

MIDDLE EAST WITHOUT AMERICA

There is precious little reason to find any optimism across the smashed and rubbleised landscape of the Middle East. What has not changed in all these years, is the pit of injustice, impoverishment, educational ignorance, fear and indignity in which the Arab and Muslim peoples live in the Middle East. And not one of the “new” leaders who are taking over from the Americans is doing anything to alleviate either the corruption that is the great sickness of the Arab world or the inequality and tribal politics which the Ottoman Empire bequeathed to the Middle East when it collapsed. Humanism has retreated rather than advanced and human and civil rights are now scarcely mentioned in the context of the region. The great Arab revolutions have played themselves out, in some cases – in Egypt, for example – actually re-infantlising their people to yet again love deep state dictators and brutal cops and generals with governessy eagles on their cap badges. Perhaps Saudi Arabia is a revolution still to come. I have always thought that the day the royal princes started locking each other up might be the beginning of the end of the Kingdom.

And we should remember that it was from this place of abject sorrow that al-Qaeda emerged, and then Isis and the whole gamut of frightening men with hoods and knives which still exists in the deserts of Iraq and Syria and across Africa from Sinai to Mali. And what new monster is going to arrive next? Those glorious days of the 1970s seem quite tame by comparison. You could almost wish for the return of the corrupt old PLO.

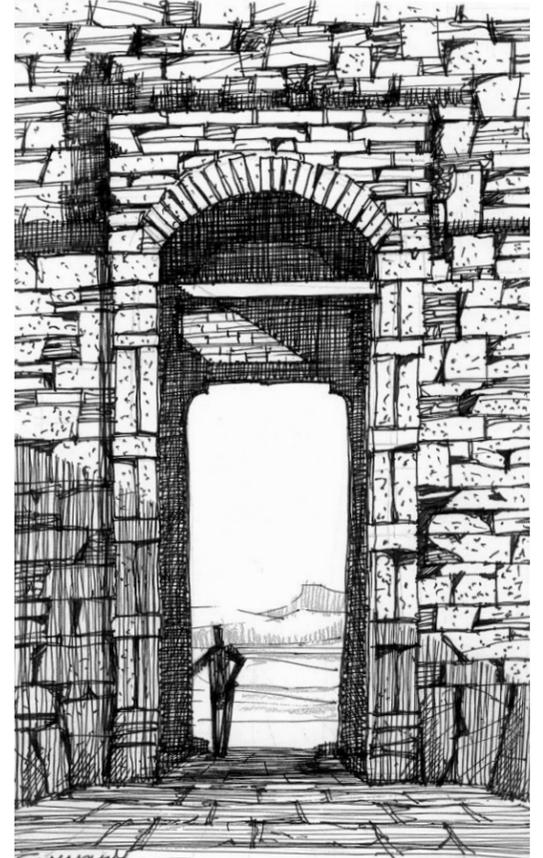
Even the return of serious American foreign policy – which does not these days even amount to a Cheshire Cat – would be a relief. Time was when a mere statement from a secretary of state – let alone a US president – would have the phones jangling across the Middle East. The Reagans, Clintons, Bushes or Obamas of this world actually did have an effect on the region, albeit often malign, US leaders being poorly briefed and always in awe of Israel (not to mention its power to destroy political lives in Washington). But today, who is calling the shots across the old Ottoman Empire? Well just take a look at Putin and Assad and Erdogan and Sissi and Macron and Rouhani. These are the men who are currently holding the headlines, either declaring Isis dead or beaten or Syria “saved” or the Kurds “terrorists” or rescuing Prime Minister Saad Hariri from his hostage home in Saudi Arabia – although now we’ve all got to believe that he wasn’t

detained and didn’t really intend to resign or did resign but doesn’t want to resign any more. And rather oddly, Mohamed bin Salman looks less and less influential, a Gulf Crown Prince whose attempts to destroy Yemen, Assad’s Syria, Qatar and Al Jazeera and even poor Lebanon look more and more like a child in a tantrum, throwing his toys around in an attempt to frighten the neighbours – including the one neighbour he will not fight, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Truly, the US has turned into the Cheshire Cat, sometimes quite disappearing from our vision with the exception of various bits and bobs of American special forces who pop up to help Kurds and weirdly named militias – all of which appear to have three-letter acronyms – who will be abandoned, betrayed or forgotten in the months to come. Perhaps only the Cheshire Cat’s grin will remain. The Hezbollah, I suspect, is the only armed force in the Middle East which has only one name. And they’re on the “terrorist” list – though not of course in Moscow, where Putin supports the Hezbollah’s ally Bashar.

So the Middle East I live in looks less and less like the place I arrived to report on more than four decades ago. Then US “policy” was real if often delusional, balanced by an ever more crumbling Soviet Union, constantly reassuring a battery of dictators that they would support them – at various times, they included Saddam Hussein, Hafez al-Assad, Anwar Sadat, King Hussain of Jordan, Colonel Gaddafi and the Shah of Iran. It was a time, too, when even the PLO and Arafat were “terrorists” – though they were confusingly taken on and off “terrorist lists” by the US or Israel every few years. In fact, these were the jolly days when the Israelis were encouraging that nice friendly Hamas movement – now, of course, back in the “terrorist” cage – to open new mosques in Gaza to counterbalance Arafat’s statelet in Lebanon. The Israelis have effectively “forgotten” that dangerous little policy of theirs.

And in those far-off days, who could imagine the cults that would emerge to recast all the “terrorists” of yesterday as “moderates” and present an entirely new chamber of horrors – al-Qaeda and Isis – to put the fear of God into us all and to spread their influence around the globe and to force even the dunderheads in the Pentagon to call them “apocalyptic”? And it’s interesting that Iran’s own President announces



that Isis is beaten – it used to be George W Bush who talked about “mission accomplished”.

And of course, now it is Putin who invites Bashar al-Assad to Sochi, and chats to the presidents of Iran and Turkey, and whose army remains in Syria, and remains a good friend of President-Field Marshal al-Sissi of Egypt. So, please note, does Emmanuel Macron who invited Sissi to Paris this month without once mentioning human rights – all this with 60,000 political prisoners in Egypt, thousands of “disappeared” and many mysterious murders. Yes, it’s all very well to thank Macron for pulling Hariri out of his glitzy prison in Riyadh – and he did that rather well, by the way – but do not think that France is going to be a beacon of reform in the Middle East any more than Putin. And if Bashar al-Assad talks again of his preparedness to negotiate with “anyone”, he did so only after meeting Putin and thanking him for “saving” Syria (and himself, one might add). Kipling’s “Recessional” sounds even more geographically appropriate today, when navies melt away and all the pomp of yesterday “is one with Nineveh and Tyre!”

Robert Fisk
independent.co.uk

MUIR REPORT GOES TO – AFRICA?

The last of the African freedom fighters has been retired. Robert Mugabe, leader of Zimbabwe's stepped down after over 30 years of ruling this country.

The West knows him as a cartoon character dictator, who single handedly, ruined the economy of this once wealthy nation by stubbornly adhering to anti-white policies. He is described as a buffoon, who jeopardized the entire country for his own selfish aims.

Having spent a fair amount of time in southern Africa, I disagree with this analysis. Whatever Mr. Mugabe may be, one thing cannot be disputed, he saved his country from the violence and colonial thievery that bedeviled the rest of the continent, during his reign of power. He is accused of stealing acres of fertile farmland from the entrenched British farmers and paying them nothing for their property. He put a limit on the amount of money, one could take out of the country, a common practice all over the rest of the world, extremely important, in a country where white colonialists had most of the wealth. He stiffened penalties on big game poaching.

Mr. Mugabe came to power in direct response to the cruelty of the Rhodesian government. He spent 11 years in a rat infested jail, at which time, he completed his studies, garnering a Masters degree in Economics, two law degrees and one degree in planning. He formerly studied at the University of London and at Oxford. He is no dope, he is a Marxist Leninist leader, who had the audacity to stand up to European powers. His major sin was expropriating the fertile farmland and re-distributing it to the black populace.

The Brits decried this action saying he unfairly stole the land. Actually, he said he would pay the farmers what they paid for the land plus interest over all the years they held it. Now, how much was it they paid? Nothing, they stole it from the natives, why can't we take it back.

Anyone who has ever toured museums in London is aware that they refer to stolen property as “acquired” by them and when the rightful owners want it back, they declare it a theft. To further anger the colonial powers, he made education to grade 12 mandatory, resulting in a literacy rate of over 89 per cent. This is far better than the rate in the U.S. He also enacted a law stating

that people must be paid a wage for their work, unlike most of the rest of Africa, where you can be forced to work for room and board. He also kept the two formerly warring tribes, the Shona and the Ndebele from further bloodshed by uniting them in their struggle.

Don't compare Zimbabwe to the United States, compare it to the rest of Africa. He also exposed the practice of so-called charitable groups flocking to African disasters and unloading supplies and vehicles at the docks, all the while filming it for fund raising in the future. This should be a good idea, but the second all the pictures were taken, the trucks and supplies are loaded back on the boats, and, they, along with any relief money was never seen again. Mr. Mugabe wanted the money up-front. He is accused of charging groups like the Red Cross money to land in this country after a natural disaster. One has only to look at the recent tragedy in Haiti and all the money that was raised and never got there to understand his actions. He resisted loans from the IMF and tried valiantly to hold the country together amid the western boycott. Much like Cuba, Libya and Burma,, struggling to survive while being blackmailed and blackballed by the wealthy powers, who, in no way, want support for any popular movement. He viewed colonialism as a short interval in the continuity of time. He publicized the ancient, flourishing cities in his country, which existed thousands of years before Europeans crawled out of caves.

For all those rejoicing in his ouster, I hope you are not counting on a quick turnaround of the economy. Zimbabwe has been ravaged with AIDS. They have lost tens of thousands of people, resulting in overburdening the already strained resources. They have no manufacturing base. Most of the factory work is done in South Africa, where wages are much lower, if they are paid at all. No investors are eager to incur the cost of shipping and building factories, when the same can be done for cheaper in Asia. The return of European and Asian investment will result in the same economic misery suffered now, the only difference being, the little money left will go to outside sources and flee Zimbabwe and the black population once again. Of all his accomplishments, my favorite is telling the Queen of England to go to hell.

Muir Walker