

# The causes of underdevelopment in middle east politics essay



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Chronological overview of the region the Middle East gives us good reason to believe that the region has been home to a variety of crisis and wars. The present invasion of the United States of America over Iraq is one example; the other is the political unrest between Iranian atomic policy and, again, the United States of America. Presently, these two are the big issues when it comes to the instability in the region, let along the Palestinian-Israeli issue echoing the international politics for the past more than a half of century.

However, if we look at the chronological history of the Middle East region, we find similarities to the present state of the region. The region has seen four large scale wars in the twentieth century alone. They were: the 1973-October War; the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon; the long standing Iran-Iraq War; and the Gulf War of Desert Storm. Then again there was an out breaking the Iranian revolution in the years 1978-1979. History well remembers “ the taking of American embassy personnel as hostages, the bombing of the U. S. embassy in Beirut, and the Palestinian intifada” (Richards, p. 176, 1995).

When we talk about the social forces prevalent as powerful forces in the Middle East, it is admitted that there is much that is in conflict with the other. It is analyzed in the words of Kamrava (1998), “ The most significant of [the] social forces arises from three conflicting yet reinforcing phenomena: political autocracy; the process of economic and social development; and the persistence of a number of primordial loyalties and attachments” (p. 42). As such the Middle East presents a diverse canvas for the social scientists that find tasty fruit for intellectual questioning. The development of the social forces that are “ rampant in the Middle East” can be pinpointed in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-causes-of-underdevelopment-in-middle-east-politics-essay/>

mixture of political, socio-cultural, and economic factors which are common to the region. Thus in Middle East the extended family system, fast conformity to religion either it is Islam or Christianity, or Judaism, have survived through good and bad times and are still present in the Middle East blood.

With the advent of the voice of globalization, and changing trends and traditions, today's Middle East is a region which is more expanded, more prone to challenges, henceforth, the causes of its underdevelopment are diverse and critical. In the following section of the paper I would examine the major causes one-by-one.

#### Urbanization and Political Unrest

The contemporary Middle East is a predominantly an urban society in the twenty-first century today and is becoming more and more urbanized by the day. Increase in population and decrease in birth, rural people migrating to urban areas are the result in immense urbanization in the Middle Eastern society. As such, by the day, urban areas are expanding rapidly physically in space and population size by taking over the space of the surrounding rural areas. In this way:

The Middle East, in fact, provides an excellent case study of the process of urbanization but one in which the consequences of growth and development are having major negative impacts. The rapid urbanization and burgeoning city populations, similar to most of the Third World, have led to problems and to the decline of quality of urban life (Bonine, M. E., p. 1, 1997).

If we look at the Middle East region, henceforth, we will find that there is too much population that is giving way to such other population-related problems as health deficiency, threats to the physical environment, infrastructure getting inadequate by the day, unemployment rate getting higher and higher, basic services getting shorter, political violence or unrest or both, and so on. However, this is also right to state that the process of urbanization is not taking shape in the Middle East; in substance, it is the norm of today's world. Bonine (p. 2, 1997) notes that "The world is rapidly becoming urbanized. By the end of [twentieth century] almost half of humanity will live in cities, increasing from only 3 percent in 1800 and 15 percent in 1900" (my italics).

This is one reason that we see rapid urbanization in the region of the Middle East. But today's scholars are also equally concerned with the political unrest raging from the Middle Eastern cities which are affecting the politico-geographical environment of the world on the whole. However, some scholars like Bowman and Green (in Bonine, p. 237, 1997) discuss a factor which is to them is something that "is widely assumed that there is a direct causal prelateship between urbanization and political violence in the Middle East". However, to such an assumption they comment that it is "neither completely accurate nor inaccurate" (p. 238). What is their point of view in this regard is that though "Massive urbanization, in the Middle East and elsewhere, does culminate in socioeconomic and political change," there are other sufficiently correlated factors that need to be taken into consideration. Bowman and Green cite Goldstone (p. 238) who recognizes that "only when urban growth is combined with food shortages and outraces the availability

of jobs do grievances grow that may stimulate political violence.” And tracing these factors Bowman and Green note that such grievances are likely to result from the growth in cities that is caused by such other factors as migration, infant mortality, increases in population, and so on. As such they present in a demographic table that lists that infant mortality has declined and students enrolled in the secondary school, their number has increased. Thus they also cite Tilly who agrees with Goldstone’s “ assertion that the threat or fear of food shortages and unemployment are powerful stimuli to popular unrest” (in Bonine, p. 240, 1997). Thus:

According to theorists of political violence, rebellion, and revolution, the two particularly suggestive factors that promote instability are abrupt changes in either the price or availability of food and constrictions in the labor market in which employment is either unavailable or in short supply. (Bowman and Green, in Bonine, p. 241, 1997)

### Unemployment and GDP

Looking at the economic canvas of the Middle East, we note that the challenge of unemployment, in the words of Richards (1995) “ is perhaps the most politically volatile economic issue for the immediate future” (p. 177).

He comes up with the following observations in this regard:

Current rates of unemployment is very high;

This problem will get worse with the passage of time;

This in turn affects the semi-educated, young people, who contribute toward political unrest due to the growing anger;

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The labor supply is growing rapidly, however, the demand for labor is increasing only with a sluggish pace.

Public sector has only created inflexible markets of labor.

Richards notes that the local official figures about unemployment are not satisfactory because they do not comply with the “ international definition” of joblessness, that is used by the International Labor Organization (ILO), United Nations. In the Middle East only two areas, the West Bank and Gaza, use this definition in the restrictive sense.

Another reason that he presents for the massive unemployment challenge in the region is the culture among the youth for opting for jobs that are according to their standards:

Egyptians because young Jordanian men do not want to accept work that they, their families, and — perhaps especially important -prospective spouses’ families find “ demeaning.”) In this regard, men, but especially women, are adversely affected by the decline in (eminently respectable) public-sector jobs (Richards, p. 178, 1995).

Another point in the connection of joblessness Richards note is the unplanned, disorganized type of education that the youth of the Middle East are equipped with. “ Unemployed youth have too little (or the wrong kind of) education to compete in the modern, formal-sector labor market, but too much education to be willing to accept an unskilled job” (p. 178, 1995). Thus the result is that the educated are suffering more than the illiterate in the

region in the sense that the unemployment rate for the educated are higher than those of the illiterate.

By the time the problem will worsen as the region will find the creation of job more and more daunting simply because the rate of growth of the new entrants in the labor market is growing with those still dangling in the mayhem of uncertainty. The region has the fastest growing rate of labor in the whole world. We can summarize the above discussion highlighting the main causes as follows:

Rapid growth in population;

The disorganization of the provision of education to the fast growing number of the youth;

The family standards for jobs;

Disorganization of the public sector in providing the jobs to the educated.

Misrepresentation of the governmental figures of the number of the unemployed which, in turn, creates another portion of the growing problem.

All these factors are coming to contribute to the instability of the region because, by the time, the unemployed youth's psychological frustration will increase and, in the words of Richards (p. 179, 1995), is likely to shape into a "political time-bomb". This is a highly contributing factor in the underdevelopment of the region that is taking severe shapes by the passing of the time.

Presently, the per capita GDP growth of the region has, between 2000 and 2004, has fallen “ below a 4% average for all developing economies (excluding sub-Saharan Africa). The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia estimates joblessness affects 16% of the active population and the youth unemployment rate (30%) is among the world’s highest. (Siddiqi, p. 1, March, 2005). Moreover, Siddiqi notes that the ratios of investment among the Arab countries have plunged from “ 29% of GDP in 1978 to just 16% in 2002” (p. 1).

Siddiqi also notes that the World Bank’s motto or “ Reducing unemployment through higher GDP growth remain the key challenge, particularly given the very high rates of growth expected in the labour force”. However, the Bank also analyzes the regional growth has clearly failed to “ Reach its potential” (p. 1).

### Food and Water

Food security and water security are the other parts of the causes for the underdevelopment of the Middle Easterners. The Gulf has water constraints which suggest the food-import dependency of the region and which seems to increase with the proportionate growth in the population. “ The regional obsession with food self-sufficiency does much to create water shortages” (Richards, p. 180, 1995).

In his discussion about the food and water problem in the Middle East, Richards mentions the time where there was huge oil-boom in the region. He gives the following reasons that took place that time:



Fast growing populations and rapidly increasing per capita incomes quickly raised the demand of food in the region;

The income oozed from oil was not limited to the oil exporter countries but was also shared and enjoyed by the neighboring but poor countries;

The investment was thus limited in the agriculture sector;

Specially cereal cultivation was weak due to high labor costs, " marginal rainfall", and " governmentimposed price disincentives".

Migrating population also created a problem for managing the food supply in the region;

Thus, he concludes that " Arab countries are, on balance, no better (or worse) off today with respect to food self-sufficiency than they were a decade ago; however, their food-security positions are often more precarious" (p. 180, 1995).

### Capital Shortage

The shortage of capital in one critical challenge in itself faced by today's Middle Eastern region. Although it may seem odd to make such an observation, " given the vast financial resources of the Guld", it is a core reality (Richards, p. 181, 1995).

There are certain reasons to this shortage of the capital that is a major cause for the region's under developing state. For example, there is nothing like unity among the present Arab state. " Calls by analysts to ' share the oil

wealth' are equally misplaced" (Richards, p. 181, 1995). The core problem of shortage of capital then, despite being the immense affluence in the region, is that it is fundamentally an institutional problem. First of all, "highly inefficient statist economies generate far less "bang for the buck" than do market economies". In fact, this inefficiency of investment has been constantly falling throughout the past decade in the region leading to a vacuum of destabilization and shortage of capital. "Second, savers and investors (with good reason) fear and distrust national governments. Specifically, they fear that their savings will be expropriated either directly by state decree, or by stealth via rampant inflation and overvalued exchange rates" [my italics] (Richards, p. 183, 1995). Another important reason is the government policies that mar the outside investment in the region.

The problem is a very serious one and can lead to huge vacuum within the region; the solution of this problem, to Richards (p. 182, 1995), is that "Without an expansion of the rule of law, there is little chance that private investors will fill the breach that governments can no longer fill".

### Globalization and Middle East

Insofar as the trend of globalization in the Middle East is concerned, the region has

hesitated more than any other region of the world to adopt the reforms needed to benefit from the new international division of labor, is being pushed ever harder to adopt the Washington Consensus as its basis for formulating national economic policies. Global changes are breaking the

cocoon that had once protected the region from major structural changes (Barger, p. 30, 2003).

One very obvious reason for this change (and Middle East's opting for such a change) is that the region no longer receives "the abundant strategic and petroleum rents that had previously insulated it from the need to reform". Thus the political powers and states of the region are compelled now to seek for newer and greener pasture, that is, "to attract compensatory capital flows, which in turn is driving the process of economic structural adjustment." (Barger, p. 30, 2003).

## Conclusion

Although "The Middle East and the Muslim world have changed significantly since the end of World War II" (Barger, p. 1, 2003), there is much that is needed to be done for the political unrest of the region. Along with this big issue, the other related problems such as rapid increase in the population; immense number of roaming semi-educated and educated jobless youth; their sense of depravity; must be taken into serious consideration before the time-bomb explodes.

Other issues like shortage of capital, food and water security, and globalization of the region are the problems that need equal share of policy makers and planners. This must be kept in mind that the Middle East is now going through some critical changes occurring inside and outside the region.

It is the requirement of time that the policy makers and the other concerned bodies and institutions play their role so that the future generation is surely

handed over a better tomorrow. There is no doubt that there is huge scope for the under developing region. What is needed is sincere effort on the part of the concerned bodies.