

Turkey's ruler President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has increasingly global ambitions. Embattled Libya could be a key to them, thought Turkish leaders around Erdogan. Turkey was already sending drones and armored vehicles to Tripoli. But they had not

stemmed the tide. Haftar vowed in November to take Tripoli and rid the country of "terrorists" and "militias." Turkey responded that the "warlord" Haftar would have to be stopped.

But Turkey wanted something in return for helping to stop him. It wanted rights to the Mediterranean between Turkey and Libya.

If you draw a line from Libya to Turkey, you run into Greek islands like Crete. But if you draw a line from eastern Libya, there is a passage between Cyprus and the Greek islands that narrowly links Turkey to Libya. It is here that Turkey made a bold chess move. In exchange for sending some fighters to bolster the Tripoli government, Turkey would get an exclusive economic zone that splits Cyprus from Greece by sea and gives Turkey rights to explore for natural gas. It also sinks the dreams of Greece and Cyprus to invite companies like ENI to explore for natural resources under the sea.

The play by Turkey has muscle behind it. Ankara has been sending its navy out to conduct drills around Cyprus, showing the flag and its power. Turkey has new sea-based missiles. It is buying new drilling ships. Cyprus thought it was ahead of the curve, signing deals with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007 and Israel in 2010. But Turkey has thrown down a gauntlet.

One should understand Turkey's treatment of the Greeks and Cypriots historically. Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 claiming to help protect members of the Turkish minority. Turkey has stayed ever since, recognizing Northern Cyprus as a country. No one else recognizes it, but Turkey says Northern Cyprus has widespread rights to explore for gas around Cyprus. Turkey has sent drones to Cyprus to show that it will police those waters it claims.

For Turkey, the Cyprus operation was a way to show it would not be removed from more islands in the Mediterranean – for instance, the Dodecanese Islands, near Rhodes, were taken by Italy during a war with the Ottoman Empire in 1912. Rhodes also was held by Italy, then by Germany during World War II, and finally became part of Greece in 1947. Turkey today says that these islands, even though they are part of Greece technically, cannot be used by Greece to determine its rights to the waters off the islands. Instead, the continental shelf that extends from Turkey gives Erdogan's country rights to the sea.

TURKEY'S DECISION to revive its claims to the sea and send forces to Libya should be seen in light of a century of Turkey's policies since the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The Ottomans lost Libya to the Italians in 1912. Now, the Turks are back.

Turkey has flirted with various policies since the end of the Ottomans. For a few years in the 1920s, it looked like the country would be dismantled. However, Turkey pushed the Greeks out of modern-day Turkey and embarked on a campaign of Turkish nationalism and secularism that supplanted European rule in Istanbul and created the current borders. But Ankara was never entirely satisfied. It felt that its formerly powerful role had been reduced.

During the Cold War, Turkey was an ally of the US and also suffered its own internal troubles and coups. At the time, Turkey's neighbors seemed to be advancing. Syria under Hafez Assad, father of the current embattled president, was trying to be an Arab socialist paradise. Borrowing heavily from secular nationalist traditions of European fascism blended with socialism and Arab nationalism, the Assadist regime was brutal to dissenters, but treated loyalists decently. It wanted to modernize and look like an eastern European state, with the Communist-style brutalist high-rises and lots of Soviet tanks and other assorted accoutrements. It left to fester the questions that arose after 1920. For instance, what about the Kurds in eastern Syria? The Assadist Ba'athist regime treated them like they didn't exist, suppressing them and denying many citizenship.

The Assad regime also ignored large Arab tribes along the

Euphrates. Those tribes sometimes looked to Saddam's Iraq across the border for cultural relations with other tribes in Anbar province. Saddam Hussein, like the Assads, was a product of the Arab nationalist revolutionary era. All these regimes, from Assad to Saddam to Nasser's Egypt, were products of a reaction against the colonial era of the British and French mandates. They had replaced the old system of kings and colonials and sheikhs. They wanted modernity.

In some way, they were reactions also against the Jewish nationalism of Zionism, which they hated, and also the secular Turkish nationalism of Atatürk. If there were to be Jewish and Turkish states, so there would be an Arab nationalist group of states as well.

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Iraq never worked out the problems the British colonials had saddled it with. The British wanted to include Mosul in Iraq so there would be more Sunni Arabs to support the Hashemite king they had chosen. The king was from what is now Saudi Arabia and a brother of the king of Jordan at the time. But for Iraq, he became the first Iraqi.

That didn't mean much to Kurds in the north, who also wanted freedom and independence. It is sometimes forgotten that a brief independent Kurdish state called the Republic of Mahabad had arisen in 1946 after World War II. Like the changeover in power of Rhodes, or the question of whether Hatay would be part of Turkey, this republic was a byproduct of unresolved questions from the 1920s.

Kurds wanted freedom and rights. Instead, they were forced to be part of states that didn't recognize or want them. They were told to be Arab nationalists or Turkish nationalists, not Kurds. For the colonial powers, this didn't matter. For the nationalist regimes, they were a headache. For the US and Soviets in the Cold War, they were tools to be used and discarded.

This system that arose in the 1920s and then in the 1960s revolved around questionable states like Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Egypt was an ancient state, but Damascus had its own ambitions. At one point, the Arab Revolt had sought to hold Damascus as part of a greater Arab state. The British and French said no to that.

Instead, the Kingdom of Jordan became a Bedouin kingdom. The kingdoms that were created in the 20th century may have seemed weak at the outset, but they had more staying power than the nationalist regimes. Instead, the regimes – from Gaddafi in Libya to Saddam in Iraq and Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen – were overthrown. The Nasserist regime, too, fell apart in 2011 when the Arab Spring broke out. Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia was also forced out. So too the Algerian regime.

Why did some of the monarchies survive and not others? The British helped shepherd to power the kingdom of Egypt of Farouk. King Idris of Libya appeared a more formidable ruler, but he was pushed from office in 1969 while away for medical treatment in Turkey. The Gulf monarchies, by contrast, and the Moroccan and Jordanian monarchies, have survived. Likely because their states are either more homogenous or because of their traditions of rule, they have had more success.

THE PAST 10 years have witnessed an extraordinary reversal, as most of the Arab countries have been torn apart from within. Where monarchies or Arab nationalism failed, a rising religious extremism preyed on weak states. But even this Islamist terrorist rise did not supplant the new states.

ISIS came and went. Even the Muslim Brotherhood, briefly rising in Gaza and even in Tripoli or other areas, and seeking election in Tunisia, Jordan and other places, has not been the success that some thought. Political Islam is not winning.

What has happened is that the historically powerful periphery states, Turkey and Iran, have risen to grab influence throughout the Middle East. These states, as the Ottoman Empire and Persian Empire, were weakened in 1920 and European powers supplanted their historic role. But now, with Europe looking more insular, these countries are rising again.

Turkey's expedition to Libya is just one symbol of that new world order in the Middle East. ■



TURKISH DRILLING vessel 'Yavuz' is escorted by Turkish Navy frigate TCG 'Gemlik' (F-492) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea off Cyprus on August 6. (Murad Sezer/File Photo/Reuters)