CHAPTER 19

FROM FREEDOM TO FREEDOM

The defeat of the Axis and the victory of the Allied powers in 1945 did not bring immediate peace to the world. The advance of the Soviet Empire in Eastern and Central Europe and the retreat of the Western colonial empires in Asia and Africa posed grave problems in these regions. Both the loss and the gain of sovereign independence revived old hatreds and created new ones, displacing millions of refugees. The Middle East also had its share of post-war, post-imperial upheavals. Peace in this region was fitful, uneasy, and frequently interrupted by struggles against internal and, on occasion, external enemies. On the whole, its troubles were less intense and less traumatic than those which accompanied the clamping down of Soviet rule in Central and Eastern Europe, or the winding down of British rule in South and Southeast Asia. But the problems of the Middle East, though of smaller dimensions, proved to be of greater intensity and far less amenable to diplomatic treatment and political solutions.

In the Middle East, as elsewhere in the ex-colonial world, the first and, for a while, the only, issue of public concern was independence.

In the aftermath of the First World War, three states in the region, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan, possessed full sovereign independence and had lengthy experience in exercising it. The inter-war period added four Arab states, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iraq and Egypt. The first two enjoyed a large measure of practical as well as theoretical independence, but the last two were bound to their former rulers, both diplomatically by unequal treaties and militarily by the presence of British bases and forces. The enforced departure of France from the Levant added Syria and Lebanon to the roster of Arab sovereign states. The 'League of Arab States' was formed in March 1945 by Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and also Transjordan, though the last named was still in principle part of the British-mandated territory of Palestine. A year later, in March 1946, Transjordan, subsequently renamed Jordan, also gained independence.

The first objective in all these states was to turn nominal into

real independence by abrogating treaties and eliminating the foreign presence. As the Western empires withdrew from almost all their possessions, this was completed by the early fifties.

At the same time, the process was extended to the rest of the Arab world. Libya became independent in 1951, the Sudan, Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, Mauritania in 1960, Kuwait in 1961, Algeria in 1962, South Yemen (the former Aden colony and Protectorate) in 1967, and the Gulf States in 1971. All of them joined the Arab League. Some, notably South Yemen and Algeria, acquired their independence only after a long and bitter struggle. In most of the others, independence was achieved more or less peaceably, by sometimes tough negotiations ending in agreement.

With the exception of Israel, established in 1948 after the termination of the Palestine mandate, all the new states that became independent in the post-war period were Arab. This situation changed dramatically in the early nineties. With the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Transcaucasian and Central Asian territories, acquired by the tsars in the nineteenth century and retained by the Soviets in the twentieth, suddenly had thrust upon them an independence for which they were ill prepared. Historically, all these countries had been part of or dependent on the Middle East. Two of them, Armenia and Georgia, were Christian, but had for many centuries been subject to Muslim empires, either Turkish or Persian. The rest, Azerbaijan and the five republics of Central Asia, were predominantly Muslim, speaking languages closely related to either Turkish or Persian, and tied by a thousand historical, religious, and cultural bonds to their southern neighbours in the Middle East. One of them, Tajikistan, was Persian by speech and culture. The other four – Kazakstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan – spoke languages related to Turkish. With the exception of Kazak, the differences between these various languages were no greater than between the vernaculars spoken in the Arab lands from Iraq to Morocco. Unlike the Arabs, the Turks had no common standard written language, but the coming into existence of a world of Turkish states analogous to the Arab world, which had for so long dominated and in large measure shaped the politics of the Middle East, was a new and portentous development. The previous experience of these new states provided them with little preparation for the attainment or exercise of either national or personal freedom. And it soon became apparent that, despite the demise of the Soviet Union, the new Russian state still had

concerns and interests in these republics and a consequent desire to maintain some form of Russian presence. In many ways it seemed that the Turkish world was about to re-live some of the experiences of the Arab world a few decades earlier in disengaging from their former imperial masters.

But even the political troubles of the region did not end with the attainment of sovereign independence. Old conflicts remained, and new conflicts emerged at several levels – internal, intra-regional, and international. Of the newly independent nations of the Arab world, a few represented old and continuing historical entities with long experience of separate identity – notably Egypt and Morocco. Others were new creations, both as countries and as regimes. Saudi Arabia, though assembled by conquest from different tribal and regional groups, did at least have the advantage of homogeneity. It was all Arab, all Muslim and, except for the eastern province, overwhelmingly Sunni. Most of the other newly created states lacked this advantage, and were riven by inner rivalries and hatreds. Sometimes these broke out into armed conflict, variously described as rebellion, revolution, or civil war – the differences between these are of perspective as well as of dimension.

The most persistent and destructive were the struggles in Lebanon between rival groups and often between rival factions within the groups themselves – religious and sectarian, ethnic and tribal, regional and local. These struggles were complicated and protracted by the intervention of outside powers. Such were the civil wars in Lebanon in 1958, in 1975–6, and, with interruptions and uneasy truces, between 1983 and 1991.

Another region of persistent conflict was southern Arabia. In 1962, a revolutionary movement with Egyptian support overthrew the traditional rule of the imam, and installed a republic in its place. The resulting struggle, between outside forces – Saudi and Egyptian – and between rival factions espousing either the royalist or the republican cause, endured for many years. The greater United Yemen, formed in 1990 by the union of the territories of the former Imamate and the former British possessions with their centre at Aden, was again convulsed by a deadly civil war between the north and the south in 1994. Yemenis also were involved in the long-running conflict in Dhofar which, between 1965 and 1975, tried to separate itself from the Sultanate of Oman, of which it was a part. The Dhofar rebellion was finally suppressed with the help of an Iranian expeditionary force

provided by the shah. This secessionist rebellion acquired a more than local significance because of the involvement of South Yemen, at that time a Marxist state closely aligned with the Soviet Union.

There were many other Middle Eastern countries in which governments used force to suppress dissident minorities or provinces. Both Turkey and Iraq had to confront disaffection and sometimes insurrection among their Kurdish minorities. Iraq also resorted to military action against the Shīʿa population – actually a majority in the country as a whole – in the central and southern regions. In the Sudan, the Arabic-speaking, Muslim north was often at war with the non-Arab, non-Muslim Africans in the south. In Jordan, differences between the Palestinian leadership and the Royal Jordanian establishment came to a head in September 1970, when the Palestine Liberation Organization openly challenged the authority of the Jordanian state and suffered a bloody defeat. Perhaps most ominous of all was the civil war in Algeria in the early 1990s, when a powerful Islamic fundamentalist movement and leadership questioned the legitimacy and challenged the authority of the Algerian government.

One of the basic principles of the Arab League is that no Arab state should take up arms against another Arab state to settle a dispute. There had been many disputes between Arab states. Sometimes a state claimed the entire territory of a neighbouring state, seen as a part of the national soil detached and separated by imperialist intervention. Such were, notably, the Moroccan claim to Mauritania, the Egyptian claim to the Sudan, the Syrian claim to Lebanon, and the Iraqi claim to Kuwait. The Egyptians renounced their claim to the Sudan in 1953 and recognized its separate sovereignty. The Moroccans recognized Mauritania in 1970. In November 1994 the government of Iraq was induced to recognize the sovereignty and integrity of Kuwait – a renunciation achieved only after a long and bitter conflict.

The Iraqi claim came in two forms – sometimes for a frontier rectification, sometimes for Kuwait in its entirety. A threatening movement by Iraq in 1961 was countered by the swift dispatch of British troops to Kuwait. This stopped the Iraqi advance for the time being, but did not end the Iraqi claim. The Syrian claim to Lebanon and, more remotely, to all the lands of the former Palestine mandate also remained unresolved. There were some minor border disagreements and skirmishes – between Morocco and Algeria in 1963, between Libya and Chad in 1980 and again in 1986–7 and some others, but these were of purely local importance and had little or no effect on

the general pattern of development. The first major violation of the Arab League principle occurred in 1990 with the Iraqi invasion, occupation, and annexation of the sovereign state of Kuwait. Beginning as an inter-Arab conflict, this rapidly developed into a major international crisis.

Sometimes, in pursuit of the ideal of pan-Arabism, attempts were made to combine previously sovereign Arab states in some form of direct but voluntary association. The most notable of these was the United Arab Republic, formed by the merging of Egypt and Syria in 1958. After some years of uneasy cohabitation, Syria seceded from the UAR and resumed its separate existence in 1961. Several other attempts, mostly initiated by the government of Libya, were without effect.

The post-imperial Arab states, with few exceptions, are of extraneous origin and artificial character, but they have proved remarkably persistent – and successful – in preserving their independent statehood and their territorial integrity. Despite many attempts in both directions, no Arab state has yet been pulled apart; no two Arab states – with the questionable exception of Yemen – have successfully been joined together.

Of all the wars that originated and were fought within the region in recent times, two were especially deadly, bitter and protracted: the series of short wars between Israel and the Arab states that began in 1948 and may have ended in 1994, and the long war between Iraq and Iran from 1980 to 1988.

The Arab–Israel wars had their origins in events long before the establishment of the state of Israel, when the Arab leadership in Palestine was striving to halt and reverse the build-up of the Jewish national home in that country. This struggle began when Palestine, not yet known by that name among its inhabitants, was still part of the Ottoman Empire. The struggle became more acute after the establishment of the British mandate, the terms of which embodied a formal recognition of the principle of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. It reached crisis proportions in the 1930s and 1940s, with the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany and the spread of Nazi ideas and practices, by force and otherwise, to many other countries. The enthronement of militant anti-Semitism in the heart of Europe seemed to confirm the Zionist analysis of the Jewish predicament; the closed doors of the former countries of immigration, their economies racked by the depression, left the mounting tide of Jewish refugees

from Europe and later from the Middle East with nowhere else to go.

By the end of the war in 1945, the vast majority of the Jews of German-occupied Europe were dead, and only a few hundred thousand remained alive, mostly in the so-called 'displaced persons' camps. Those who had come from Western Europe returned home and were re-integrated without undue difficulty. Those who came from Central and Eastern Europe, from countries suffering from internal upheavals and foreign invasions and occupations, faced far greater problems; all too often, when they tried to return, they were received by their former neighbours with hostility and violence. Many, therefore, rather than endure a new cycle of repression and persecution at the hands of their reluctant compatriots, preferred to risk the hazards of a journey to the Promised Land.

For the British government, struggling to brace the crumbling pillars of empire, and keenly aware of the mounting resentment of the Arabs in Palestine and elsewhere, the sudden flood of Jewish immigrants presented an impossible dilemma. For almost two years, the British government made a sustained effort – by diplomacy in the countries of origin and transit, by naval action on the high seas, by police action in mandatary Palestine – to prevent, divert, or repel the incoming tide. But the naval and police efforts were of limited effectiveness, and at a time when the Western world, still stunned by the revelations of the Nazi Holocaust, was sympathetic to the Jews, and the Soviet bloc, for its own reasons, supported the Jews against Britain, the diplomatic effort was unavailing and even counterproductive.

Meanwhile, with the ending of British rule in India, the primary motive for staying in the Middle East had gone, and there seemed little reason for the weakened and impoverished Britain of the post-war years to pursue a policy that was difficult, unsuccessful and increasingly unpopular both at home and abroad. On 2 April 1947 the British government announced that it would return to the United Nations the mandate which it had received from the defunct League of Nations, and would relinquish the Palestine Mandate. Some months later the date of termination and withdrawal was set on Saturday, 15 May 1948.

For more than a year, the British still remained in Palestine, but now functioned only as a caretaker government, while the responsibility for deciding what happened next in the former mandated territory reverted to the United Nations. After long and complex negotiations, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on 29 November 1947 for

the partition of Palestine into three entities – a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a *corpus separatum* under international jurisdiction for the city of Jerusalem. The General Assembly passed this resolution by the necessary two thirds majority, but made no provision for its execution or enforcement.

There were others, however, who made provision for its prevention. On 17 December, the Council of the Arab League declared that it would oppose the proposed partition, if necessary by force. The Palestinian leadership resumed its armed resistance to the mandatary government and to the Jewish national home. The Jewish leadership in Palestine accepted the UN plan. Since the mandate ended on the Sabbath, they anticipated its end by some hours, and on Friday, 14 May 1948 announced the establishment of a state, which they called Israel, in the territories assigned by the UN partition plan. The Palestinian leadership had already been at war for some time to prevent its establishment; they were now reinforced by the armies of the neighbouring states, with some support from remoter Arab countries.

Fighting between Jews and Arabs in Palestine had abated during the war years. It began again in 1947 and continued until the end of the mandate and after. The Palestinian Arabs were assisted by a volunteer force from Syria known as the Arab Liberation Army. With the establishment of the state of Israel – immediately recognized *de facto* by the United States of America and *de jure* by the Soviet Union – and the armed intervention of the neighbouring Arab states, the conflict acquired a formal international dimension. The struggle for Palestine was now an Israel–Arab war.

Against such odds there seemed little chance that the new state would survive. But after a few weeks of desperate struggle, the situation changed dramatically. The Israelis, caught between their enemies and the sea, showed unexpected strength, while the Arab coalition was misled by overconfidence and weakened by dynastic and national rivalries.

This first war continued for several months, punctuated by fragile truces negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations. During these consecutive phases, there was a decisive change in the military situation. The Israeli state withstood the first Arab attack and was able not only to hold but even to extend its ground. The remainder of Palestine was held by the forces of the neighbouring states – the Egyptians in Gaza and in what became known as 'the Gaza Strip'; the Jordanians on the West Bank and in east Jerusalem, and the Syrians in

a small enclave on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. In January–April 1949, armistice agreements between Israel and the neighbouring Arab states were negotiated and signed on the island of Rhodes.

For decades these remained the only formal legal instruments recognized by both parties that regulated relations between the signatories. The Arab states made it clear that their acceptance of the armistice agreements in no sense constituted a recognition or acceptance of the state of Israel or of its frontiers. The agreement with Lebanon confirmed the former international boundary between the two sides; the agreements with Egypt, Jordan, and Syria recognized only armistice demarcation lines, leaving the drawing of political and territorial boundaries to 'the ultimate settlement of the Palestine question'.[1]

In the course of the fighting, great numbers of Palestinian Arabs in the Israeli-held areas fled or were driven from their homes and became refugees in the neighbouring Arab countries. The evidence is contradictory, claims conflicting, but it seems likely that both descriptions are true of different places. Their numbers were estimated at the time by United Nations agencies at 726,000.

Amid the confusions and uncertainties of battle and diplomacy, in the agonies of flight and expulsion, the Palestinian refugees shared the fate of millions of other victims of conflict who fled or were driven from their homes in India, in Eastern Europe, and elsewhere, in the bloody reshaping of the world after the Second World War. Their position, however, was unique in that, unlike all these others, they were neither repatriated nor resettled but were left or kept in camps where they and their descendants remained for generations as stateless refugees. The one exception was Jordan, where the Hashimite government formally annexed the Jordanian-held territories west of the river and later offered citizenship to all Arab Palestinians. At about the same time, Israel absorbed some hundreds of thousands of Jews who fled or were driven from Arab countries. In a time of intense Arab-Jewish conflict, their position had become untenable.

The war of 1948–9 was the first of a series fought between Israel and its Arab neighbours, sometimes together, sometimes separately. The responsibility for the immediate outbreak of these wars is about evenly divided. The wars of 1948 and of 1973 were unmistakably launched by the decision of Arab governments; those of 1956 and of 1982, by Israel. Responsibility for the war of 1967 is more difficult to allocate. As more information becomes available about the sequence of events leading to the opening of hostilities, it seems that the par-

ticipants were like characters in a Greek tragedy, in which at every stage the various actors had no choice but to take the next step on the path to war.

The most dramatic of these wars was certainly that of 1967, when in six days the Israeli armed forces inflicted crushing defeats, in rapid succession, on the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, and on an Iraqi expeditionary force. By the end of the war, Israel was in possession not only of the whole territory of mandatary Palestine west of the Jordan, but also of the Golan Heights, taken from Syria in the north, and the Sinai peninsula, taken from Egypt in the south. Israel's military frontiers were now on the Suez Canal, the Jordan River and the Golan Heights, some thirty miles from Damascus. The Sinai Peninsula remained in Israeli hands until, in 1979, a peace agreement was signed between Israel and Egypt – the first with any Arab country – under the terms of which peace and normal diplomatic relations were established between the two states and Israeli forces withdrew in agreed stages to the old, international frontier between mandatary Palestine and the Kingdom of Egypt. In October 1994, a second peace treaty with an Arab country was signed between Israel and Jordan. Negotiations, apparently of a similar purport, had already begun between Israel and Syria.

The extension of Israeli rule to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip added a new dimension to the dispute: the active involvement of a Palestinian leadership. Between 1949 and 1967, the Arab League, and in particular the Arab states occupying parts of Palestine, claimed to speak for the Palestinians and discouraged – at times even prevented – any active Palestinian participation in the political process. The total defeat of these states in 1967 ended such claims and gave added importance to the Palestine Liberation Organization, founded three years previously and until then principally an instrument of inter-Arab politics. It now acquired an entirely new role and, as the advancing guerrilla replaced the retreating soldier as the symbol of Arab opposition to Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization rapidly became a major international player. For twenty-five years, the PLO leadership carried on a struggle variously designated from different perspectives as resistance, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Their first base was in Jordan, until, in 1970, a clash with the Royal Jordanian government led to their departure for Lebanon. There, the circumstances of the civil war and the weakening of the authority of the central government enabled them to set up a virtual state-within-a-state under PLO

control. This phase ended in 1982, when the Israeli forces entered Lebanon and secured the expulsion of the PLO. The leadership and headquarters were then transferred to Tunis, where they remained until 1994.

During this final phase, the PLO's struggle against Israel changed in character. Until then, its actions had consisted mainly of attacks on Israeli and other targets abroad, with publicity as the prime objective. The late eighties and early nineties saw the transfer of the struggle to the occupied territories, and the emergence of a new phase of resistance and rebellion, known as the Intifāḍa. The Intifāḍa was directed, not against neutral targets abroad, but against the personnel and instruments of the occupation at home, and its primary purpose was to weaken and discourage that occupation, rather than to attract attention. Finally, in 1993, the PLO and the government of Israel decided to recognize each other and enter into negotiations. These eventually produced interim agreements for the transfer of authority from the Israeli police and military to the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Inevitably, these developments were affected, and sometimes determined, by the international context of the Arab-Israel conflict. In 1948–9, both the United States and the Soviet Union gave diplomatic support to the new state of Israel. Stalin in those days still regarded Britain, not the USA, as his principal world adversary, and saw in the new state of Israel the best chance of undermining the British position in the Middle East. In pursuit of this objective, he allowed Czechoslovakia, then a Soviet satellite state, to provide the weapons which enabled Israel to survive its first war. Some military help also arrived from private sources in the United States, despite a generally maintained official embargo on weapons to all the contending parties. In 1956, when Britain and France landed forces in Egypt, ostensibly to interpose between the Israelis and the Egyptians but almost certainly in prior agreement with the Israelis, the United States government, followed by that of the Soviet Union, took up a strong position against the three invading powers and by various means compelled their withdrawal from Egyptian territory.

But by this time, the strategic situation had radically changed. In the immediate post-war years, Soviet pressure was directed mainly against the so-called Northern Tier states, Turkey and Iran. Resisting both the pressures and the blandishments of the Soviet government, these countries turned for help to the United States, which became increasingly involved in the affairs of the Middle East, first in the

attempt to shore up the crumbling British position, and then, with the realization that this objective was unattainable, in the attempt to create a Middle Eastern defence system against possible Soviet attack. In 1952, both Greece and Turkey were accepted as members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In 1955 the government of Iraq was induced to join with Turkey, Iran, and Britain in a new alliance that came to be known as the Baghdad Pact. The United States at that time preferred informal association to formal membership of the alliance.

In the event, the attempt to include an Arab country in a Western-sponsored alliance proved counterproductive. Turkey and Iran were old sovereign states. Lying on the southern frontier of the Soviet Union, they were keenly aware, from both past experience and current realities, of the threat from the north. The Arab states had no such experience, and their recent political history had consisted largely of attempts to free themselves, first from Western rule, and then from Western entanglements. In Iraq, the inclusion of that country in the Baghdad Pact was seen as a retrograde step restoring Western dominance; in other Arab countries, and especially in Egypt under the new republican regime, it was seen as a Western attempt to change the regional balance of power against Egypt. When in the mid-1950s the Soviets, leap-frogging the Northern Tier states, established close relations with Egypt and other Arab states, they were generally welcomed, and were quickly able to establish positions of strength and influence – even to the extent of persuading Arab governments to sign treaties and accord base facilities.

An important element in Soviet policy from the mid-fifties, and more strongly in the sixties and seventies, was their support for the Arab case against Israel – diplomatically, at the United Nations and other international fora; militarily, by the provision of sophisticated weaponry and technical and logistical support for the Arab armies. This in turn led the United States to enter into a new and closer strategic relationship with Israel, of which it became the principal source of diplomatic, strategic, and in time also financial, support.

These developments made the Arab–Israel conflict a major issue of the Cold War. In Middle Eastern as in some other problems, superpower involvement on the side of their various protégés served to contain crises and limit their effects, but also at the same time to prevent any real movement towards a solution. For the Middle Eastern peace process, as for parallel peace processes in other parts of the world, the ending of the Cold War was an essential prerequisite.

Of all the wars between Middle Eastern states and peoples, the Arab–Israel conflict has attracted most attention in the outside world, in part because of the direct involvement of the rival superpowers, in part, no doubt because of interests and concerns only tenuously related to the issues and merits of the case. These outside concerns have prevented a clear resolution of the conflict by the victory of one side or the other. The struggle thus consisted, in effect, of a series of short, sharp wars, ended by international intervention, with at best tactical and never strategic victories. The unintended result was that, in dealing with this issue, the role of the international agencies was not the resolution but rather the conservation of conflict.

The response to the war fought between Iraq and Iran from 1980 to 1988 was very different. Unlike the Arabs and Israelis, neither side could command any strong international support – if anything, the contrary, since both regimes had aroused powerful antagonisms in the outside world. Neither the powers nor the international bodies seemed disposed to make any great effort or take any great risk to bring the fighting to an end. The result was a conflict which lasted longer than the Second World War and which, in its toll of death and destruction, greatly exceeded all the Arab–Israel wars put together.

The issues were also more complex. Those of the Arab–Israel conflict were basically clear and simple. They were, consecutively, three questions. Should Israel exist; if so, where should its frontiers be, and who should rule on the other side of these frontiers? The Iraq–Iran war had many different aspects. It could be and was portrayed in personal terms, as a confrontation between two charismatic leaders, Khomeini and Saddam Hussein; in ethnic terms, between Persians and Arabs; in ideological terms, between Islamic revivalism and secular modernism (Saddam Hussein later changed his mind on this point); in sectarian terms, between Sunni and Shīʿa; in economic terms as a contest for control of the oil of the region; and even in old-fashioned power political terms as a quarrel over territory and a struggle for regional hegemony. A notable feature of the struggle was the patriotic loyalty of both Iranians and Iraqis to their countries and to the governments that ruled them. The Arab minority in southwestern Iran did not rally to the Iraqis; the Shīʿa population of Iraq, with few exceptions, showed little sympathy with the Iranian revolution or regime.

Impeded by neither domestic nor international pressures, nor yet – since both were oil exporters – by serious financial constraint, the two sides were able to pursue their mutually destructive war for eight years.

At first, the Iranians seemed to be gaining the upper hand. After halting the opening Iraqi offensive, they mounted a powerful counter-attack and advanced into Iraqi territory. The Iraqis, with significant intelligence and logistical support from the United States and financial support from the wealthier Arab states, were in turn able to halt this attack and eventually Iran was compelled to agree to a peace which left Iraq in a slightly better position.

Saddam Hussein's quasi-victory over Iran and the acquiescence of the outside world in his attack emboldened him to start a new war, with the invasion, occupation and annexation of Kuwait in August 1990.

In starting these two wars, Saddam Hussein made both political and military calculations, both correct and incorrect. In attacking Iran, he calculated – rightly – that neither regional nor outside powers would lift a finger in support of a revolutionary regime that had both outraged and alarmed them. He also calculated – wrongly – that the invasion of Iran at a time of revolutionary upheaval would be quick and easy. In his invasion of Kuwait ten years later, the balance of correct and incorrect calculation was the other way round. His military calculation that the invasion and annexation of Kuwait would be quick and easy was correct. His political assumption, that the regional powers would be supportive or at least acquiescent and that outside powers would not go beyond some perfunctory and ineffectual protest was, from his point of view, disastrously mistaken.

This error arose from a failure to take account of the changing configuration of world affairs. By the summer of 1990 processes had begun which, within the following months, led to the unravelling of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War. Saddam Hussein was no longer held back from dangerous adventures, as he might have been in the past, by the caution of a superpower patron, and he took full advantage of this new freedom. But there was a price. As the sequel soon demonstrated, he could no longer summon his superpower patron to protect him from the other superpower invoked by his victims within the region.

A new pattern was emerging in the region. In this new configuration, outside powers no longer determined or directed the course of events in the Middle East, but the policies and actions of Middle Eastern governments provoked or invoked the intervention of increasingly reluctant outside powers. The war over Kuwait in 1990–1 was not, like so many previous struggles in the region, inspired or prolonged

by external rivals. It was a regional and, indeed, an inter-Arab conflict in which external powers, led by the United States, became involved. The war and its aftermath showed that not one but both of the superpowers were in effect withdrawing from the battle for the Middle East – the one lacking the ability, the other the desire, to play an imperial role or even, more modestly, to provide the region with police protection against its more dangerous denizens.

The defeat of Saddam Hussein's army by a coalition of regional and external forces proved quick and easy, in striking contrast with the eight-year war between Iraq and Iran. But having expelled the Iraqi forces from Kuwait, the United States and its allies were content to leave matters at that; that is to say, to leave Saddam Hussein and his regime in power. Several explanations, of varying plausibility, have been offered for this decision, but one basic reason seems fairly clear. In the situation prevailing in 1991, to destroy the regime would have meant installing another in its place, and that in turn would have required a level of sponsorship and protection perilously reminiscent of the mandates and protectorates, both overt and disguised, of earlier times. The United States, it was said at the time, had no desire to install a proconsul in Baghdad, nor would America's Arab allies have been willing to accept such an action. Instead it was decided to leave to the Iraqi people – as was their right – the choice of retaining, changing or replacing the government of their country. The practical implications of this policy were seen in the period immediately following a cease-fire between Iraqi and coalition forces, when Saddam Hussein proceeded to the ruthless repression of opposition movements among the Kurds in the north, the Shīʿa in the south, and dissident elements of all persuasions at the centre.

The lesson was clear. The United States might act vigorously to defend its own basic interests and those of the international community, the definition of these interests to be determined by trial and error. Otherwise, the governments and peoples of the Middle East were on their own. The Middle East was a freer, and also a more dangerous place.

The ending of the Cold War, and the collapse of the bi-polar discipline which the two superpowers, sometimes acting in competition, sometimes in accord, had managed to impose, confronted the peoples of the Middle East, like those of other regions liberated from superpower control or interference, with an awful choice. They could move, however slowly and reluctantly, to settle their disputes

and live peacefully side by side, as happened in some parts of the world; or they could give free rein to their conflicts and hatreds, and fall into a descending spiral of strife, bloodshed and torment, as happened in others. It was surely the prospect of this bloody descent into chaos, and the awareness that there were forces – inside not outside the region – actively working to this end, that impelled the government of Israel, the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization, and a number of Arab governments to embark on negotiations which, with external and particularly American help, seemed to be leading to mutual recognition, to a measure of mutual tolerance, and, more practically, to the transfer of the occupied territories from Israeli to Palestinian rule.

With the agreement to end Israeli rule in the occupied areas, the last of the Arab peoples, the Palestinians, seemed about to realize their dream of freedom. But among the Palestinians, as earlier among other Arab peoples, a different and increasingly urgent question was discussed – after the achievement of freedom from foreign rule, what kind of freedom would they in fact enjoy? For peoples under foreign rule, the first objective – and for many, the only objective – was to end that rule. But even under foreign rule, the debate began on the nature of the regime to follow its ending. The debate became urgent and immediate once independence was attained.

Both the British and the French had created new states in their own images. The French set up parliamentary republics, the British constitutional monarchies. After the departure of their patrons, almost all of them collapsed or were abandoned and the peoples of the region looked for other models.

While the political and strategic threat offered to the Middle East by the Axis powers ended with their defeat, the impact of their ideas on the rising nationalist and related movements remained and even grew. This new pattern of thought and of social and political organization had a double appeal – first, because it was opposed to the dominant West and was already attractive for that reason; and second, because the ideologies and social strategies that were being offered corresponded in many ways much more closely to both the realities and the traditions of the region. In countries of still uncertain territorial definition and of shifting national identity, ethnic nationalism was much more understandable than patriotism. Similarly, radical and authoritarian ideologies had greater appeal than liberal and libertarian ideas. Communal and collective identities and rights made better sense

than the more individualistic formulations of the West, which at that particular point seemed both irrelevant and inappropriate. These influences were and remain more active in Syria and in Iraq than in Egypt, which had a stronger national identity, an older liberal tradition and a much more extensive and effective parliamentary experience.

The failure of the combined Arab forces to prevent the birth of Israel gave rise to profound heart-searching in the Arab countries and, within a few years, to the violent removal of the rulers and sometimes even of the regimes that were held responsible. The first regime to fall was that of Syria, where in March 1949, Colonel Ḥusnī Zaʿīm, in a bloodless coup, terminated the presidential and parliamentary order and inaugurated a series of military *coups d'état*. The period of army government ended in 1954 with the restoration of the parliamentary regime and the holding of elections. This restoration was of brief duration. Between 1958 and 1961, Syria was part of the United Arab Republic. After its secession, the country moved rapidly towards a dictatorship of the Ba'th party. In Jordan, King ʿAbdullah, held responsible for the Arab defeat in Palestine and, worse, for having tried to make peace with Israel, was assassinated in 1951. But the Hashimite monarchy, which to many at the time seemed the most fragile of Arab regimes, held firm, and King ʿAbdullah, the founder and creator of his kingdom, was succeeded by his son and grandson.

The most dramatic changes were in Egypt where, in 1952–4, in a series of moves, King Fārūq was deposed and exiled, the monarchy abolished and a republic was proclaimed. The first ruler, General Muhammad Neguib, the nominal leader of the revolution, was soon set aside and replaced by Colonel Nasser, the real head of the group of so-called 'Free Officers', who had planned, organized and executed the change of regime. The republican government gradually lost its military character. It remained authoritarian.

In time, other Arab states were affected by the revolutionary wave. In Iraq in 1958, the monarchy, discredited especially by its Western alignment, was overthrown and replaced by the first of a series of military dictators. As in Syria, the army rule eventually gave way to a party dictatorship run by the Baʿth. Though sharing a common origin with the Syrian ruling party, the two branches of the Baʿth were profoundly hostile to one another.

Of the Arab states bordering Israel, only Lebanon, which had taken no significant part in the military action in 1948, and which alone had recognized an international frontier with Israel in the Rhodes armistice

agreement, retained its parliamentary and democratic system until in time that, too, was overthrown in a civil war, due in large measure to external intervention.

Among the remoter Arab regimes, the two Yemens in southern Arabia, Libya and Algeria in North Africa, also succumbed to revolutionary takeovers. Elsewhere, in Morocco and in the Arabian peninsula, more remote from the conflict in Palestine, traditional regimes were able to survive.

In the countries more actively involved, revolutions came and went, and revolutionary regimes removed and replaced one another. But the basic problems which had brought each new regime to power remained unresolved – the immediate problem of the presence of Israel at the centre of the region and beyond that, the agonizing dilemmas posed by the survival and even the flourishing of Israel in spite of the hostility of the entire Arab world.

The initial survival of Israel after months of bitter fighting could plausibly be explained as a victory of desperation against overconfidence. This explanation did not, however, suffice for the greater and swifter victories achieved by Israel over vastly bigger and better equipped armies in the wars that followed.

For some, the establishment and development of Israel was a continuation of the aggressive acts of Western imperialism against the Arab and Islamic lands. In this perspective, Israel was created to serve as a bridgehead of Western influence, penetration and domination; Zionism was simply the tool of imperialism and Israel an instrument of Western power. Later, in the desperate search for explanations, there were some who, drawing on the themes and imagery of European anti-Semitism, depicted events in the same dramatic terms but with the roles reversed.

Others, concerned less to detect and condemn the misdeeds of foreigners than to discover and remedy the faults of their own societies, pointed to the disparities between the two sides – to the scientific and technological attainments, the economic and social structures, the political liberties of Israel as contrasted with their own situation. In all this, Israel, despite its predominantly Middle Eastern population, was seen as part of the West – not merely in the crude instrumental sense of being a tool of Western power, but in the profounder sense of being a part of Western civilization. The question of Israeli success was therefore part of the larger problem that had been exercising Muslim minds for centuries – the problem of Western wealth and power

contrasted with the relative poverty and powerlessness of the Muslim states and peoples.

There were many answers to this dilemma. For some, the root cause of their difficulties was disunity – the fragmentation of the once great Arab world into a score of petty, squabbling states, incapable of agreeing among themselves and frittering away their energies on sterile rivalries and conflicts. Their answer was pan-Arabism – the ideal of a higher loyalty to a greater nation, purer and nobler than the often squalid parochial politics of the various Arab states. This ideal reached its peak in the days of the struggle against imperial control. It declined in appeal and in strength when the states attained effective independence and their leaders became increasingly reluctant to surrender that independence to some larger body. In any case, the history of Europe and, indeed, of the Western world in general provided ample proof that disunity was not necessarily an obstacle to material and intellectual progress and, in certain circumstances, could even contribute to its attainment.

As the states into which the region was divided became more stable and more permanent, both in the awareness of the political classes and in the realities of the region, governments and peoples began to look more to problems that could be formulated and solutions that could be applied within the structure of national sovereignty. As the struggle for political independence receded into an ever more distant past, attention was increasingly focused on economic problems and, more specifically, on the need for rapid economic development. Only in this way, it was felt, could these countries take their place in the modern world and acquire the strength to confront their modern enemies. The economic situation in most of these countries was deteriorating, not just relatively, as compared with the West and the rising economies of the Far East, but absolutely, as expressed in the falling standard of living of the rapidly increasing population.

For a long time, the solutions to these problems were seen almost exclusively in socialist terms. Developing countries, it was argued and widely accepted, did not have the time to wait for the gradual and erratic progress of the market economy; nor did they have the patience for the upheavals and the uncertainties of political democracy. Only a firm hand and central planning, that is to say, authoritarian socialist government, could achieve the requisite rapid development. This approach was, of course, enormously encouraged by the influence and

example of the Soviet Union, the most respected power in much of the Middle East and North Africa at that time.

By the mid-century, socialism was already popular among many intellectuals, but it was not they who brought it to power and put it into effect. Socialism, like liberalism in an earlier generation, was imposed from above, and fared no better. In Egypt, it was applied by a decision of the Nasserist regime nine years after its accession to power; in other countries, by military and nationalist regimes of various complexions which shared the belief that this was the only way to rapid economic development. There were several varieties of socialism – some of them more or less Marxist, more or less Soviet style; others, the so-called 'Arab socialism', seen as more humane, less rigid and better adapted to Arab conditions.

By the early 1990s it was clear that both Arab and Marxist socialism had failed and that the often misguided and inept reforms introduced by reformist governments had impeded rather than advanced the economic development that governments had so plausibly promised and peoples had so eagerly awaited.

Only in one respect were the economic policies successful – in underpinning a series of ruthless and pervasive dictatorships in which both the decencies of the traditional Islamic order and the liberties of the new Western order were undermined and destroyed. In their place, in the so-called socialist countries, the new political order consisted of a range of totalitarian dictatorships copied – sometimes with imported expert guidance – from the worst Central and East European models.

Despite the failure of economic policies, this was a period of very rapid economic change and perhaps even more of social and cultural transformation. Politically Western influence was reduced to a minimum but, in every other respect, Western influence grew apace.

The most visible, the most pervasive and the least recognized aspects of Western influence are in the realm of material things – the infrastructure, amenities and services of the modern state and city, most of them initiated by past European rulers or concession holders. Here there was clearly no desire to reverse or even deflect the processes of modernization. Nor indeed were such things as aeroplanes and cars, telephones and televisions, tanks and artillery, seen as Western or as related to the Western philosophies that preceded and facilitated their invention.

More remarkably, even some avowedly anti-Western states have

retained the Western political apparatus of constitutions and legislative assemblies. The Islamic Republic of Iran claims to be restoring true Islamic government but it does so in the form of a written constitution and an elected parliament – neither with any precedent in Islamic doctrine or history.

Perhaps the most powerful and persistent of Western political ideas in the region has been that of revolution. The history of the Islamic Middle East, like that of other societies, offers many examples of the overthrow of governments by rebellion or conspiracy. There is also an old Islamic tradition of challenge to the social and political order by leaders who believed that it was their sacred duty to dethrone tyranny and install justice in its place. Islamic law and tradition lay down the limits of the obedience which is owed to the ruler and discuss – albeit with considerable caution – the circumstances in which a ruler forfeits his claim to the allegiance of his subjects and may or rather must lawfully be deposed and replaced.

But the notion of revolution, as developed in sixteenth-century Holland, seventeenth-century England and eighteenth-century America and France, was alien and new. The first self-styled revolutions in the Middle East were those of the constitutionalists in Iran in 1905 and the Young Turks in the Ottoman Empire in 1908. Since then there have been many others, and by the last decade of the twentieth century, a clear majority of states in the region were governed by regimes installed by means of the violent removal of their predecessors. In early days, this was sometimes accomplished by a nationalist struggle against foreign overlords. Later it was usually achieved by military officers deposing the rulers in whose armies they served. All of these, with equal fervour, laid claim to the title 'revolutionary', which in time became the most widely accepted claim to legitimacy in government in the Middle East.

In a very few cases, the change of regime resulted from profounder movements in society, with deeper causes and greater consequences than a simple replacement of the men at the top. One such was surely the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, which invites comparison with the French and more especially Russian Revolutions in its origins, its modalities and perhaps also its ultimate fate.

For better or for worse – and from the start there have been different views on this – what happened in Iran can be seen as a revolution in the classical sense: a mass movement with wide popular participation that resulted in a major shift in economic as well as political power

and that inaugurated, or perhaps more accurately continued, a process of vast social transformation.

In Iran under the Pahlavis, as in France under the Bourbons and in Russia under the Romanovs, a major process of change was already under way, and had advanced to a point at which it required a shift in political power in order to continue. And in the Iranian, as in the other revolutions, there was also the possibility that something might happen whereby the process of change was deflected, perverted or even annulled. From an early stage, some Iranians, arguing from different and sometimes contrasting premisses, claimed that this had already happened. As the revolutionary regime ensconced itself in power, more and more came to agree with them.

The revolution in Iran, unlike those earlier movements designated by that name, was called Islamic. Its leaders and inspirers cared nothing for the models of Paris or Petrograd, and saw European ideologies of the left no less than of the right as all part of the pervasive infidel enemy against whom they were waging their struggle. Theirs was a different society, educated in different scriptures and classics, shaped by different historical memories. The symbols and slogans of the revolution were Islamic because these alone had the power to mobilize the masses for struggle.

Islam provided more than symbols and slogans. As interpreted by the revolutionary leaders and spokesmen, it formulated the objectives to be attained and, no less important, it defined the enemies to be opposed. These were familiar from history, law and tradition: the infidel abroad, the apostate at home. For the revolutionaries, of course, the apostate meant all those Muslims, and especially Muslim rulers, who did not share their interpretation of authentic Islam and who, in their perception, were importing alien and infidel ways and thus subverting the community of Islam and the faith and law by which it lived. In principle, the aim of the Islamic revolution in Iran, and eventually in other countries where such movements established themselves, was to sweep away all the alien and infidel accretions that had been imposed on Muslim lands and peoples in the era of alien dominance and influence and to restore the true and divinely given Islamic order.

An examination of the record of these revolutionaries, however, in Iran and elsewhere, reveals that the rejection of the West and its offerings is by no means as comprehensive and as undiscriminating as

propaganda might indicate, and that some at least of the importations from the lands of unbelief are still very welcome.

Some of these are obvious. The Islamic revolution in Iran was the first truly modern revolution of the electronic age. Khomeini was the first charismatic orator who sent his oratory from abroad to millions of his compatriots at home on cassettes; he was the first revolutionary leader in exile who directed his followers at home by telephone, thanks to the direct dialling that the Shah had introduced in Iran and that was available to him in France but not in Iraq, his previous place of exile. Needless to say, in the wars in which they have been engaged, both formal and informal, the Iranian revolutionary leaders have made the fullest use of such weapons as the West and its imitators were willing to sell them. Naturally, such weapons as fax, internet and the satellite dish are also available to those who seek to overthrow them.

There was, tragically, another respect in which the revolutionary regime in Iran borrowed from Europe. While their symbols and allusions were Islamic rather than European, their models of style and method were often more European than Islamic. The summary trial and execution of great numbers of ideologically defined enemies; the driving into exile of hundreds of thousands of men and women; the large-scale confiscation of private property; the mixture of repression and subversion, of violence and indoctrination that accompanied the consolidation of power – all this owes far more to the examples of Robespierre and Stalin than to those of Muḥammad and ʿAlī. These methods can hardly be called Islamic; they are, however, thoroughly revolutionary.

Like the French and the Russians in their time, the Iranian revolutionaries played to international as well as domestic audiences, and their revolution exercised a powerful fascination over other peoples outside Iran, in other countries within the same culture, the same universe of discourse. The appeal was naturally strongest amongst Shīʿite populations, as in south Lebanon and some of the Gulf states, and weakest among their immediate Sunni neighbours. It was for a while very strong in much of the Muslim world where Shīʿism was virtually unknown. In these, the sectarian difference was unimportant. Khomeini could be seen, not as a Shīʿite or an Iranian, but as an Islamic revolutionary leader. Like the young Western radicals who, in their day, responded with almost messianic enthusiasm to events in Paris and Petrograd, so did millions of young and not-so-young men and women all over the world of Islam respond to the call of Islamic

revolution – with the same upsurge of emotion, the same uplifting of hearts, the same boundless hopes, the same willingness to excuse and condone all kinds of horrors, and the same anxious questions about the future.

The years that followed were difficult years in Iran. The people suffered greatly from foreign wars, internal strife and repression, and a steadily worsening economic crisis. As in other revolutions, there was recurring conflict between rival factions, sometimes described as extremists and moderates, more accurately as ideologues and pragmatists. Because of these and other changes, the ideal of the Islamic revolution, Iranian-style, lost some of its appeal – but not all. Islamic revolutionary movements derived from, inspired by, or parallel to the revolution in Iran developed in other Muslim countries where they became serious and sometimes successful contenders for power.

All these various revolutionary regimes, as well as the surviving monarchies and traditional regimes, shared the desire to preserve and utilize both the political apparatus and the economic benefits which modernization placed at their disposal. What was resented was foreign control and exploitation of the economic machine, not the foreign origin of the machine itself.

Like the British and the French before them, the Soviets and the United States in their rivalry in the Middle East tried to create societies and polities in their own image. Neither task was easy, one of them especially difficult. The sponsorship of authoritarian government presented no problem, but it was quite another matter to create a Marxist, socialist regime in an Islamic country. The task of creating a liberal democracy was even more difficult. But if democracies are more difficult to create, they are also more difficult to destroy. This in the long term worked to the advantage of the democracies, both inside and outside the region, and to the detriment of their authoritarian enemies.

In the long debate about how the hard-won independence should be used, and the lot of the people bettered, there were two main ideological streams: Islam and democracy. Both came in many variant and competing forms. At a time when all the different imported methods that Muslims had used or copied or imitated had visibly failed, there was considerable force in the argument that these were the ways of foreigners and unbelievers, and that they had brought nothing but harm. The remedy was for Muslims to return to the faith and law of Islam, to be authentically themselves, to purge state and

society of foreign and infidel accretions, and create a true Islamic order.

The alternative programme was democracy – not the shoddy imitations of Western democracies practised in the interwar period, and operated only by small cliques of magnates at the top, but authentic, free institutions functioning at every level of public life, from the village to the presidency. Where fundamentalists and democrats are both in opposition, the former have an immense advantage. In the mosques and preachers, they dispose of a network for meeting and communication that no government, however tyrannical, can entirely control and no other group can rival. Sometimes a tyrannical regime has even eased the path of the fundamentalists by eliminating competing oppositions. Only one other group in society has the cohesion, the structure, and the means to take independent action, and that is the army – the other major motor of political change in the region. At different times and in different places, the army has acted for democracy, as in Turkey, or for fundamentalism, as in the Sudan.

The proponents of both Islamic and democratic solutions differed considerably among themselves, and many variants of both have been propounded. For some, the two ideas were mutually exclusive. The so-called Islamic fundamentalists – a minority, but an active and important one among Muslims – had no use for democracy, except as a one-way ticket to power; the militant secularists among the democrats made little effort to conceal their intention of ending, or at least reducing, the role traditionally played by Islam in the public life of a state. The interaction between the Islamic tradition of a state based on faith and Western notions of separation between religion and government seems likely to continue.

For men and for women alike, the interlude of freedom was too long, and its effects too profound, for it to be forgotten. Despite many reverses, European-style democracy is not dead in the Islamic lands, and there are some signs of a revival. In some countries, parliamentary and constitutional systems are becoming increasingly effective. In several others there have been steps, still rather tentative, towards political as well as economic liberalization.

In cultural and social life, the introduction and acceptance of European ways went very far and persisted in forms which even the most militant and radical either did not perceive or were willing to tolerate. The first to change were the traditional arts. Already by the end of the eighteenth century, the old traditions of miniature painting in books

and of interior decoration in buildings, were dying. In the course of the nineteenth century they were replaced in the more Westernized countries by a new art and architecture that were at first influenced and then dominated by European patterns. The old arts of miniature and calligraphy lingered on for a while but those who practised them, with few exceptions, lacked originality and prestige. Their place in the artistic self-expression of society was taken by European-style painters, working in oils on canvas. Architecture too, even mosque architecture, conformed in the main to Western artistic notions as well as to the inevitable Western techniques. At times there were attempts to return to traditional Islamic patterns, but these often took the form of a conscious neo-classicism. Only in one respect were Islamic artistic norms retained and that was in the slow and reluctant acceptance of sculpture, seen as a violation of the Islamic ban on graven images. One of the main grievances against such secular modernizers as Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and the Shah in Iran was their practice of installing statues of themselves in public places. This was seen as no better than pagan idolatry.

The Westernization of art was paralleled in literature, though at a slower pace and at a later date. From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, traditional literary forms were neglected, except among some die-hard circles with limited impact. In their place came new forms and ideas from the West – the novel and the short story, replacing the traditional tale and apologue; the essay and the newspaper article, and new forms and themes that have transformed modern poetry among all the peoples of the region. Even the language in which modern literature is written has, in all the countries of the region, been extensively and irreversibly changed under the influence of Western discourse.

The change is least noticeable in music, where the impact of European art music is still relatively small. In Turkey, where European influence has lasted longest and gone deepest, there are talented performers, some of them with international reputations, and composers working in the Western manner. Istanbul and Ankara are now on the international concert circuit, as are of course the chief cities of Israel, itself in effect a cultural component of the West. In these places, there are audiences large enough and faithful enough to make such visits worthwhile. Elsewhere in the Middle East, those who compose, perform or even listen to Western music are still relatively few. Music in the various traditional modes is still being composed and performed at high level and is accepted and appreciated by the vast majority of

the population. Of late there has been some interest in the more popular types of Western music but even this is, in the main, limited to comparatively small groups in the larger cities. Music is perhaps the profoundest and most intimate expression of a culture, and it is natural that it should be the last to yield to alien influence.

Another highly visible sign of European influence is in clothing. That Muslim armies use modern equipment and weaponry may be ascribed to necessity, and there are ancient traditions declaring it lawful to imitate the infidel enemy in order to defeat him. But the adoption of infidel dress is another matter, and has a significance at once cultural, symbolic, even religious.

In the nineteenth century, the Ottomans, followed by other Muslim states, adopted European style uniforms for both officers and men, and European harness for their horses. Only the headgear remained un-Westernized, and for good reason. After the Kemalist Revolution in Turkey, even this last bastion of Islamic conservatism fell. The Turkish army, along with the general population, adopted European hats and caps, and before long they were followed by the armies, and eventually even many civilians in almost all other Muslim states.

The position was different for women. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Europeanization of female attire was slower, later, and more limited. It was strongly resisted, and affected a much smaller portion of the population. At many levels of society, where the wearing of Western clothes by men became normal, women still kept – or were kept – to traditional dress. By the mid-twentieth century, however, more and more women were adopting a Western style of clothing – at first among the modernizing leisured classes, and then, increasingly, among working women and students. One of the most noticeable consequences of the Islamic revival has been a reversal of this trend and a return, by women far more than by men, to traditional attire.

Of all the changes attributable to Western example or influence, the profoundest and most far-reaching is surely the change in the position of women. The abolition of chattel slavery made concubinage illegal, and though it lingered on for some time in the remoter areas, it ceased to be either common or accepted. In a few countries, notably Turkey, Tunisia, and Iran until the fall of the shah but not after, even polygamous marriage was outlawed, and in many of the Muslim states, while still lawful, it was subject to legal and other restrictions. Among the urban middle and upper classes, it became socially unacceptable;

for the urban lower classes, it had always been economically impractical.

A major factor in the emancipation of women was economic need. Peasant women had from time immemorial been part of the work-force and had, in consequence, enjoyed certain social freedoms denied to their sisters in the cities. Economic modernization brought a need for female labour, which was augmented by mobilization for modern war. This became a significant factor in the Ottoman Empire during the First World War, when much of the male population was in the armed forces. The economic involvement of women and the social changes resulting from it continued in the inter-war period and after, and even brought a few legislative changes in favour of women. These had some effect in social and family life. Education for women also made substantial progress, and by the 1970s and 1980s, considerable numbers of women were enrolled as students in the universities. They began in so-called 'women's professions', such as nursing and teaching, traditional in Europe and gradually becoming so in the lands of Islam. Later, women began to appear in other faculties and professions. Even in Iran there are women physicians for women patients and, more remarkably, women members of parliament.

The enrolment of women even in the traditional professions was too much for some of the militants. Khomeini spoke with great anger of the immorality which he believed would inevitably result from the employment of women to teach boys.

The political emancipation of women has made significant progress in those countries where parliamentary regimes function. It matters little in the dictatorships, controlled by either the army or the party. Both are overwhelmingly male. Westerners tend to assume that the emancipation of women is part of liberalization, and that women will consequently fare better under liberal than under autocratic regimes. Such an assumption is dubious and often untrue. Among Arab countries, the legal emancipation of women went furthest in Iraq and South Yemen, both ruled by notoriously repressive regimes. It lagged behind in Egypt, in many ways the most tolerant and open of Arab societies. It is in such societies that public opinion, still mainly male and mainly conservative, resists change. Women's rights have suffered the most serious reverses in countries where fundamentalists have influence or where, as in Iran, they rule. The emancipation of women is one of the main grievances of the fundamentalists and its reversal is in the forefront of their programme.

Nevertheless, it is clear that irreversible changes have taken place.

Even those claiming to restore the Holy Law in its entirety are unlikely to reintroduce legal concubinage, nor is there much probability of a return to polygamy among the educated classes in Middle Eastern cities. Fundamentalist influences and rulers have in many ways changed the content and manner of education for women, but they have not returned them – nor are they likely to return them – to their previous condition of ignorance. And while, in Islamic lands as in Europe and America, there are women who speak and work against their own emancipation, the long-term trend is clearly for greater freedom. There are now significant numbers of educated, often Western-educated, women in Islamic lands. They are already having a significant impact, and Islamic public life will be enriched by the contributions of the previously excluded half of the population.

These changes, and the legal, social, and cultural transformations which preceded, accompanied and followed them, have evoked sharply differing reactions among the population. For many women, they brought release and opportunity; for many men, they opened a way to a previously hidden world. In some places, the impact of the West brought wealth, often beyond any that could be imagined. Western technology and Western-style business introduced new ways of acquiring money; Western consumer culture offered a wide range of new ways of spending it. But for many, and not only those directly and adversely affected, the new ways were both an affront and a threat – an affront to their sense of decency and propriety, and a mortal threat to the most cherished of all their values, the religious basis of their society.

Modernization – or as many saw it, Westernization – widened the gap between rich and poor. It also made that gap more visible and more palpable. In most cities outside the Arabian peninsula, the rich now wore different clothes, ate different food, and lived by different social rules from the unmodernized mass of the population. And all the time, thanks to Western means of communication, especially the cinema and television, the deprived masses were more aware than ever before of the difference between them and the wealthy, and of what, specifically, they were missing.

In some countries, the pain and discomfort inevitable in a period of rapid change were palliated by wise and moderate governments. But in most they were aggravated by the economic mismanagement of autocratic regimes. There were real problems, notably the rapid growth of population unaccompanied by any corresponding increase

in domestic food resources. But often even the considerable assets enjoyed by some countries were squandered. Part of the problem was the heavy cost of the security and military apparatus required to maintain order at home and to confront or deter potential enemies abroad. But these costs are not the whole explanation. The sad comment of an Algerian interviewed in a French news magazine is typical: 'Algeria was once the granary of Rome, and now it has to import cereals to make bread. It is a land of flocks and gardens, and it imports meat and fruit. It is rich in oil and gas, and it has a foreign debt of twenty-five billion dollars and two million unemployed.' He goes on to say that this is the result of thirty years of mismanagement.

Algeria has a small oil income and a large population. Some other countries have large incomes and small populations, but have nevertheless managed to devastate their economies and impoverish their peoples. In the longer perspective, oil may prove to be a very mixed blessing for the countries endowed with it. Politically, oil revenues strengthened autocratic governments by freeing them from the financial pressures and constraints which, in other countries, induced governments to accept measures of democratization. Economically, oil wealth often produced a lopsided development, and left these countries dangerously exposed to such outside factors as the fluctuations in the world price of oil, and even, in the long run, to the position of oil itself. There are other sources of oil besides the Middle East; there are other sources of energy besides oil, and both are being actively pursued by a world that has grown weary of Middle Eastern pressures and uncertainties.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the Middle East faces two major crises. One of them is economic and social: the difficulties arising from economic deprivation and, still more, economic dislocation, and their social consequences. The other is political and social – the breakdown of consensus, of that generally accepted set of rules and principles by which a polity works and without which a society cannot function, even under autocratic government. The break-up of the Soviet Union exemplifies the consequences of such a loss of consensus, and the difficulties and dangers of creating a new one.

In the last decade of the twentieth century, it became increasingly clear that in facing these problems, the governments and peoples of the Middle East were substantially on their own. Outside powers were no longer interested in directing, still less dominating, the affairs of

the region. On the contrary, they displayed an extreme reluctance to become involved. The countries of the outside world – that is to say, of Europe, the Americas, and increasingly, of the Far East – were basically concerned with three things in the Middle East: a rich and growing market for their goods and services, a major source of their energy needs, and, as a necessary means to safeguarding the first two, the maintenance of at least some semblance of international law and order.

The circumstances which would provoke outside military intervention were epitomized by Saddam Hussein's invasion and annexation of Kuwait, and the consequent immediate threat to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. This confronted the outside world with a double threat. The first was that the oil resources of the region, that is to say, a significant part of the oil resources of the world, would fall under the monopolistic control of an aggressive dictator. The second threat was to the whole international order established in the aftermath of the Second World War. Despite all the many conflicts in many continents, this was the first time that a member state of the United Nations in good standing was simply invaded and annexed by another member state.

Had Saddam Hussein been allowed to succeed in his venture, the United Nations, already devalued, would have followed the defunct League of Nations into well-deserved ignominy, and the world would have belonged to the violent and the ruthless.

He was not allowed to succeed, and an impressive range of forces, both from inside and from outside the region, was mobilized to evict him from Kuwait. But – this is the most telling indication of the new era – he was evicted from Kuwait, not from Iraq, and was allowed to resume his distinctive style of government and many of his policies in that country. The message was clear. If the Iraqis want a new and different form of government, they must do it for themselves; no one else will do it for them.

This broadly has been the message of the outside powers in the last decade of the twentieth century. These powers will, at most, act to defend their own interests, that is to say, markets and oil, and the interests of the international community, that is to say, a decent respect for the basic rules of the United Nations. Otherwise, the peoples and governments of the Middle East, for the first time in two centuries, will determine their own fate. They may produce new regional powers, perhaps acting in concert, perhaps contending for regional hegemony.

They may go the way of Yugoslavia and Somalia, to fragmentation and internecine chaos – and there are movements and individuals in the region who have made it clear that they would choose this rather than compromise on what they believe to be their religious duties or national rights. Events in Lebanon during the civil war could easily become a paradigm for the entire region. They may unite – perhaps, as some are urging, for a holy war, a new *jihād* which, again as in the past, might well evoke the response of a new Crusade. Or they may unite for peace – with themselves, their neighbours, and the outside world, using and sharing their spiritual as well as their material resources in the search for a fuller, richer, freer life. For the moment, the outside world seems disposed to leave them in peace, and perhaps even to help them achieve it. They alone – the peoples and governments of the Middle East – can decide whether and how to use this window of opportunity while, in an interval of their troubled modern history, it remains open.