

Andy Karpov
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Mr. Benoy
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Essay # 1
Nationalism

Nationalism Essay

When thinking of the Middle Eastern conflicts, the common knowledge is that these conflicts originated in biblical times, which I think to be wrong. According to Rashid Khalidi, "The situation in the Middle East is not so different from the recent history of Europe, where the upsurge of nationalism in the nineteenth century fueled conflicts that culminated in two world wars. And just as modern nation-states like France and Germany have manufactured pedigrees that stretch back centuries; nationalists in the Middle East have crafted narratives to support their own claims to power."¹ Nationalism is often defined as the feeling which unites people with common descent, language, or religious background; this feeling often causes people to unite and abolish foreign rule over their own affairs. Nationalism is a very strong power with great prospects to do either good or bad depending on the degree of nationalism and the side of argument looked at. Nationalism was a chief driving force in the creation of the state of Israel and throughout the 20th century shaped politics and caused many conflicts in that region. Nationalism brought about the prosperity and fall of many countries such as Israel and the various national groups contained within it.

Jewish nationalism was the main driving force in the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 to accommodate the substantial amount of Jews, and Zionist pioneer settlers who "saw the Arab population as small, apolitical and without a nationalist element and they therefore believed that there would not be friction between the two communities."² The creation of the state of Israel promoted Israeli nationalism and pride in their nation to the point where not many Israeli citizens disagreed with the conscription of both males and females into the army at the age of 18. Arab states surrounding the newly formed Israel, and the Arab residents of that area did not see it in the same light. Conflicts arose and various Arab nations used that same feeling of nationalism to justify raids, and later, more organized attacks against the state of Israel.

Israel found itself misfortunately placed surrounded by Various Arab states who's feeling of nationalism made them forget about their past conflicts and, seeing as they had a mutual language and similar cultures, to unite against Israel in various conflicts. Another cause for Arab attacks on Israel is the fact that Jerusalem, which was included in the territory of Israel, Is a central and a very important city for three main religions: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the latter of which is the religion of the Arab nations surrounding Israel. Hence, we can see the natural drive of these nations to unite in support of each other and try to gain control over that area. One such occasion came on May 15, 1948; a day after the foundation of the state of Israel an invasion of Iraq, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria took place. Israel, due to better organization, training and morale managed to hold out to the attacks and even take over some territory. When fighting stopped in January 1949, "Israel held the 5,600 square miles allotted to it by the UN partition plan plus an addition 2,500 square miles. Transjordan held the eastern sector of Jerusalem and the West Bank and Egypt held the Gaza Strip."³ This victory furthermore

increased Israeli nationalism feeling, by that causing many Israeli people to feel superior to the populace of the Arab states around them, and will to take over more territory surfaced. On the other side, Arab countries felt the need for revenge, and wish to retrieve lost territory, which would mark their actions throughout the rest of the 20th century.

Strong feelings of nationalism among the Palestinian residents of the West bank lead to the creation of Palestine whose borders were not fixed and altered throughout the late part of the 20th century. Determination of the Palestinians to create a state in which they could govern themselves and be relieved of Israeli occupation of the territory was growing at a consistent rate with the feeling of nationalism in that region; the feeling, which often led to bloody confrontations between extremists on both sides. Throughout the last part of the 20th century, terrorist nationalist groups, such as the Hamas and Hisbala, committed terrorist acts to further their causes, which on the most part were related to an Israeli withdrawal from various former Arab controlled territories. The only problem with the demands of these groups is the fact that Arabs originally controlled all of what is now called Israel, the west bank, Jerusalem, and the northern part of the Golan.

The events of the Middle East throughout the 20th century can be all traced back to the basic effects of nationalism in its various degrees. While nationalism can have a great effects such as raising troop morale, uniting various groups within a country, or even uniting different countries for a common cause, when taken too far it can cause needless conflicts and bloodshed with which were often acquainted in the 20th century middle east. Twentieth century Middle East is a good example of how nationalism was exploited by leaders to unite people for a cause which would otherwise seem irrational. Nationalism was the force fueling Middle Eastern politics and which greatly influenced the Middle East in the 20th century. Nationalism cannot be classified as purely good or bad, but looking at the events, which took place in the 20th century I would have to say it was both; the only definite thing I could say about nationalism is that it had a very substantial effect on the Middle East and the rest of the world.

¹ Rashid Khalidi. "The Emergence of Nationalism in the Modern Middle East."
<http://www.fathom.com/feature/122281>

² "Before the Creation of the State of Israel"
<http://www.adl.org/ISRAEL/Record/conflicts.asp>

³ "Before the Creation of the State of Israel"
<http://www.adl.org/ISRAEL/Record/48war.asp>