

Chapter Five

GOVERNMENT



Figure C5 *Memorial Hall: monument to Harvard Alumni serving in the Union Army who died in the Civil War*

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Concerning Colonial Settler States and Ignoble Wars

Lessons from Algeria

Clement M. Henry

We were the “Silent Generation”, as our class editors note, “*our silence and obedience . . . [being] in contrast to the political and social uproars of some other generations*”, because, born shortly before the proclamation of the American Century in 1941, we grew up in a comfortable bipartisan consensus of liberal internationalism.

We were also the Cold War generation. The Iron Curtain descended on Eastern Europe during our pre-teens, dividing the world into the children of light and the children of darkness, and the United States was on the right side of history, the unquestioned leader of the Free World. We graduated at the height of America’s postwar power as true believers in a beneficent liberal world order led by the United States.

Youthful Hubris

Upon graduation I immediately in the summer of 1957 joined a special seminar on international student relations conducted by the United States *National Student Association* and, after attending NSA’s national congress in August, became its representative in Paris focused on our bilateral contacts with overseas student associations, principally those from France’s African colonies.

Algeria was a particular focus of attention. As a sort of junior ambassador I felt I was contributing my share to the Cold War, contesting international Communist influence over Third World students by offering our support in their struggles for national self-determination. Clandestine financing from CIA did not disturb me; quite the contrary, secret financing by an agency apparently run by former student leaders confirmed that we were on the right track, ahead of our official

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diplomacy paralyzed even after the Suez crisis between support for our traditional NATO European allies and our classic Wilsonian ideals.

The only American public figure of note to be supporting the Algerian revolution in 1957 was Senator John F. Kennedy. I was proud to be following his footsteps and contributing at the NSA congress to drafting a resolution on behalf of Algerian students.

Expelled from France

The day after Christmas, 1957, I represented NSA at the annual congress of the *Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France* (FEANF) and gave my first formal speech in French.

One talking point was to express NSA's solidarity, shared with FEANF, with all the students suffering under the yoke of colonialism, and notably the Algerians. In keeping with the "syndicalist" or trade union traditions of national student associations, I had to embed any political stances in material or academic student concerns. Consequently I spoke of the "*ignoble consequences of French colonialism*" for the rights of Algerian students as well as expressing my sympathies with their aspirations for independence.

About two weeks later, the French police knocked on my door in the winter darkness at 8 a.m. They drove me down to police headquarters where the supervisor politely told me that I had abused French hospitality and had 48 hours to leave the country. It seems it was that term *ignoble*, reported in a brief excerpt of *Le Monde*, that did me in.

To me the term *ignoble* was just a throwaway, a term I had heard before that sounded good in French. I should have remembered from a course I had taken a year or two earlier from Louis Hartz, "*Democratic Theory and its Critics*", that only Americans laugh at ignobility: for lack of a feudal past we are blessed to be liberal in the tradition of John Locke.

I spent the rest of the academic year in London but kept up with the Algerians. Shortly after my expulsion the French authorities dissolved their student association, and so in London we organized an international meeting in solidarity with the Algerians and in protest against the arbitrary infringement of their right of student association.

On a personal note, I decided to turn down my admission to the Harvard Law School, already postponed by a year, and enroll instead in graduate school to pursue studies of North African politics. Upon completing my PhD dissertation field work in Tunisia I was finally

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able to drive my VW across North Africa just a couple of weeks after Algerian independence in the summer of 1962. With me, working on his dissertation about Tunisian labor, was Eqbal Ahmed, who would become a brilliant public intellectual and activist against the war in Vietnam.

Modernizing Vietnam by Carpet Bombing?

Eqbal and I already knew by 1962 that South Vietnam was a lost cause.

Algerian nationalists, inspired in part by the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954, had just won their war against far greater odds. Unlike distant Vietnam, which had attracted relatively few French settlers, Algeria had been part of France, occupied in 1955 by well over one million settlers out of a total population of almost ten million.

The fact that the Vietnamese nationalists were also Communists was unfortunate from my Cold War perspective but did not justify the massive increase in American troops on the ground in 1965, comparable in my mind with the futile French mobilization of some 600,000 conscripts to fight for “*French Algeria*” in the late 1950s. As an assistant professor at Berkeley I joined many of my colleagues and students protesting against the war in the mid-1960s.

I also worked with Samuel P. Huntington on a conference and eventually a book about the evolution of established single-party systems despite being appalled by his argument, stated in a different context, that the United States was contributing to the urbanization and hence modernization of Vietnam by carpet bombing, forcing its peasants into internment camps.¹

Arab-Israeli Wars and Post-1967 Attrition

From studying and writing about Algeria and Morocco as well as Tunisia, I moved to the American University in Cairo in 1969 in time to witness some of the speeches and then the funeral of Gamal Abdel Nasser. Only then did I become particularly concerned about another colonial settler state, Israel.

In my NSA year of student politicking, the Middle East had been off limits. In Tunisia, too, where I spent two years doing field work, my Tunisian friends, under the spell of President Habib Bourguiba, used to view Egypt and its Arab neighbors to the East as “*oriental*” and politically as well as economically underdeveloped. In June 1967 the

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Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria even broke off relations with Egypt (as well as the United States) for surrendering to Israel.

Once in Cairo, however, I was exposed to Egyptian perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict and began to see the Middle East differently. Israel seemed less like the embattled little democracy depicted by American media. It had invaded Egypt twice, once in 1956 and again in 1967. In 1956 President Eisenhower had obliged Israel as well as Britain and France to withdraw from all their occupied territories, whereas in 1967 President Johnson permitted Israel to keep the territories occupied as a result of the Six-Day War, pending negotiations that have never concluded.

Israel's West Bank and Gaza: A Colonial Settler Mini-State and Open-Air Prison, Respectively?

I left Cairo in 1973, before the outbreak of the October (Yom Kippur) War. While Egypt and Israel eventually made formal peace, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict persists. Fifty years after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967, the territories are peppered with illegal settlements, transforming these parts of Palestine into a mini colonial settler state reminiscent of French Algeria.

Although they withdrew their settlers from Gaza in 2005, the Israelis asphyxiate its 1.8 million inhabitants, most of them refugees from the 1948 war, with a tight blockade and periodic bombardments, sometimes casually referred to as "*mowing the lawn*", with American-supplied F-16s.

The entire area of the former British Mandate of Palestine consists of Israel, Gaza, and the occupied territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Just about half the population is Jewish, the rest being Arab, including Christians as well as Muslims and Druze.

Without any two-state resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the whole area will in time come demographically to resemble other colonial settler states, with a minority of Jews, the huge majority of whom immigrated to Palestine after 1882, dominating a Palestinian majority. Jimmy Carter and others call it apartheid.

America's Military Overreach in Punishing Aggressors: Parallels between 1950 and Desert Shield

I am concerned not only about America's blind support for Israel, intensified by our new president who apparently endorses Israel's

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illegal settlement building on occupied territories, but also about the growing militarization of US foreign policy.

It began well before September 11, 2001. When Saddam Hussein occupied Kuwait on August 2, 1990, the United States chose to eject him by force rather than encourage an Arab political solution that would have taken into account some of Iraq's legitimate grievances in exchange for military withdrawal. It is clear from George H.W. Bush's memoirs that he was determined on principle to prevent any Arab compromise short of unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

On reading these memoirs recently, I remembered another story about the dangers of American overreach, using military force to punish aggressors. Professor McGeorge Bundy lectured us in his US foreign policy course at Harvard about how Truman had unnecessarily extended the Korean War by two years. After brilliantly cutting off the North Korean invaders, who had occupied all but the southern tip of Korea by June 1950, General MacArthur pushed beyond the 38th parallel into North Korea, reaching the border with China to punish the Communists for their aggression. Consequently the Chinese intervened to push the United Nations forces back to a long see-saw struggle around the 38th parallel.

As the appalling events of 9/11 demonstrated, military overreach had consequences. Osama Bin Laden committed his atrocities in response to “*Desert Shield*”, the huge American military buildup in Saudi Arabia in 1990 followed by “*Desert Storm*”. He also claimed, “*The Palestinian cause has been the main factor that, since my early childhood, fueled my desire, and that of the 19 freemen (Sept. 11 bombers), to stand by the oppressed, and punish the oppressive Jews and their allies.*”²

Not only America’s invasion of Iraq in 2003 but also unrelenting support for Israel has turned much Arab and Muslim public opinion against the United States. Our “*soft power*” has become negative, in the sense that violent fanatics are able to mobilize support for their insurrections by deliberately attacking our citizens abroad to provoke US counterattacks.

We fell into the trap of generating further support for these fanatics. Perhaps inadvertently, we also armed ISIS by supporting our allies in the region, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Furthermore we have become accomplices in the Saudi destruction of Yemen. Who knows what backlashes these involvements may provoke?

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“America First” for War against Islam?

Today much is yet to be seen about President Trump’s policy in the Middle East and more broadly. But the indications are worrisome. I worry about President Trump’s apparent intentions to support Israel unconditionally, settlements and all, further alienating Arab Christian as well as Muslim public opinion. “America First” should stop all aid to Israel if the latter’s leadership persists in building settlements in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank.

I worry even more about never-ending wars in the Greater Middle East. Reading *The Field of Fight* by National Security Adviser Michael Flynn and Michael Ledeen, I am reminded of Sam Huntington’s culturally parochial *Clash of Civilizations*, now being reduced to real war. As I write, President Trump in his first week in office has issued a reckless Executive Order suspending the entry of Syrian refugees and of other people literally in midair coming from certain Muslim majority countries.

How better to confirm the propaganda of Bin Laden’s successors that America is at war with Islam?³

Clement M. Henry, who at Harvard and until 1995 wrote under the name of Clement Henry Moore, has written extensively about political development, the engineering profession, and financial institutions in various parts of the Middle East and North Africa over more than five decades. After receiving his doctorate in political science from Harvard in 1963 he taught at the University of California, Berkeley until 1969 when he joined the American University in Cairo (AUC). He returned to the United States just before the October War of 1973 to teach at the University of Michigan, where he also obtained an MBA that enabled him to direct the Business School at the American University of Beirut from 1981 to 1984, at the height of Lebanon’s civil war. After serving as visiting professor at UCLA and Sciences Po, Paris, he taught at the University of Texas at Austin from 1987 to 2011.⁴

Just retired, he returned during the Arab Spring to AUC to chair its political science department until 2014, when he took up a research professorship at the National University of Singapore, completed in May 2016.

Endnotes

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Bases of Accommodation”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (Jul., 1968), pp. 642–656. Our co-edited book, *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Societies: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), may still have some relevance to China and some of its neighbors.

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- 2 “Bin Laden: Palestinian Cause Prompted 911”, CBS News, May 16, 2008: <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/bin-laden-palestinian-cause-prompted-9-11/> (accessed Jan. 31, 2017). Further evidence of the salience of the Palestine issue is revealed in his lengthy “Letter to America”, *The Guardian*, Nov. 24, 2002: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/nov/24/theobserver> (accessed Jan. 31, 2017). See also Thomas Hegghammer, “Osama bin Laden’s True Priorities”, *The Guardian*, Dec. 3, 2007: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/dec/03/osamabinladentruepriorities> (accessed Jan. 31, 2017).
- 3 As reconfirmed after I wrote these lines, in “Trump Pushes Dark View of Islam to Center of US Policy-Making”, *The New York Times*, Feb. 1, 2017.
- 4 Biography of Clement N. Henry: <http://liberalarts.utexas.edu/government/faculty/henrycm>; http://www.la.utexas.edu/users/chenry/public_html/vitae.html.



Figure 5.3.1.1 Arab scholars at an Abbasid library in Baghdad. *Maqamat of al-Hariri*. Illustration by Yahyá al-Wasiti, 1237

The House of Wisdom (Arabic: بيت الحكمة ; Bayt al-Hikma) was a major intellectual center during the Islamic Golden Age.

During the reign of al-Ma'mun, astronomical observatories were set up, and the House was an unrivalled center for the study of humanities and for science in medieval Islam, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, alchemy and chemistry, zoology, and geography and cartography. Drawing primarily on Greek, but also Syriac, Indian and Persian texts, the scholars accumulated a great collection of world knowledge, and built on it through their own discoveries.

By the middle of the ninth century, the House of Wisdom had the largest selection of books in the world. It was destroyed in the sack of the city following the Mongol siege of Baghdad (1258).

Text: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Wisdom
Image: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maqamat_hariri.jpg