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UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY AND THE PORTRAYAL OF MUSLIMS IN MOTION PICTURES: 1921 T0 2021

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Abstract:

This research examines the images used to portray Muslims in American film over the past century and their relationship to American foreign policy in the Middle East. It documents how, at various times, Muslims have been depicted as romantic ideals, vengeful predators, violent hordes, and heroic leaders in conjunction with the United States interests in the Region. The analysis links these portrayals to American ideologies of Christian conquest, military dominance, political corruption, and popular cynicism. The study concludes that much of the ideology employed is grounded not only in Americans' vision of Muslims, but Americans' views of themselves.

Keywords: Middle East, Muslims, Arabs, American Foreign Policy, Film History

INTRODUCTION

On August 30, 2021, the United States withdrew its military troops and embassy personnel from Afghanistan ending a 20 year war that began with the September 11, 2001 attacks by Al Qaeda operatives on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and American Airlines Flight 93. In response to those events, the United States had also initiated armed invasions of Iraq and Syria and assisted in the overthrow of Muamar Khadafi in Libya (see e.g., Gordon 2020, Khoury 2019, Rosenberg 2021, Senate Committee on the Armed Services 2016).

These actions and counter-actions brought into sharp focus America's relationship with and perceptions of the Muslim world. In two widely cited works, Fukuyama (2011, 2014) traces the development of modern statehood from prehistory to the arrival of democratic nations to the present day. Along the way he outlines the intricate evolution between religion, politics and the rule of law. In different regions of the world, for example, he argues these three institutions developed varied relationships with one another.

These variations have led in modern times to significantly different societal structures in China, Western Europe, the Middle East and India. In each region, law, government and religion interact to produce unique relationships within the culture. In the past, when inhabitants of these regions led lives largely isolated from one another, the opportunity for ideological conflict was less common. But due to heightened contemporary migrations and the global expansion of social media, people often find themselves in contact with those whose religious beliefs and behavioral standards differ greatly from their own.

The Contemporary Muslim Diaspora

The contemporary Muslim diaspora originates from several factors. During the 1970s, Muslim immigrants from Turkey and Central Asia began arriving in Western European countries, such as Belgium and Germany, seeking higher wages (Akcapar 2012). Their lower economic status and unfamiliar language and consumption behaviors made them frequent targets of ethno-religious hostility (Akcapar 2012). Concurrently, Pakistani Muslims immigrating to Britain and North African Muslims immigrating to France often met with hostility and residential segregation (Bolognani and Lyon 2011; Aissaoui 2009).

These migrations resulted in part from Western Colonialism during the prior century (Bolognani and Lyon 2011; Aissaoui 2009). Quite often, the European nations that eagerly colonized and garnered economic benefits from Muslim countries have not been enthusiastic about having their inhabitants show up on the doorstep decades later (https://www.omusa.org/continents/muslim-diaspore, accessed June 6, 2022)

The rise of Political Islam (Volpi 2010) at the close of the Colonial Period coupled with the critical importance to Western economies of the petroleum resources found in many Muslim countries, placed additional political pressures on Muslim migrants. This was greatly exacerbated by the appearance of violent Islamist political groups in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War (Volpi 2010). By the early 1980s, several different Muslim extremist organizations began forming, most notably Al Qaeda in Afghanistan, to fight against invading Russian forces (Dreyfus 2005). When these same groups began attacking Western targets in the late 1980s, Muslims living in those nations became the targets of suspicion (Aissaoui 2009). Post 9/11, the situation worsened substantially (Schlee 2014). As a result, one of the most pressing issues in contemporary American society is ideological conflict based on religion, especially between Christianity and Islam (https://www.brookings.edu/research/american, accessed June 6 2022). Have Americans' views of Islam and Muslims changed over time and if so in what ways?

The present research proposes that it is only by taking a *long-term perspective* of American ideology regarding Muslims that a clear understanding of contemporary views can be obtained. One of the most important cultural media in which such ideological imagery is embedded is *motion pictures*, which predate the arrival of television by decades and the arrival of the global internet by almost a century. Film provides a multi-leveled ideological perspective using motion, visual images, dialogue, music and color to embed a rich pattern of ideology that is especially effective in impacting personal beliefs and emotions regarding its content (https://ethw.org/Motion_Pictures, accessed June 4 2022). The purpose of the present study is to investigate the imagery used to depict Muslims in American motion pictures over the past century and to consider the possible political and economic motivations for these portrayals.

The study covers a key period of American political and economic history -- post-World War I to the early twenty-first century. The key proposition identified is that *the films express an ideology promoting European and American intervention in the political and economic affairs of Muslim countries.* The goal of these Western intrusions was to exploit the economic resources of Muslim countries, most often their petroleum reserves (Anderson and Shannon 2021, McAlister 2005, Tuma, 2014). Further, the majority of the most recent films suggest that the political and moral penalties for these actions have been especially costly to the United States (Baxter and Akbarzadeh, 2012).

The Global Muslim Population

At present, persons following the Muslim religion number in excess of 1.9 billion globally (worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/2021). While the majority of Muslims live in the countries of the Levant (e.g., Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan), the Arabian Gulf (e.g., Qatar, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia), North Africa (e.g., Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Sudan), and Central Asia (e.g., Pakistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Iran), there also are large Muslim populations found in Southeast Asia, China, and Eastern Europe (worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/2021). Currently, approximately 4 to 6 million Muslims live in the United States and 44 million reside in Western Europe (worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/2021).

Although the Muslim population is growing steadily in the West, those living there often report incidents of stereotyping, profiling and other forms of ethnic prejudice from non-Muslim residents. Likely some of this 'typing' of Muslims stems from media portrayals, which often may be negative. Yet few systematic analyses have been undertaken to examine the presence and/or content of such representations (hub.wsu.edu/law-justice-realtime/2015/12/17, accessed March 2022). The present research addresses these issues directly.

METHOD

A set of 26 films spanning the time period from 1926 to 2020 was selected for the present analysis. Since the focus is upon motion pictures presenting narratives about Muslims that were widely viewed by American audiences, films were selected which had the following characteristics: (1) English language, (2) wide release in the United States, and (3) Muslim characters central to the main story-line.

Each film is contextualized in two ways for purposes of the analysis. First, the motion picture is considered historically, that is, in the time and place it is **intended to represent**. For example, the film *Kingdom of Heaven* was released in 2005, but depicted the time period of the Second Crusade (1187 to 1189 CE). In discussing this film, we first account for the historical context it depicts (see e.g., Verhaegen 2010). Next we consider the time period in United States history during which the film was presented to the American public, i.e., after the September 11, 2001 attacks and in the midst of United States involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. Both types of contextualization -- diachronic and synchronic -- proved enlightening to the analysis. One key theoretical premise underlying the analysis is that each film represents *a 'cultural interview' or 'cultural snapshot' of American ideology toward Muslims relevant to the time period in which it is released* (see e.g., Franklin 2006), much as archival materials are commonly used by researchers to provide entry into a cultural epoch (deBurgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan 2008).

A second component of the analysis is *positioning the films within the appropriate historical context*. Each film represents a viewing point into American cultural ideology at a particular time in national development during the 1920 to 2020 time period. Most often, the theoretical structure utilized is that of European Colonialism (Lehning, 2013). From the mid-1800s to the mid-twentieth century, much of the Middle East was under the political control of various European powers; France, Italy, and especially Britain held sway over the majority of the Muslim population across the world (MacEoin and Al-Shahi, 2013). While a detailed discussion of European Colonialism is beyond the scope of the study, material pertinent to the interpretation of given films is included. We now turn to the films.

The Sheik (1921)

The first film, *The Sheik* (1921), serves as the cultural origin-point for the American view of Islam (Shaheen 2006). *The Sheik* was released in 1921 to an American public 'high' on internal economic success (Preston, 1992). New factories and manufacturing facilities created a GNP growth of 4.2% per year (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2021). The Roaring Twenties were being launched on a national euphoria of capitalism and middle class income expansion (Carlisle, 2008). Mass transit was institutionalized in major US cities; and both men and women were moving to urban areas in search of upward mobility (Carlisle, 2008). Capitalism reigned as the unquestioned engine of growth and seemed capable of providing upward mobility for all (Carlisle, 2008; Streissguth, 2009). Across the Atlantic, both Britain and France were growing rich on resources from their colonial empires in the Middle East, India and North Africa (Moss, 2000); but these remained exotic places which few Americans had ever visited.

Into the American consciousness arrived *The Sheik*, featuring Rudolph Valentino. The film was 'silent', yet its images were capable of transporting viewers to a fantastical world almost completely at odds with their own (Everson, 2009). For American men, the film presents a world in which “men are still men”: riding horses, shooting guns, engaging in sword fights, and ruling over women, all of which presently seemed imperiled in America. For women, the film presents an independent, courageous and beautiful heroine who succeeds in infatuating the desert prince. From this narrative, American consumers developed their first cinematic prototypes of the Muslim world. Here is a brief synopsis of the plot:

Set in French Algeria, *The Sheik* opens with the Muslim call to prayer, showing images of both mosques and desert sands. The narrative reads “Civilization has passed them by... these sons of Allah”.

A set of iconic images is then shown to provide cultural context for the audience: palm trees, oases, desert sand dunes, tribal tents, horses, donkeys, and camels; these will become the semiotic props in virtually all other American films set in Muslim lands.

In the film, women are portrayed as chattel, used for men's entertainment, and sold in a market. They live in harems and are almost absent from the public sphere. The film suggests a strong Muslim objectification of women, noting that, “When an Arab sees a woman that he wants, he takes her”. European imperialism is depicted as the height of civilization. British and French characters dress formally for dinner, live in elegant houses and have personal servants. Arab men are portrayed as valiant but ruthless warriors who engage in hand-to-hand combat and are excellent horsemen.

Prince Ahmed (Valentino) is handsome, an excellent rider and warrior, and ruler of the Arab tribes in the area. Notably, he has been substantially Europeanized. He smokes cigarettes, is said to have been educated in Paris, and is served by a French valet named Gaston. The heroine, Lady Diana Mayo, the daughter of an English peer, is described as 'reckless and daring' and believes that 'marriage is captivity'. On a whim, she rides into the desert with only an Arab guide and is almost kidnapped by Omair, an Arab bandit and slaver.

Photo by Donald Biddle Keyes

“The Sheik” is the hectic tale of an English girl in the clutches of an Arabian chief

The narrative states that Diana, being a 'white woman', would have fetched a high price in the market.

She is rescued by Prince Ahmed and taken back to his opulent desert tent. A series of adventures ensues in which Ahmed attempts to subdue Diana's independence, while she, in turn, reprimands him for being 'a savage'. Several of these involve ventures into the desert which the narrative describes as “a fiery, undulating savage”. In the final scenes, Ahmed rescues Diana from the clutches of Omair, in whose fortress she is being held (and served by black slaves). In the fight with Omair, Ahmed is shot. He tells Diana, “It [my life] rests with Allah.” Ahmed survives, telling Diana: “All things are with Allah”. They decide to marry.

What is omitted from this synopsis is the knowledge provided about half way through the film: Prince Ahmed is *not* an Arab by birth. Rather, he was *adopted* as an infant by an Arab sheik and his birth parents were an English aristocrat and a Spanish woman. This crucial information makes him racially acceptable as a marriage partner for Diana, who, after all, is 'white'. Importantly, this film also communicates a clear *racial hierarchy*; Europeans are depicted as culturally superior, civilized, and aristocratic; Muslims represent an intermediate position of humanity: they are barbaric, but also valiant and exciting; African blacks are shown to be inferior humans, useful only as servants.

Thief of Baghdad (1940)

The next significant American film concerning Muslims appeared 20 years later. *Thief of Baghdad* is a fantasy film set in ancient Iraq with two intertwined story-lines. The first concerns a young thief, Abu, who goes on several remarkable adventures: journeying to the top of the Himalayas, freeing a giant black genie from a bottle, and flying on a magic carpet. This storyline has its origins in both Muslim (genie and flying carpet) and Hindu (Shiva goddess) legends.

The parallel storyline is a complex love story between the young sultan of Baghdad, Ahmed, who has been transformed into a blind beggar by his evil vizier, Jafar, and the beautiful (but unnamed) daughter of the sultan of Basra. This film uses the previously identified iconic devices American audiences now deem appropriate for an Arab-Muslim setting: donkeys, camels, horses, minarets, tents, bearded men, long-haired, veiled women dressed in flowing robes, and white-washed city buildings.

Through a series of enchantments, Jafar has blinded the young sultan he was supposed to serve, in an attempt to marry the daughter of the sultan of Basra, himself. To accomplish this, Jafar invents mechanical toys that at first delight the narcissistic old sultan, but ultimately kill him. By marrying the princess, whose father is now dead, Jafar intends to become sultan of both Baghdad and Basra.

However, the princess refuses to marry him, because she loves Ahmed. In retaliation, Jafar sentences both of them to public beheading. At this critical moment, Abu, the boy, arrives on his magic carpet and slays Jafar. The people rejoice, believing Abu to be 'the promised one' prophesied to free them from Jafar's tyranny. Ahmed (now no longer blind) and the princess marry, becoming beloved rulers of Baghdad and Basra. Ahmed asks Abu to become vizier, but Abu instead flies off on his carpet to new adventures.

This tale has several significant ideological aspects. First, the same racial hierarchy present in *The Sheik* is found here. Both the princess and Ahmed (who represent royalty) are lighter skinned than most of the other characters; Abu and Jafar are darker-skinned with black hair (recall that Abu is low-born, while Jafar is evil), and the genie-from-the-bottle is Black (with a Black American accent). Other Black characters in the film are represented as doing menial jobs (e.g., servants and trumpet blowers).

Women are veiled throughout the film and usually secluded from public view, the sole exception being 'dancing girls' who entertain the men. The old sultan's narcissistic, spoiled behaviors communicate negative impressions of Arab-Muslim leaders that were carried forward in American ideology regarding 'enemy' Muslim leaders, such as Muamar Qadafi and Sadam Hussein, but were largely absent in representations of Muslim politicians favorable to US policy. For example, former King Hussein of Jordan and Anwar Sadat of Egypt were depicted positively by the American media, usually wearing suits and conversing in English (Anderson and Khalili, 2009). An important ideological revision in this film vis-à-vis *The Sheik*, is that the Muslim religion and Allah have become demonized, with Jafar typically calling upon Allah to help him cast his evil spells. This shift will be linked in later discussion to World War II alterations in American political ideology regarding the Middle East, especially the oil producing areas in and around Iraq.

Suez (1938)

The next film appeared two years before *Thief of Baghdad*; it is discussed out-of-turn, because it differs so greatly from the other two films. *Suez* (1938) was released at a turning point in US history: near the end of the Great Depression, but before the entry of the United States into World War II -- a time during which America's faith in capitalism and the free market economy had crashed along with the stock market (Moss, 2000). To most Americans, the world of 1938 seemed ominous and the future uncertain.

The narrative of *Suez* takes Americans back to a time when there was certainty and optimism and Western efforts to 'make the world a better place' seemed appropriate and realistic. The film's narrative creates a romanticized version of the construction of the Suez Canal. The time period is 1850 - 1869, the height of European colonization in Africa and the Middle East (Sperber, 2014). Louis Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon Bonaparte, is president of France. French society is divided into wealthy aristocrats and impoverished commoners. Ferdinand de Lesseps, the narrative's central character, is the well-educated son of a French Parliamentarian and envoy to Egypt.

While visiting Egypt in 1850, he conceives the idea of a canal which would connect the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Suez on the Red Sea. He desires the canal to be "open to ships of all countries...for the good of all mankind".

But there are several political difficulties. First, Alexandria, Egypt is under the dominion of Ottoman Turkey, a Muslim country with a lengthy history of regional conquest (Quataert, 2005). Egypt, also a Muslim country, is depicted as very poor and backward; the primary means of local transport is donkeys. The landscape is shown to be largely desert, with a few palm trees and oases, and populated in the outer regions by Bedouin tribes. The tribesmen live in tents and are excellent horsemen. The climate is hot, dry and full of insects. While women are absent from the public sphere, men spend their time watching public sword-fights.

Second, Prince Said, son of the Viceroy of Egypt, is depicted as fat, indolent, unambitious and dark-skinned. He is a poor rider and poor swordsman. He sleeps most of the day, fanned by Black slaves. Said is a stereotype of the lazy Arab prince we have not encountered before, but one which will be repeated over the next few decades in American film. Prince Said extends the Muslim greeting to de Lesseps: "a salam alaikum". He informs deLesseps that the proposed canal has little chance of success, because both the Turks and the British oppose building the canal. The Turkish leader declares: "One cannot tamper with the will of Allah." Prince Said seconds this by saying, "Inshallah (Only if Allah wills it.")

However, after his father dies, Prince Said changes his attitude and provides support to de Lesseps for the canal, even selling many of his personal treasures to generate funds. The canal construction begins in 1859, requiring 30,000 laborers using baskets and donkeys. Black African laborers wear only loin cloths as they work, while de Lesseps supervises on horseback wearing a white linen tailored suit. Prince Said observes the work from a lounge chair while he is fanned by Black servants. Thus the familiar racial hierarchies are clearly demarcated. Prince Said comments to de Lesseps, "You have given Egypt hope".

Meanwhile, political machinations are underway in Europe. Overthrowing the democratically-elected French Parliament, Louis Napoleon declares himself Emperor of France and begins a ruinous war with Germany. Funds for the canal dry up. The Prime Minister of Britain, Gladstone, refuses to assist in finding the canal, because he fears it will benefit the French and Germans more than the British. Gladstone, however, is then replaced by Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who restores funding for the canal. Finally in 1869, ten years after its start, the Suez Canal is completed. De Lesseps is awarded the French Medal of Honor.

While not fully accurate with respect to historical events, this film was an effort to represent Western ideology in an historical context. The Suez Canal was built in Egypt and designed by a French architect. The Ottoman Turks, French Republic and British government all had a role in advancing or delaying its construction. However, it is the overall impression the film provides to Americans about Muslims that is of most significance here. And that impression is not positive.

The underlying ideology is that *only Western countries possess the technical skill, ambition, and financial resources to construct the modern world*. Muslims, in this instance, North Africans and Turks, are consistently portrayed as unambitious, unable to see 'the big picture', incompetent with machinery, fatalistic and lazy. In short, they are unable to 'make progress' by or for themselves; they can be led, but they cannot lead. This film also suggests that Western influence in Muslim affairs is inherently positive; it will 'create a better world' for everyone. However, as we shall see in the next set of films, this ideology is later questioned.

The late 1940s and 1950s were barren of any significant American films concerning Islam. However, the 1960s witnessed a remarkable set of Muslim-themed motion pictures, several of which signal a dramatic alteration in ideology regarding the political economy of the Middle East and the West's role in shaping it. Two films in particular, *Exodus* (1960) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1965), present narratives that resonate with recent regional crises.

Exodus (1960)

This film is based on a best-selling novel by Leon Uris (1958, Doubleday). Its story deals with the settlement of refugee Jews in British-controlled Palestine in the wake of World War II, the subsequent partitioning of Palestine, and the founding of the state of Israel. What is particularly notable about the film is that the primary villains portrayed are not Muslim Arabs, but rather British colonialists.

The narrative opens in 1947 in Cyprus, where Jewish refugees from Nazi concentration camps are being held by the British to prevent them from journeying to Palestine. Several Zionist organizations have encouraged the immigration of European Jews to Palestine, and the narrative tells us that, “The Arabs don't want them in Palestine. The British don't want them there either”. One of the Zionists is a Palestine-born Jew, Ari Ben Canaan, whose significance is signaled by the casting of actor Paul Newman in the role; Newman was then at the height of his popularity in the US and his presence added gravitas to the film.

Ari tricks the British commander into lending him a transport ship onto which he loads several Jewish refugees. When the British refuse to let the ship depart Cyprus, a hunger strike is held, leading to deaths aboard the ship. Finally the British relent. Ari tells an American Christian nurse, Katherine, who is assisting the refugees, “Thus sayeth the Lord, 'Let my people go'”, recalling the exodus from Egypt. Notably, the British in this metaphor are representing the Egyptians. Ari and Katherine journey to a kibbutz near Haifa named for a young woman who was engaged to marry Ari, but killed by Arabs.

Ironically, one of Ari's best friends is a young Arab man whose family gave the land for the settlement. Thus the film provides conflicting ideologies, implying both that Arabs are enemies of Jews, but also suggesting that Arabs can be helpful and loyal to Jews.

Attempting to wrest Palestine from British control, Zionists blow up the British consulate, killing 83 people. The Zionist leaders are captured and ordered to be hanged; however members of the Zionist group manage to sneak into the British prison and release both Jews and Arabs held there. A few months later, the United Nations votes to permit the partition of Palestine, and the Jewish residents declare the state of Israel to be founded.

Rumors then spread about an impending "Arab attack from Syria", which has been encouraged by an anti-Jewish imam. Yet Ari and his family invite the local Arabs, including his friend's family, to "stay and work with us in the free state of Israel". His friend tells him "I must leave Israel. I realize I am a Moslem; I cannot go against my own people; I cannot kill another Arab". Shortly thereafter, Ari discovers his friend has been hanged by Syrian Arabs, who view him as a Jewish sympathizer. The narrative closes with a hopeful wish: "The day will come when Arab and Jew will share a peaceful life." Many decades after the film, of course, the world is still waiting for this day to arrive.

What is noteworthy about the film, however, is not the friction between Muslims and Jews, but rather the ideological identification of another type of predator in the region – Britain -- the Western colonial power that overstayed its welcome. Up until this point, Western cultural theory had made little effort to incorporate the impact which Western capitalism and economic demands had on the development of political tensions in the Middle East.

Exodus also marks an important turning point in American motion pictures regarding Islam. In this narrative the Arabs are depicted as certainly no worse than and generally more favorably than the British. The central placement of the friendship between Ari and his 'adoptive' Arab brother proposes that Muslims and Jews can co-exist. The plot's Archimedean moral point is the necessity of removing British cultural intrusion from Palestine. This is a marked reversal of ideology from 1921s *The Sheik*, where Britain represented the apex of human civilization.

It is also important to note that Zionist Jews are portrayed in the film as engaging in justifiable acts of violence. They blow up the British consulate in Jerusalem, killing both military and non-military personnel; they violently free prisoners, and they shoot and kill British military personnel using AK-47 automatic weapons. It is remarkable to ponder that it will be Islamist Muslims who are negatively depicted engaging in these same actions in American motion pictures some 55 years later.

Lawrence of Arabia (1965)

We next consider a film that, up until the events of the 1990s, most influenced American ideology regarding Muslims. *Lawrence of Arabia* was the first major film to present multi-dimensional Muslim characters to American audiences. The statesmanship of Prince Faisal and the wisdom and courage of Lawrence's Bedouin friend Sharif Ali challenged Americans to see Muslims as having noble qualities, admirable qualities, qualities that they themselves would desire to possess. And again in this film, the British are depicted as a deceitful, manipulative colonial power. The film also marked the initiation of motion pictures which 'demonized' Ottoman Turkey, previously used primarily as a background semiotic figure.

As the story begins, World War I is underway and the major Western powers are seeking to increase their hegemony in the Middle East. On their own initiative, Muslim Bedouin tribes led by Prince Faisal are attacking Turkish garrisons in Arabia, attempting to regain control of their homeland. The Ottoman Turks have sided with the Germans and their holdings in Arabia and Egypt are seen as 'fair game' by the British. General Allenby and the British Arab Bureau decide to send an inexperienced English mapmaker, T. E. Lawrence, from their Cairo office to advise and observe Prince Faisal's Bedouins.

Lawrence sets off across the desert on a camel with a Bedouin guide. The desert (as we have seen before in *The Sheik* and *Suez*), is depicted as vast, treacherous, arid, and relentlessly hot. Lawrence is dressed in British military field gear and navigates with a compass; his Bedouin guide is shrouded in white robes and uses the stars and sun to find his way. The guide is fascinated by Lawrence's other machines – a pistol and watch. At a tribal well, the guide is killed by another Bedouin, Sharif Ali, because he is not from the same tribe. The Bedouin shooter, Ali (Omar Sharif), is dressed in black and rides a black Arabian stallion. He is handsome, proud, and tells Lawrence: "I have been in Cairo for my schooling." Lawrence reprimands him for killing the guide: "So long as the Bedouin fight tribe against tribe, they will be a little people, a silly people... Barbarous and cruel."

Lawrence continues on his way alone, finally reaching Faisal's camp. Here he finds the archetypal film iconography of tents, horses, shrouded women, warriors on horseback, camels and donkeys. The Bedouin are being bombarded by German airplanes and artillery. Mounted on horseback and having only rifles, they are little match for Western weaponry. Prince Faisal is handsome, articulate, and courageous; he has the cleverness to understand his role in this international chess game. The British soldiers accompanying Faisal's forces are rude and derogatory toward the Bedouin, clearly viewing them as culturally inferior. Faisal fears, correctly, that "any land we regain may soon be confiscated by the British."

Although Ali, who has joined them, is skeptical, Lawrence develops a plan to attack the Turks at Aqabba using an overland route through the Nefud Desert. He tells Ali, "This will permit the Bedouin to fight as they do best – on horses with rifles." The Bedouin successfully take Aqabba, but are unable to operate the city's mechanical equipment and soon must abandon it. Concurrently, Lawrence is called upon to execute a man he had earlier saved from the desert, when the man slays a member of a rival tribe. Both of these events communicate once more the deep divide between Arab and Western cultures.

Lawrence, now wearing full Bedouin attire given to him by Ali, returns to Cairo with an Arab boy to inform British General Allenby of their success. At first the two ragged "Arabs" (Lawrence and the boy) are met with dismay and disgust at British headquarters. However, after learning Aqabba has indeed fallen and Lawrence is indeed British, he is celebrated. Allenby tells his colleagues that the British intend to occupy Palestine and Jerusalem, while Lawrence is misled to believe the land will be returned to the Arabs.

Lawrence – now viewing himself as a spiritual Bedouin -- leads a series of assaults on the Turkish railway system in Arabia. Captured by the Turkish military, he is tortured and likely raped. As a result, Lawrence becomes emotionally unstable; alternating between megalomania and depression. Importantly, the two primary Muslims in the film, Ali and Faisal, are positioned as the moral centers. The British are depicted as more disciplined than the Turks, but ultimately just as brutal in their manipulation of the Bedouin (and Lawrence).

The narrative closes on a somber and prophetic note. After exhibiting great courage and tactical skill, the Bedouin succeed in taking Damascus from the Turks. However, they are soon forced to abandon that city, as well, due to their inability to operate its technology. The British then move in and stay, because they *can* operate machines. As the Arabs ride out, General Allenby comments, "Marvelous looking beings, aren't they?"

And it at this point that we want to draw some parallels between the Arabs as portrayed in *Lawrence of Arabia* and two additional peoples who have been portrayed in similarly evocative ways: the Native Americans in *Dancing with Wolves* (1990) and the Scottish Clans in *Brave Heart* (1995). Together with *Lawrence of Arabia* these three films are the most compelling cinematic depiction of the values of Romanticism yet created. Romanticism is a life philosophy brought to the forefront of Western culture during the 1780 to 1850 time period ((Britannica.com/art/Romanticism).

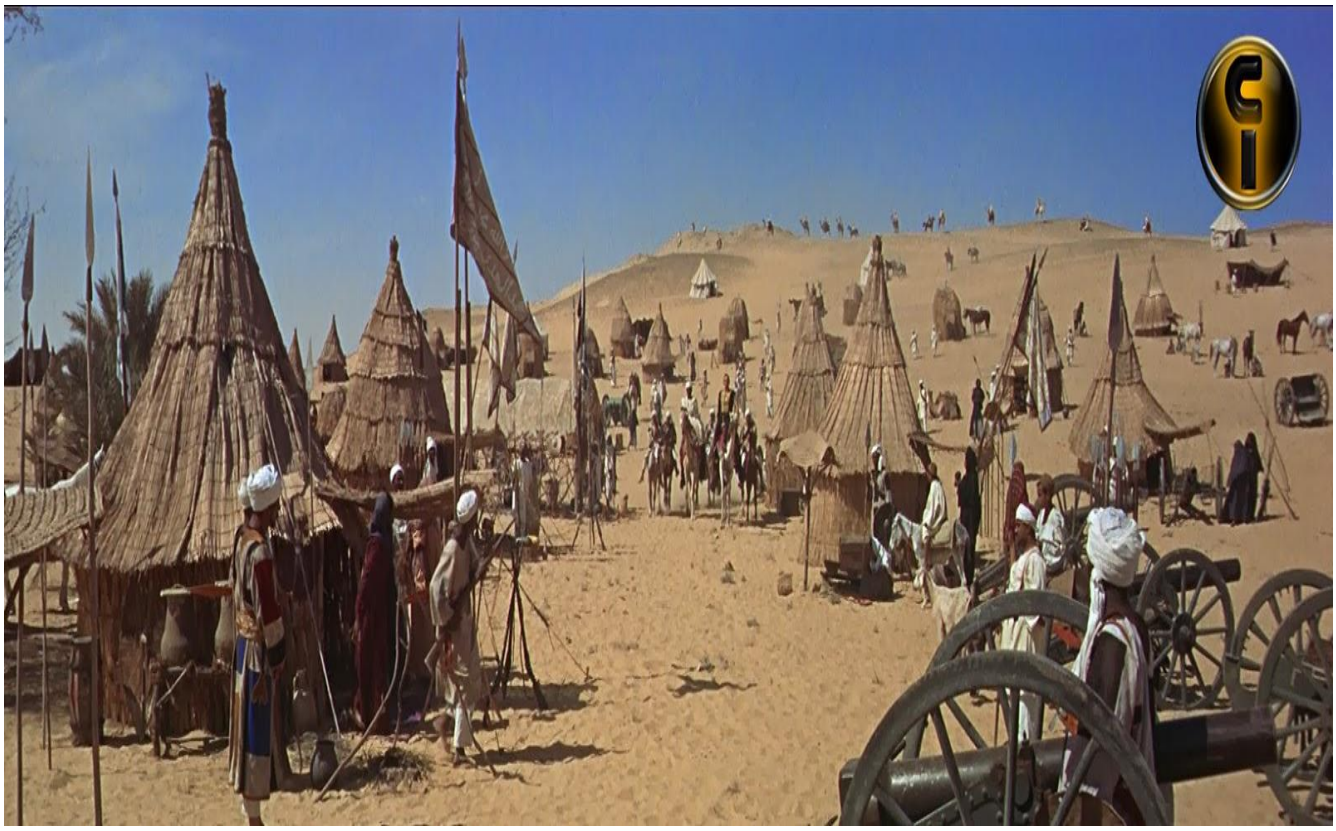
It grew out of the intellectual and emotional rebellion by some poets, novelists and artists against the increasing mechanization, structuralism and formality of Western culture. The Romantics glorified Nature, emotion, passionate love, beauty and freedom as the true essence of life. In the three films cited above we view the sad demise of peoples who had been living in a state of harmony with Nature but are ultimately destroyed by civilizations placing higher value on technology, science and the human dominance of Nature.

It is also important to note that both *Exodus* and *Lawrence of Arabia* provide an ideological template beyond the unidimensional Muslim stereotypes we first encountered during the 1920s. Both Muslims and Westerners are now portrayed as having positive and negative traits. Western ways are shown to not necessarily be superior; Muslim ways are shown to not necessarily be inferior. This ideology continues in the next film.

Khartoum (1966)

Set in the era of British empire-building in Africa during the 1880s, *Khartoum* places two religious leaders, one Muslim, one Christian, against each other. The Muslim is victorious. The film opens with several images to once again acclimate American audiences to its Islamic setting: palm trees, expanses of desert, sunrise over the Pyramids, Arabic music and white dhows on the Nile River.

The Suez Canal has been constructed, and the British are reducing their military presence in the Sudan, which lies just below Egypt. The narrator describes the region as “A million square miles of desert and scrub”. A charismatic Muslim leader (played by Sir Laurence Olivier) has arisen in the Sudan. Calling himself the Mahdi (the Expected One), his intent is to forcefully remove the Western influence from North Africa and to carry his “campaign of Islamic jihad to Cairo, Mecca and Constantinople.”



The British Prime Minister (Gladstone) sends a large military force to defeat the Mahdi, but it is defeated when the modern, wheeled artillery bogs down in the sand. As a result, the Mahdi's forces capture 10,000 rifles and one million rounds of ammunition – an amount sufficient to carry their campaign well across North Africa. The Mahdi tells his followers that the Prophet Muhammed has spoken to him and guaranteed the success of their mission.

The British government is shocked that a "rabble of tribesmen armed only with spears and swords could destroy our modern army." They decide to send General Charles Gordon (Charlton Heston), a hero of several prior British colonization efforts, to Khartoum to evacuate the inhabitants who are loyal to Britain. The British government cynically reasons that if Gordon fails, it will be deemed his fault and not that of their administration. (Note that this continues the downward trajectory of Britain's image for American audiences.)

Once in Cairo, General Gordon is entertained by 'belly-dancing girls' at the British embassy, as the call to prayer emanates from the minarets outside. Gordon takes a steamship up the Nile to Khartoum, observing that the Muslim population along the way is armed and hostile. A deeply religious Christian, Gordon sees himself as the savior required for Khartoum, much as the Mahdi views himself the savior of Islam. He is joyfully greeted by the city's residents. That evening, Gordon and a Black servant venture into the desert to secretly meet with the Mahdi. The Mahdi tells Gordon he was "instructed by Allah to pray in the Kaaba (Mecca) mosque", meaning that he plans to carry his holy war through Arabia. An impressive figure, the Mahdi is dressed in white robes with dark skin and a beard.

Returning to Khartoum, Gordon reports this news to Gladstone in London. The British send a force of 7,000 men to assist in defense of the city, but they purposely stall in Cairo, intending to let Khartoum fall without additional economic or military expenditure. (Again, this portrays the British as cynical overlords who value financial assets over their colonists' lives.) By contrast, the Mahdi offers Gordon safe passage to Cairo and promises to spare the lives of those who wish to go with him. Many residents do sail to Cairo, but Gordon, himself, chooses to remain in Khartoum. The Mahdi's forces then attack the city and Gordon is slain when the city falls. He becomes enshrined in British cultural memory as a "valiant war hero slain by radical Muslim violence".

What is particularly striking about this film is that the Muslim cleric emerges as the moral and military victor, while the technologically superior British are defeated, due to underestimating the resolve of those colonized to reassert their own religion and culture. In this, the narrative ventures close to America's national origin myth -- the American Revolutionary War against Britain. Another indicator of the rise in American esteem for Islam is the actor who plays the Mahdi -- Sir Laurence Olivier. At the time, Olivier was the most respected classical actor in Britain, and likely the Western world.

Only one year earlier, he had performed the role of Shakespeare's tragic Moor, Othello, and been nominated for an Academy Award. His casting as the Muslim cleric in Khartoum was a strong signal that this historical Islamic figure was worthy of respect by contemporary American audiences.

The Wind and the Lion (1975)

In the mid-1970s another motion picture appeared about the struggle of Western-colonized Islamic countries to gain independence and reassert their Muslim culture, again featuring a famous and admired actor in the leading role. In *The Wind and The Lion*, actor Sean Connery, the savior of the Western world as James Bond, returned to play the role of Sheik Rasuli of Morocco. In the film, he leads a Muslim Berber revolt in 1905 against Western nations seeking to utilize his country as a staging ground for imperial expansion. The beginning of the narrative shows Rasuli leading a band of North African Berbers into Tangier, Morocco. They are dressed in desert attire, with full robes, turbans, bearing rifles and mounted on fleet Arabian horses.

The raiding party rides to the residence of the recently deceased American ambassador and, after killing the servants and a visiting Englishman, kidnaps the ambassador's wife and two children. We fear the worst, but Rasuli plans to use the family as a bargaining chip in negotiating with the West. This film was released in 1975 -- the era of Women's Liberation in the United States – and the ambassador's wife (Candace Bergen) is presented as a belligerent female, who warns Rasuli she is quite capable of defending herself and her children.

In Washington, DC, Teddy Roosevelt is President and running for re-election. He senses an opportunity to demonstrate America's "Big Stick" against the "barbarous brutality" exhibited by Rasuli. He vows to unilaterally "invade Morocco to defend human life and American property. I don't care if it's legal." At that time there are two nominal Muslim rulers in Morocco: (1) a shah who rules from Tangiers and (2) a sultan who resides in Fez. Both are depicted as indolent, spoiled and disengaged from the country's populace. The shah tells Roosevelt's representatives that he "has been threatened by the United States, Germany, France and Spain in the past" and refuses to help rescue the kidnapped Americans. After multiple efforts by the Americans to bribe him, the shah agrees to assist them in exchange for lions for his zoo.

In the Berbers' desert encampment, the kidnapped children are impressed with Rasuli; the son begins dressing like a Berber and practices sword fighting. Rasuli and his men pray to Allah and treat their hostages well. He intends to trade them for America's help in removing both the shah and sultan, a return to Islamic religious observance, and the departure of European colonialists from Morocco. Back in the United States, President Roosevelt is beginning to admire Rasuli, whom he recognizes as a fellow warrior. He tells his cabinet members, "The rifle is the very soul of the Arab!" to which they respond, "Rasuli is a Berber, Mr. President", Roosevelt retorts, "Well, it goes double for Berbers!"

Roosevelt sends two warships and American troops to take Tangier. The troops march into the city and capture the shah's palace, killing several guards and servants in the process, and take the shah prisoner. Rasuli agrees to exchange the kidnapped woman and her children for a ransom and religious freedom. But at the agreed exchange point, the Americans are deceitful and take him prisoner. They turn Rasuli over to the German military unit in Rabat, where he is tortured. However, the American ambassador's wife convinces a unit of American marines that Rasuli is an honorable man, and they take Rasuli back from the Germans in a gun battle. Rasuli and his men return to the desert and the Americans return to the United States.

This narrative documents that by the mid-1970s, American cultural ideology has become favorable toward Muslim countries and leaders who seek freedom from colonialism. Parallels are drawn between America's historic struggles for independence and religious freedom and the colonial histories of Islamic countries. While mentions are made of Muslim 'brutality and barbarism', these are matched in the film by corresponding brutal acts that the US commits. The narrative suggests that Americans may be coming to grips with their own country's moral deficiencies and also recognizing nobility and courage in others. Then, however, come two disturbing films that counter-argued these ideological shifts: *Black Sunday* and *Midnight Express*.

Black Sunday (1977)

This film is important because it interweaves two historical events marking the 1970s -- the end of the Vietnam War and the beginnings of international terrorism growing from the displacement of Palestinian Arabs from the state of Israel. During the formation of Israel, approximately 250,000-300,000 Arab Muslims were forced to leave their homeland (McAlister 2005). These displaced persons were consigned to "refugee camps," which featured squalid living conditions and soon turned into sites fostering generations of angry young Arab men. Vowing to overthrow the new Jewish state, they formed groups such as the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and al Fatah. American news coverage and official US policy throughout this time period were largely supportive of Israel's position that these organizations were not 'resistance fighters,' but rather 'terrorists' (Dobson 1974).

Black September was a militant Palestinian organization founded in 1970 by al Fatah dissidents (Dobson, 1974; www.britannica.com/topic/Black-September.). The organization's first targets were political and military figures in Jordan. By linking itself to Palestinians living outside the Middle East, the group originated the 'terrorist cell' structure in which 4 or 5 persons would work together to conduct acts of violence without being in contact with other groups (www.britannica.com/topic/Black-September). This resulted in fragmented, but highly effective, operations such as the Munich Olympics murders of 12 Israeli athletes, the hijacking of a Belgian aircraft, an attack on visitors in the Rome airport in 1973, and the hijacking of a Lufthansa aircraft in 1973 (Dobson 1974, www.britannica.com/topic/Black-September). These incidents will be covered later in films from the 1980s.

Black Sunday takes this set of attacks a fictional step further – to the shores of the United States, and ties its story not only to the dismal conclusion of the Vietnam War, but also to key American popular culture icons and sporting events. The narrative opens with a young, attractive brunette woman in Western-style apparel exiting a cab in the medina of Beirut, Lebanon. The marketplace is depicted as clean and busy. Women in black burqas are shopping; mezzoud music is playing. The call to prayer echoes in the background and green trees are abundant.

The young woman is Palestinian and is meeting with a secret cell of Black September men to plan an attack on the United States. The meeting is held in the basement of a large estate in Beirut, suggesting that Black September has wealthy backers. They watch a confessional tape of an American POW made as propaganda by the North Vietnamese in which the former pilot says that he has come to "hate the United States".. The group plans to use the same POW, now back in the US, to ignite a bomb above the Super Bowl using the Goodyear blimp, which the ex-POW now pilots. (The movie also inserts an evil Japanese businessman, who is supplying and shipping the plastique explosives – notably, the Japanese were viewed as a strong economic and cultural threat to the US in the 1970s.)

The terror cell is under surveillance by a small group of Israeli commandos who then attack and kill some of the cell members. The woman escapes and makes her way to Los Angeles, where she meets with the POW-pilot. He is clearly suffering psychological damage from his imprisonment. Now back in the US at war's end, his treatment at the Veterans Administration Hospital for PTSD is very inadequate, his wife and children are estranged from him, and he views his life as 'ruined'. He agrees to pilot the blimp as a suicide mission to get revenge on the "country and government that destroyed me."

The narrative next moves to FBI headquarters in Washington, DC where the Israeli commando team is meeting with several agents to prevent the attack. They know few details of the plan, but are aware of a plot to strike in the US. The FBI and Israelis board the Japanese freighter, but the shipment of explosive has already been offloaded by the POW-pilot and the Black September woman. From their easy working relationship, the narrative suggests that the US FBI intelligence service and the Israeli Mossad intelligence agency are used to working together and overlap in their goals. However, the Israeli agents are also described as "killing and murdering [Palestinians] for 30 years", i.e., since the creation of Israel.

The leader of the Israeli team is injured by the POW-pilot and hospitalized. The Black September woman disguises herself as a nurse and enters the hospital to kill the Israeli; she misses her main target, but does kill another Israeli operative. The Israeli team leader then makes a secret visit to the Jordanian Ambassador in Washington, DC to learn the identity of the young woman.

The Ambassador tells him that the young woman was born in a Gaza refugee camp. Her father and brother were killed by Israeli soldiers, her mother died from typhus, and her sister was raped. He tells the Israeli team leader: “She is *your* creation”. This dialogue serves as an ideological counterbalance to the earlier partnership between the FBI and Israelis.

It becomes evident to both the FBI and Israelis that the intended target is the Super Bowl – that most holy of American cultural events, complete with scantily-clad cheerleaders, face-painted, drunken fans, and brightly-colored, bone-breaking warfare between two opposing sets of gladiators – in this instance the Pittsburgh Steelers and the Dallas Cowboys, both of whose players and coaches are present in the film. The setting is sun-soaked Miami and even the US President (Jimmy Carter) is in attendance. As the narrative continues, the POW-pilot and Black September woman succeed in positioning the explosives-laden blimp (which is lit up saying “Happy New Year”) above the stadium. Mass panic ensues, but the Israeli leader and an FBI agent succeed in shooting both terrorists and then exploding the blimp over open water.

The film is terrifying – in the true sense of the term – because it presents a scenario in which 'innocent bystanders', i.e., the American public, become the targets of political forces that are largely beyond their cultural control. Americans during this time period had “heard about” Black September and the grievances of the displaced Palestinians, but these were deemed issues irrelevant to their daily lives; they were far, far away, somewhere in the “Middle East”. And most Americans favored the Israelis, anyway. Paul Newman (*Exodus*) had struggled valiantly to help win the Jews a homeland. Why couldn't the 'other Arabs' take in these displaced people? It is not our problem.

There is also some deep nightmarish repressed consciousness at work in the film that America did 'do wrong' by the Vietnamese and especially by the soldiers we sent there to fight. Many came home irrevocably broken, despised, and branded as 'losers' (www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war). The POW-pilot and the Black September woman serve as terrifying tools of evil, because deep down the audience knows it had a hand in creating them.

Midnight Express (1978)

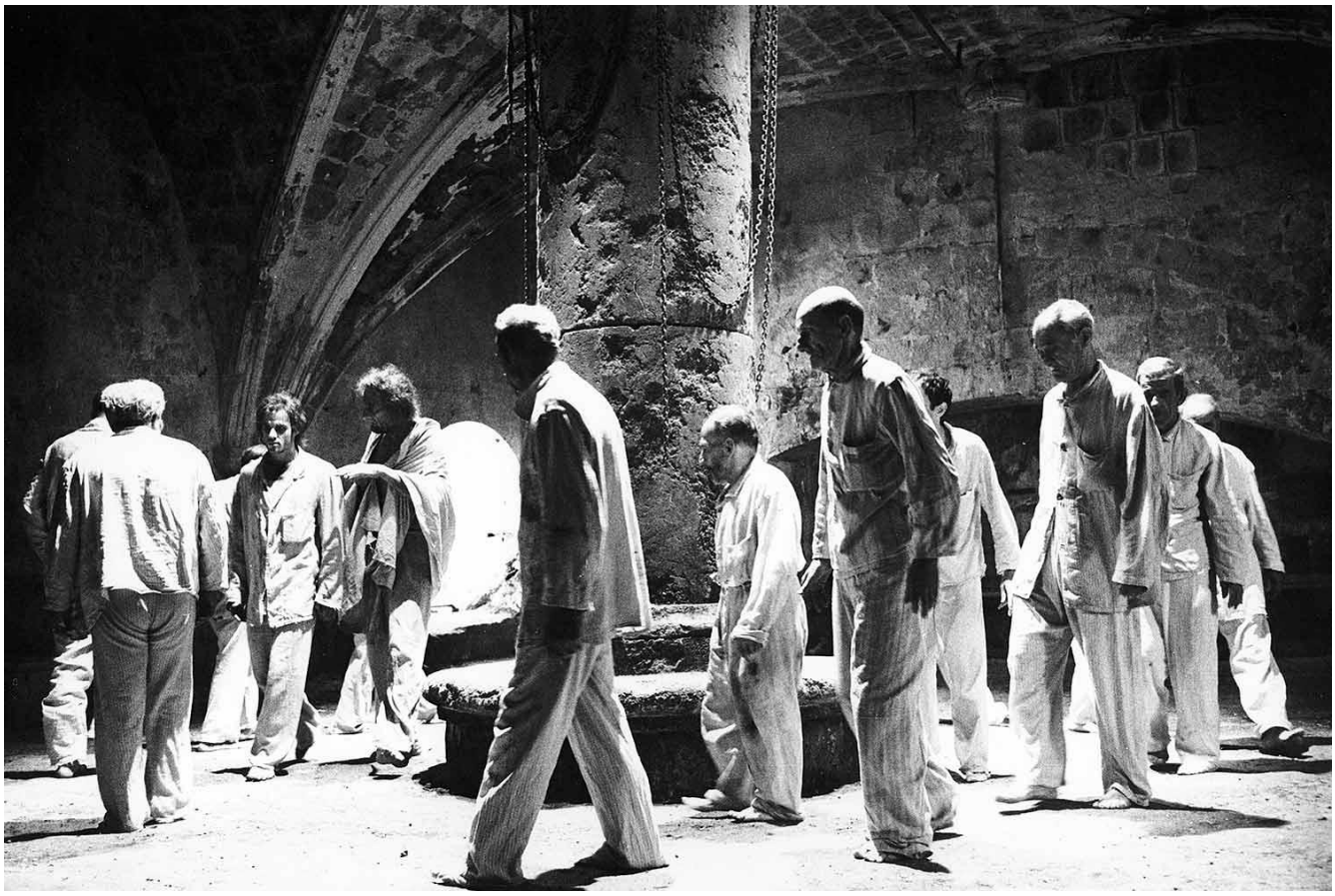
Midnight Express (1978) is based on the autobiography of a young American, Billy Hayes. In 1970 Hayes and his girlfriend visit Istanbul, Turkey and, while there, engage in illegal drug use with several other young Western tourists. Hayes is arrested, charged with attempted drug smuggling and sentenced to several years in a Turkish prison. However, in the film, Turkey and Islam are depicted as the criminals.

The narrative opens with street scenes of Istanbul, complete with minarets and the evening call to prayer. (The mnemonic of the Muslim call to prayer has by now become a standard semiotic device in American cinematic depictions of Islam.) At the end of their vacation in Turkey, Hayes and his girlfriend arrive at the Istanbul airport.

Hayes tapes packets of illegal hashish to his midsection, intending to sell them in the US. Obviously nervous and sweating profusely, he attempts to board the plane but is patted down by the Turkish police. The hashish is discovered, and Hayes is arrested. At the police station, which has several photographs of Turkish President Attaturk on display, he is strip-searched and introduced to an American named "Tex". Tex tries to help Hayes make a deal with the Turkish police by identifying the people from whom he purchased the drugs. If Hayes does so, he is told he can return to the US without charges.

The next day, Billy identifies the man, a Turkish cabdriver, from whom he bought the hashish. But instead of returning to the station with the police, he dashes off into the crowd. The crowd consists primarily of black veiled women and chickens being slaughtered, used to indicate the primitive "otherness" of Turkish culture. Tex catches Billy and he is taken to prison -- a dark, cold dungeon run by a large, brutal jailer who rapes him. Billy learns that many of the prisoners are young Europeans and Americans convicted of drug smuggling.

Billy's father arrives from the US and hires an obese, indolent Turkish attorney (recall that this stereotype was invoked frequently in earlier films) who tells them, "I will arrange everything just right." At the court hearing, Billy is sentenced to 4 years. His father yells at the warden, "You take good care of my boy or I'll have your head." Additional images are then presented of minarets in Istanbul and the call to prayer—reinforcing the 'otherness' of Islam. As his sentence draws to a close, Billy is taken to court for another hearing to determine if he is fit for release. But instead of expressing contrition, Billy tells the judge and prosecutor, "For a nation of pigs, it sure is funny you don't eat them... Jesus Christ forgave the bastards, but I can't. I hate your nation and your people. You are all pigs." The dismayed court sentences him to 30 years.



Billy is returned to prison, where his anti-Turkish outbursts result in his being placed in the mental ward. He tells his parents, “The Turks are slowly draining my life away.” Billy's girlfriend visits him in prison and smuggles him money and a plane ticket. Later, during another altercation with the warden, Billy kills him. He changes into a guard's uniform, walks out of the prison and crosses the border to Greece. He arrives later at Kennedy Airport, now a free man.

The real Billy Hayes apologized to the people of Turkey several years after this film was released, noting that the portrayal of his imprisonment was inaccurate and that he was indeed guilty of attempted drug smuggling. However, the damage to Turkey's image as a civilized country and to Muslims as civilized human beings never fully dissipated. Paired with the portrayal of the Turkish military in *Lawrence of Arabia*, it created a lasting image of cruelty and sexual predation that is still resonant.

Then in the 1980s, the global political climate underwent a series of ideological convulsions, many originating in the history of Western Colonialism across the Middle East (Dicken, 2007).

Delta Force (1986)

The political paradigm shift regarding Muslims during the 1980s began with attacks by Islamist groups on overseas American military targets and international airline flights. The attacks shocked the United States and the West which had grown complacent toward conditions in the Middle East (McAlister 2005). Quickly a series of motion pictures was produced to incorporate these new types of threat; most employ a one-dimensional, good-guy/bad-guy story-line. The first, *Delta Force* (1986), involves the fictional hijacking of a Rome to New York flight by a band of Muslims led by a man named Abdullah, Several American Jews on the airplane are mistreated by the hijackers, who declare themselves to be “anti-American, anti-Zionist and pro-socialist”.

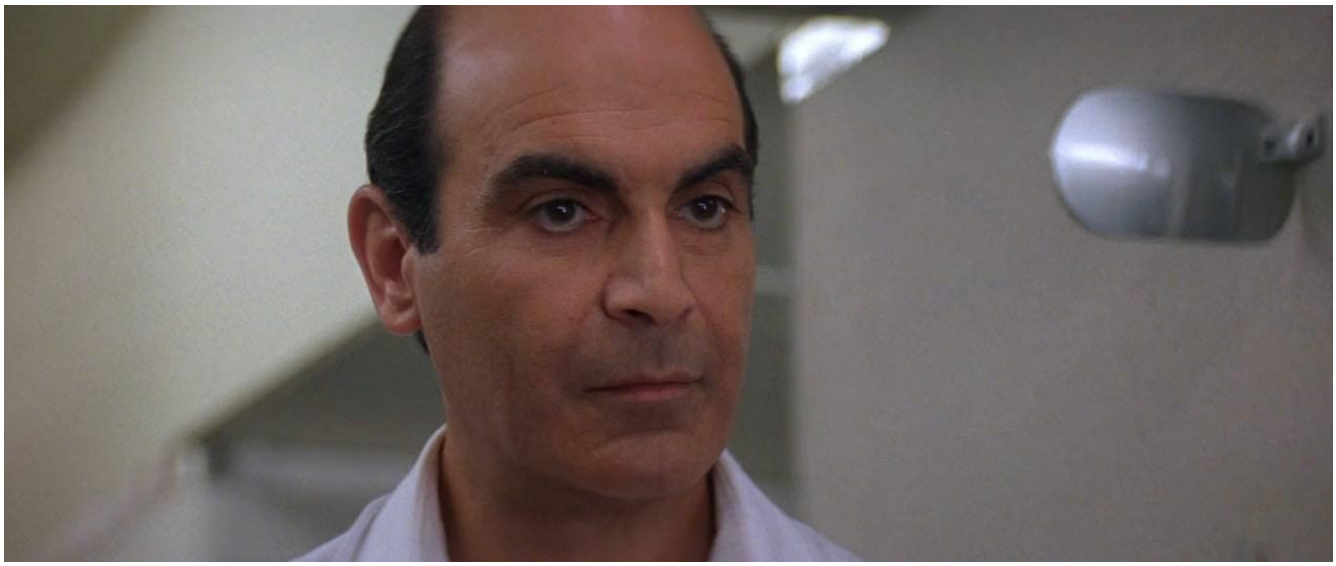
The hijackers injure and threaten to kill a young US soldier who is aboard the flight. The plane then lands at Beirut Airport, where a Lebanese general, Jamil, declares support for the hijackers' cause. The hijackers shout, “Allah be praised”. The passengers are taken off the plane and held hostage in a local school. US Delta Force operatives are then sent to Beirut and free the hostages. At the end of the film, the soldiers and the freed hostages sing, “America, America...God shed His grace on Thee”.

ThIs narrative is an extreme example of what is termed 'jingoism', which was prominent in some segments of the American electorate at this time: *Jingoism* is a form of extreme nationalism in which a nation immediately employs force against those nations or groups that are perceived to be threats to its national interest. Non-hostile responses, such as peace talks or mediation, are deemed to be signs of unpatriotic weakness or cowardice.

Navy Seals (1990) presents a more sophisticated version of this same jingoistic narrative. The film references the destruction of the US Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983 by Islamists likely linked to Iran. It then presents several (fictional) missions which Navy SEAL teams undertake in response to that event. These missions take place in "the Eastern Mediterranean", Syria, and Beirut, Lebanon. The SEALs are shown to be competent in a variety of venues, e.g., amphibious assaults, urban rescue missions, ship recovery. However, the narrative does comment that "the majority of Muslims are peace loving" and that "terrorism often kills and injures the civilian Muslim population, as well as devastating the cities."

A final example of the jingoistic genre, ***Executive Decision*** (1996), provides additional ideological nuances. The narrative begins with US Special Forces engaging in specific missions to fight terrorism. It then focuses on a current emergency in which five male Muslims, clean shaven and well-dressed, hijack an aircraft destined for Washington D.C. They plan to exchange the crew and passengers for release of their founder, El Said Jama, who is being held prisoner in the United States. However, the leader of the group is secretly on a suicide mission, intending to drop canisters of a highly potent nerve gas on Washington, DC and then crash the plane. An important ideological twist to this tale is the presence of a US Senator on board who cynically tries to make a side deal with the hijackers to save himself, suggesting that American political leaders are more interested in their own welfare than that of the country.

Approaching Washington, their leader tells them of his plan to kill thousands of Americans with poison gas: "Allah has blessed us... We will strike deep into the heart of the infidel." But the other hijackers protest his plan, "This is not God's will; this is not Islam." The leader shoots and kills them. Ultimately, the leader is killed by one of the Special Forces personnel and the plane lands safely.



What is significant here is the presentation of Muslims who are *opposed* to the killing of civilians; they simply want to trade their American hostages for Said Jama "and fly the plane back to Algeria." Similarly, the presentation of US politicians as self-serving and deceitful is reminiscent of *The Wind and the Lion* portrayal of President Theodore Roosevelt's opportunism two decades earlier. In other words, this film signals an ideological return to the position that there are positive and negative political elements in both the United States and Muslim nations.

Not Without My Daughter (1991)

We close this section with a film from the early 1990s which is a fictionalized account of actual events occurring during the mid-1980s. An American woman, Betty, is married to an Iranian doctor, Mahmood, employed at a Michigan hospital. They have a 6 year old daughter and a comfortable life; the family appears to be happy and loving.

Mahmood is quite 'Americanized' -- enjoying scotch, barbecues and fishing. Then one day Mahmood, who has not seen his family in Iran for 10 years, convinces his wife to come with him to Tehran (also bringing their daughter) for a two-week visit. What is not known to Betty is that her husband has been fired from the hospital, likely due to anti-Iranian prejudice. (These events took place approximately 5 years after the Iranian revolution against the Shah and the establishment of a Shi'a theocracy (Skocpol, 1994)). Despite misgivings, she agrees to the trip.

Once they arrive in Tehran, Betty is immediately given a black burqa by his family and told she and her daughter must cover their hair. The family crowds around Mahmood, embracing him, while ignoring Betty and the daughter. The next scene shows a lamb being halal-slaughtered in the street, as the little girl watches. This imagery immediately establishes the isolation the mother and daughter now face, as well as the brutality of Muslim society. Her husband and his family inform Betty that she and the daughter must now stay in Iran and become good Muslims; they will never return to the US. Her husband plans to seek work in an Iranian hospital. Betty is distraught; before they left, Mahmood had sworn on the Quran that they would return. She now feels betrayed.

The narrative next presents images of the repressive status of life in the Iranian theocracy. Posters of Ayatollah Khomeini are displayed on public buildings, police patrol to ensure that women are properly covered, and the daughter must be enrolled in an Islamic school. Dialogue in the film states that girls may be married at nine years of age, while young boys can be taken for military service. The husband's relatives are abusive to Betty, believing her to be a weakness for their family, socially. The husband, frustrated at not being able to find work in an Iranian hospital, becomes physically abusive to her. She is forbidden to leave the house or use the telephone.

Feigning an interest in Islam, Betty enrolls in an Islamic school set up for non-Muslim wives of Iranian men. There she comes into contact with Iranian smugglers who will take her and the daughter to Turkey, where there is an American embassy. Concurrently, her husband, now running an unlicensed medical clinic, says she can return to the US, but must leave their daughter in Tehran. Unwilling to accept this, Betty chooses to escape with her daughter using the smuggling trail. Once in Turkey, they go to the American embassy and return to the US.

The narrative creates a sense of overwhelming oppression for an American who has mistakenly stumbled into a Muslim country. In this, it is very similar to the ethos of *Midnight Express.* In both narratives, Muslim countries are presented as nightmares in which these Americans are trapped. But in both cases, buried beneath the stories' surface, is a denial of personal responsibility for this predicament. In Billy Hayes' case, attempting to smuggle 4 pounds of hashish out of a country known to have strict drug-trafficking laws should require that we assign the blame to him, but this is obfuscated by creating a monstrous set of Muslim jailers. In Betty's case, it would not have required much reflection on her part to grasp the extraordinary risk involved in accompanying one's husband (and taking a young daughter) to a theocratic country that has a recently overthrown a tyrannical dictator supported by US foreign policy. Often it is easier to demonize the ‘Other’ than to take a critical view of oneself.

THINGS FALL APART

By the late 1990s, events are going badly awry in the United States with regard to Islam, the Middle East and American foreign policy (Armed Services Committee 2016, Gordon 2020, Khoury 2019). A series of motion pictures is released which exhibit complex scenarios of political corruption in the US, police-state reprisals against Muslims, and soul-searching the US history of racial injustice.

The Siege (1998)

The Siege (1998). Opening scenes show an Islamist attack on a US military barracks in Saudi Arabia. The man responsible is captured and brought to the US. The scene then shifts to several American mosques with men praying; one of the mosques in Brooklyn, New York is the home of an Islamist cell. The African-American head of the FBI in New York and his Lebanese-born assistant are called in to help when a local bus is hijacked by members of the cell. They encounter a female CIA operative who is 'working' one of the members of the cell.

Mutual suspicion develops between the FBI and CIA officers, with the agencies refusing to share intelligence. A second bus is hijacked, this time carrying Jewish school children and other adult passengers. After freeing the children, the hijackers blow-up themselves and the adult passengers.

A bomb attack occurs shortly thereafter in Times Square, killing many people. A few days later, the FBI headquarters in New York is blown up. The CIA, itself, appears to be complicit in some of these attacks, as their 'contacts' in the terror cells are among those planning them.

A high-ranking US military officer arrives and places the entire male Muslim population of New York into internment camps. One of the young men is the son of the Lebanese FBI agent, who resigns in protest. The CIA, FBI and US military continue to undercut each other as they jockey for power. Some suspected terrorists are tortured and killed by the CIA and US military.

Information leaks to the press that several of the terrorists originally worked for the CIA in their home countries and were then "abandoned to be slaughtered when the CIA left". At the close of the narrative, the female CIA agent is killed by her Muslim contact after she betrays him, and the military commander is charged with murder for the torture death of a Muslim man, who was a US citizen.

This film is perhaps the most sophisticated narrative in our motion picture set thus far. First, it is notable for portraying friendship between the African-American FBI agent and his Lebanese-American colleague, as well as representing most members of the US Muslim community as not being involved in terrorist activities. American Muslims are now portrayed as a repressed minority, while a few (radicalized by the actions of the CIA) have become terrorists. Additionally, the root cause of Islamic terrorism – the core moral flaw – is suggested to be the manipulation of Muslims in several countries by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, and not an inherent aspect of Islam.

Importantly, this film appeared in 1998, three years *prior to* the September 11, 2001 attacks on the US. And poignantly, the narrative presents several themes that will become even more endemic in US political culture after those attacks – the infighting among various American intelligence and security agencies, covert activities by the CIA that prove destructive to US security, and a willingness to curtail individual liberties for the presumed interests of national security. An additional theme – the abandonment of Muslim allies of America who then turn against the US-- is a central issue in the next film.

Three Kings (1999)

The cultural questioning of America's political and economic motives in dealing with Muslim countries is continued in *Three Kings*. The setting of this film is post-war Iraq (the first Iraq War). Having secured the Kuwaiti oil fields, the US military is withdrawing, leaving Sadam Hussein still in power. A disheveled, hard-partying battalion of US soldiers is wrapping up their Iraq tour, when four of them (three white and one Black) discover a 'treasure map' showing where Kuwaiti gold and luxury items stolen by Hussein are buried in a nearby bunker. The group sneaks off in a Humvee and heads for the bunker, finding it near an Iraqi village being attacked by Iraqi soldiers. The Iraqi soldiers are killing civilians who supported the US against Hussein during the war.

The four US soldiers try to enter the bunker and steal the loot without helping the villagers. However, when a woman is shot in the head by an Iraqi soldier while trying to protect her daughter, they decide they cannot abandon them to be killed. They engage in a bloody shootout with the Iraqi military and load several villagers in the Humvee to take them to the Iranian border (where they believe they will be safe).

The Humvee is destroyed by a landmine and one of the US soldiers is captured. He is tortured by an Iraqi soldier who tells him, "You (America) blew up my home; my wife's legs were blown off; my son is dead – one year old. How would you feel if I blew up your kid?" The US soldier replies, "Worse than death." The other three US soldiers, together with several rebel Iraqis, return to the village and defeat the Iraqi soldiers. They rescue the tortured US soldier, who refuses to kill his torturer. The soldiers take the villagers to the

Iranian border and use the stolen Kuwaiti gold to bribe Iranian officials to let the villagers enter.

In this and the prior film, the United States is shown to be morally struggling with its own responsibility in creating Muslim terrorism. Americans are being asked to directly consider the proposition, "Do we bear some culpability in the world's present inequities, especially those in Muslim nations?" The next film answers this question in the negative, arguing that any attack on United States interests is worthy of lethal retaliation.

Rules of Engagement (2000)

Rules of Engagement argues that any attack against US property in a foreign country constitutes a direct attack on the United States and justifies the use of deadly force in retaliation – a belief that is held by a segment of Americans in the present day. The narrative starts with a flashback to the Vietnam War. A Marine colonel executes a North Vietnamese prisoner-of-war in order to scare the prisoner's comrade into calling off a planned airstrike on US troops. The colonel is never charged for this war crime and, years later, retires with honors. One of the Marines, an African-American he saved by executing the prisoner, is now commander of a Marine Special Forces unit sent to protect the US embassy in Yemen. The embassy is presently surrounded by angry Muslim protesters. The cause of the protest is never stated, but the crowds are chanting "Get out of Yemen!" in Arabic.

When the Marines reach the embassy, they find the US ambassador cowering under his desk. The Marines are fired upon by snipers, and some are wounded while lowering the US flag. In retaliation, their commander orders his troops to fire directly into the crowd, which is composed of men, women and children. Two Marines refuse this order. The commander again orders his troops to: "Waste the motherfuckers"; the Marines fire, killing 83 civilians.

The Yemeni government files a formal protest, and the Marine commander is charged with a war crime by the US State Department. The Marine asks his retired Vietnam colleague to act as his attorney.

The US Secretary of State declares, "The Marine commander... shot women and children." The military prosecutor asks the Marine commander, "What do you think would happen if a Yemeni came over here and killed 83 Americans? We'd have a one day trial and then execute him."

The commander's attorney visits the embassy site in Yemen. Yemen is shown to be a dry, poor country filled with Arabs in robes, donkeys and white-washed buildings. The exterior of the (now-abandoned) US embassy shows signs of rifle fire from snipers. The interior of the building is wrecked, and the walls are strewn with Arabic graffiti. Later, outside a mosque where the survivors are praying for the souls of the dead, angry Yemenis confront the attorney and yell at him, but do not harm him. He visits the local hospital where many of the wounded children are being treated. The physician tells him most will die due to severe gunshot wounds and the lack of adequate medical supplies.

The attorney returns to the US and confronts the Marine commander: "I didn't find one goddamn shred of evidence to support what you did." The Secretary of State, however, has now viewed a videotape showing some women and a young girl firing at the Marines from the crowd. He destroys the tape and orders the cowardly Ambassador to lie on the witness stand and say he heard the commander "order his troops to fire on unarmed civilians."

At the trial an Arabic audiotape is played for the jury saying, "It is the duty of every Muslim to kill Americans and their allies." (Although not mentioned in the film, a tape similar to this was circulating at the time and likely originated with Osama bin Laden). The commander's attorney tells the jury, "He did what he had to do; his primary responsibility is to his Marines and the embassy personnel....." The military court finds him not guilty.

The ideological proposition here is that American lives and property are more valuable than those of other peoples. It was acceptable to kill prisoners in Vietnam to protect American interests. It is acceptable to kill Muslim civilians in Yemen, if they are believed to pose a threat to American interests. There is a segment of the American public who carry this ideology.

Kingdom of Heaven (2005)

Kingdom of Heaven (2005) appeared 4 years after the 9/11 attacks and during the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that followed the attack. 2005 was a challenging year ideologically for Americans. In January, the search for "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq concluded with no weapons being found (Jervis, 2005); in May over 100,000 people marched in an anti-war rally in Washington, DC (El-Shibiny, 2010). Thus American views on Muslims, war and their own country's culpabilities were in great upheaval.

Kingdom of Heaven is not about contemporary Middle East conflicts, but rather about similar struggles of the past -- specifically the battles between Christians and Muslims for control of the Holy Land during the twelfth century. Yet the film has a strong metaphoric resonance with US involvement in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The narrative begins in France where a young blacksmith, Balian, has killed a priest. He runs away and encounters a troop of knights on their way to Jerusalem to fight in the Second Crusade. Christians have been promised absolution for their sins by the Pope, if they win back the Holy Land from the Muslim Saracens. The Saracens are led by Yusif ibn Ayyub Salah al Din, known to the West as Saladin. The French Baron of Ibelin, who has an estate outside of Jerusalem, is leading the knights. He dies *en route* and names Balian as his heir. After being shipwrecked, Balian finally arrives on the shores of the Holy Land. There he encounters a Muslim warrior and spares his life.

Jerusalem is depicted as a very cosmopolitan city, filled with pilgrims of multiple faiths, merchants, craftspeople, holy sites, caravans, horses, warriors and families. A truce has been struck with Saladin permitting persons of all faiths to worship and dwell in the city. The leaders of the Christian community are a young king, Reynald de Chatillon, who is afflicted with leprosy, and a marshal who serves as the mayor of the city. Both these men are happy with the peace and want to uphold the truce.

However, the Knights Templar are depicted as desiring to break the truce in hopes of gaining territory and riches for their own use. Balian also desires peace and employs a religiously diverse group of workers on his inherited estate. A romance begins between Balian and the beautiful sister of the King of Jerusalem, Sibylla, who is married to one of the Knights Templar commanders.

In an attempt to disrupt the peace and gain land for themselves, the Templars engage in raids on merchant caravans and Muslim settlements, purposely killing Saladin's sister in one of the attacks. This leads to full scale war between Christians and Muslims. Balian is captured in one of these battles, but is spared by the Muslim warrior he earlier released.

Additional Templar-instigated bloodshed continues with the Muslims emerging victorious. The Templar commander married to Sibylla is killed. Saladin's forces then march on Jerusalem, which is defended by Balian. After a brutal siege, the Christians are on the verge of starvation; Saladin, however, offers them merciful terms for the surrender of the city. Balian and Sibylla depart Jerusalem and make their way back to France where they live as commoners. A few years later when the Christian knights of the Third Crusade come through France led by Richard the Lionheart, Balian declines to join them. He has learned his lesson.

Traditionally, the story of the Crusades is told in Western films using the ideology of noble Christian warriors fighting against brutal infidels for Christ's birthplace. Notably, this story-line was not followed in *Kingdom of Heaven*. In its place is a metaphoric tale not of Christians fighting for God, “but for wealth and land.... I am ashamed”, as the Christian Mayor of Jerusalem puts it. The moral centers of the film are Balian and Saladin who, even though both have killed people in battle, choose to pursue the peace.

Syriana (2005)

That same year, the film *Syriana* was released. The story line is complex and involves five interrelated sets of characters. The first introduced are the most powerless; they consist of Pakistani Muslim workers hired by a Saudi Arabian oil conglomerate. These 'guest workers' live in crowded, men-only camps, are paid minimal wages, and are entirely dependent on the oil company for their economic well-being. Two teen-aged boys in the camp are recruited as suicide bombers by the imam at an Islamist madrassa located nearby. They are easy targets, being far from their home and families and having little to hope for.

Concurrently in Iran, a covert CIA operative, Bob, is meeting with two wealthy young Iranians. The Iranians cynically discuss their whiskey, cigarettes and drug use with Bob before purchasing two missiles from him. Bob programs one of the missiles to blow-up the Iranian purchasers, but the other one is sold to the Saudi Madrassa imam, before Bob can immobilize it.

In the United States, a group of American oil executives are furious that a Saudi Arabian oil contract has been awarded to a Chinese company, instead of to them (they had paid a large bribe to try to get the contract). Bob returns to the CIA in Washington, DC and expresses concern about the missing second missile. His colleagues tell him to 'stay on message' and forget about the missile.

Bob is introduced to members of the Friends of Iran Political Action Committee, who want to "destabilize" the present Iranian regime and "make the country friendlier to capitalism". Their Political Action Committee is underwritten by the American oil companies mentioned above.

The fourth and fifth story-lines involve a young American petroleum investment analyst in Switzerland. He and his family are invited to a lavish Saudi party in Marbella, Spain. Here he meets the two sons of the Saudi Arabian king. The older one is intelligent, well-educated and progressive. The younger one is indolent, narcissistic and greedy. (We have seen these two stereotypes in previous films).The older one tells the analyst that he awarded the oil contract to the Chinese company instead of the American company, due to the higher Chinese bid – a sound business decision, but one which disrupts the current US-Saudi political and petroleum relationship. During the party, a tragic accident results in the death of the analyst's son. In recompense, the older Saudi prince invites the analyst to help create a new petroleum policy for the country. The analyst agrees to do so.

The American oil lobby in Washington pressures the CIA to kill the older prince in order to place the younger prince on the throne. The younger prince has agreed that in return he will award the oil contract to the US companies; he is promised enormous personal wealth from the deal. The older prince, learning that his brother has been chosen to succeed their father (due to the US political pressure), decides to stage a coup. Most of the country supports him.

The CIA sends Bob to arrange the murder of the older prince. The attempt fails and Bob becomes viewed as a liability by the CIA. The CIA next sends a drone to assassinate the older prince. Realizing that the CIA is intending to install a puppet government in the Saudi kingdom, Bob (having some moral courage) attempts to warn the prince, but is killed in the CIA drone attack. In the closing scenes, the two young Pakistani boys pilot their small boat carrying the 'missing' missile toward the newly installed Saudi-American oil refinery in the Arabian Gulf, exploding it and ending their own lives.

In this deeply disturbing film, there are many kinds of villains. Some are Muslim, some are American, most are motivated by greed and power; only a few, like the Madrassa imam who recruits the Pakistani boys, are driven by religion.

The closest the film comes to providing heroes are the self-sacrificing efforts of Bob to right a wrong he helped create, the petroleum analyst who provides sound economic advice to the older prince, and this same prince who desires to modernize his country. Notably, two of these characters are killed and those responsible for their deaths are wounded financially by the loss of the refinery. Indeed, there are no winners in this story. Although the film's story-line is fictional, the types of political and economic actions it describes are historically and currently accurate, as the next two films document.

Charlie Wilson's War (2008)

This fact-based film is an anomaly in our set. Released in the late 2000s, it harks back to political events and tensions that emanated from the onset of the Cold War between the West and the socialist nations in the Soviet Union. At the close of World War II, Eastern Europe fell under the sway of a series of communist governments which gradually expanded across Poland, Hungary, the Ukraine and eastern Germany. In the 1970s, the USSR desired to extend its 'sphere of influence' toward the petroleum rich region along the Persian Gulf, which was then largely under the political influence of the West, especially the US and Great Britain (McAlister 2005, Morgan 2021Yesilbursa 2004) .

The most direct route for the Soviets to take in reaching this region was through the rural, impoverished and tribally-based country of Afghanistan. Afghanistan is sparsely populated, has few natural resources, and due to its tribal structure has never had a strong central government. Religiously, the Afghans are Shi'a Muslim, but loyalties are primarily centered around family and tribal allegiances.. It is strongly patriarchal and conservative. Beginning in 1979, through a combination of coups, puppet governments and violent repression of the populace, the Russians entered the major cities and attempted to control the government. The rural tribesmen formed guerilla armies (the *mujahedin*), which often viewed each other as rivals, and simultaneously fought the Russian military. By 1982, the *mujahedin* gained control of 75% of the country – though the urban areas were still held by the Soviets or their Afghan proxies. The fighting continued until 1989, when the Russians finally withdrew.

Charlie Wilson's War is the story of the eponymous Texas congressman, Charlie Wilson, who in 1980 convinced the CIA to initiate a clandestine effort to arm the *mujahedin* in order to prevent the Russians from gaining control of Afghanistan and a pathway to the Persian Gulf. As portrayed in the film, Charlie Wilson is a middle aged, divorced, well-liked, but largely ineffectual, congressman from Houston, Texas. He drinks, lazes in hot-tubs with prostitutes and makes behind the scenes deals to further the business goals of his wealthy constituency.

An important figure in his constituency is Lynn Wyatt, a blonde, vivacious, extremely wealthy Houston socialite, who is deeply distraught that "godless communists are attacking a god-fearing country", i.e., the Russian invasion of Muslim Afghanistan. American television at the time is portraying the Afghans a courageous freedom fighters battling a brutal, genocidal communist army which is slaughtering innocent civilians and blowing up children with land mines, mortar shells and helicopter gunships. This resonates well with Americans who metaphorically view the rural Afghans as colonial patriots fighting the British during the American Revolutionary War.

However, the US Congress has allocated only $5 million toward humanitarian aid for the Afghan people. This will do little to assist in the Afghan's guerilla war against the Soviets. Wyatt convinces Charlie to approach the CIA and determine what kind of weapons are needed to shoot down the Russian helicopters. Charlie links up with a CIA operative who is sympathetic, and together they visit a series of clandestine sources, including the Pakistanis, Saudis, and Israelis in order to acquire weapons for the Afghan resistance. Charlie and an assistant make a surreptitious visit to an Afghan refugee camp in Pakistan. There they view first-hand the desperate state of the people. .Many are starving and several have missing limbs due to Soviet land mines.

Charlie is deeply moved to help and arranges to have the Congressional Military Budget Chairman also visit the camps. The Budget Chairman agrees to provide $500 million for more advanced weaponry, including hundreds of Stinger missiles. This assistance turns the tide of the war, and in 1989 the Russians depart Afghanistan. What is left behind, of course, is a wrecked country, groups of radicalized Muslim men trained in guerrilla warfare, and an impotent central government. As we know now, into this vacuum will come hundreds of young Muslim men from many countries, but especially Saudi Arabia, who are angry not only at Russia, but any political powers they view as threatening to their fundamentalist values.

Chief among these is the United States. The next film explores the effect this increased radicalization had on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Kingdom (2007): Set in Saudi Arabia, this film is based on actual events in Riyadh during 2003 (Priebe and Rooney 2021, Rosenberg 2021). The narrative opens with a brief history of the relationship between the United States, especially its petroleum industry, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. As will be recalled from *Lawrence of Arabia* (1965), Saudi Arabia came into being after World War I, when Faisal Ibn Saud gained control of much of the Arabian Peninsula. He was able to accomplish this through his family's historic ties with the Wahhabi sect of Islam, founded by Muhammed ibn al Wahhab. Wahabbism is a very strict branch of Islam, which is rooted not only in the Quran, but also in Bedouin tribal practices. In particular, the veiling and seclusion of women, the separation of the sexes, strict adherence to halal food practices and an abhorrence toward Western secularism are hallmarks of this faith.

In the early 1930s, the Southern California Oil company, SoCal, negotiated entry to the Saudi Arabian peninsula to explore for petroleum, which had earlier been discovered in nearby Bahrain. In January 1944, after having identified enormous oil deposits and initiating pumping in Dharan, Saudi Arabia, the company was re-organized and named ARAMCO, the Arab American Old Company. By 1948, Standard Oil (now Exxon) and Texaco (the Texas Oil Company), controlled the Saudi oil concession, which was enormously profitable. Most of the revenues went directly to the American oil companies, but substantial payments were also directed to the Saudi royal family – thus helping keep them in power and maintaining the flow of oil to US corporations (Yesilbursa 2004). During the 1950s, under Saudi King Abdul Aziz, the profits were re-negotiated -- giving the Saudis 50% of the revenue, and the American companies 50% (Yesilbursa 2002).

Following US support for Israel in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the Saudis began increasing their portion of the Aramco revenue, finally taking full control of the company. In 1988, the name was formally changed to Saudi Aramco. However, American petroleum companies supplied much of the technological expertise for operating the extraction processes spread across the country, and the US became, and still is, the single biggest purchaser of Saudi-produced oil. Because of the global scope of the Saudi oil market, there are several thousand Western, and especially American, citizens currently living in the country. Most reside in specific housing enclaves in the Saudi capital of Riyadh (Rosenberg 2021).

With the rise of al Qaeda during the 1990s and especially after al Qaeda-sponsored terror attacks, such as 9/11 (fourteen of the nineteen 9/11 attackers were Saudi citizens), the US State Department issued warnings to US citizens living in these enclaves to be careful of terrorist attacks. It was known that some members of the Saudi royal family, some persons in the Saudi police force and some members in the Saudi elite National Guard were Wahhabist, and al Qaeda sympathizers (Rosenberg 2021).

In May and November of 2003, large-scale attacks were made by al Qaeda operatives on Western residential compounds in Riyadh. Hundreds of persons were killed, including several Americans, and many more were wounded. Additionally, several Saudi security and police force members were also killed or wounded in the attacks. While investigating the attacks, it became clear that the plotters had access to security information, Saudi uniforms and military equipment that had to have come from 'internal sources' (Rosenberg 2021).

The Kingdom is a fictionalized version of these attacks, but presents a nuanced account of the political and religious tensions underlying them. The story opens with scenes of what seems to be a typical American summer weekend with a suburban baseball game underway, American flags wave in the air, hot dogs and hamburgers cook on the grill and voices cheer as runners slide into home plate. Incongruously, however, there are tall, modern buildings surrounding the park and men in traditional Arab dress are observing the festivities through binoculars.

The narrative then switches to a young Black American father in the US talking to his son's elementary school class about his job in the FBI. The story then abruptly returns to the baseball game where men dressed in Saudi police uniforms and police vehicles suddenly burst through security barriers and begin shooting at the ballplayers and their families with automatic rifles.

The families panic and run for their lives. We slowly realize that the attackers in Saudi police uniforms are actually Islamist terrorists who are attacking Americans and their families working in the oil industry in Saudi Arabia. Soon genuine Saudi police rush in to confront the attackers. One of the attackers runs toward a group of Americans and blows himself up, while shouting in Arabic: “There is no God but Allah and Muhammed is his messenger”.

A traditionally-dressed Saudi man observing the events from an overlooking building forces his young son to watch the carnage, telling him, “There is no God but Allah.” An ambulance arrives and seems to be loading the injured, but it is also a terrorist decoy and soon explodes, killing even more Americans. Back in the US, the Black American father is called to FBI headquarters in Washington, DC, where he works as a high ranking Special Agent.

In Washington DC, the FBI calls an emergency meeting to respond to the attack. The Evidence Response staff is depicted as multi-ethnic with a woman medical specialist. They believe the attack may be the work of a Saudi national, Abu Hamza, who is a Wahhabi imam affiliated with al Qaeda. The discussion focuses on the need to maintain the cooperation of the Saudi royal family and insuring US access to Saudi oil -- indicating that dollars outweigh lives in American foreign policy.

Back in Riyadh -- the scene of the attack -- Saudi police interrogate and beat a policeman, Sgt. Haytham, whom they suspect of being complicit in the attack. However, Haytham is innocent and had courageously fought the attackers. His innocence is supported by a higher ranking Saudi officer named Farris.al Ghazi. The FBI Evidence Response Team arrives in Saudi Arabia; it consists of the Black Special Agent, the female medical officer, a Jewish FBI agent named Leavitt, and two white male FBI agents. Al Ghazi meets their plane and takes them to a gymnasium in the American compound. He has been assigned to keep tabs on them and despite having been to the US to visit the FBI, he is wary of them.

Similarly, the FBI team is suspicious of al Ghazi and the Saudis generally. They then learn that 47 Saudi citizens also died in the attack while trying to protect the Americans. The FBI agents begin interviewing survivors of the attack. During the investigation they learn the area had been recently surveilled by suspicious Saudis who had gained access to the compound.

The attack scene itself is still strewn with blood, body parts, toys, bicycles, and lawn furniture. The FBI agents utter a constant stream of profanity ,e.g., fuck, shit, goddamn, which is offensive to the Saudis assisting them The female medical technician is asked to cover up her arms and large breasts. Political and diplomatic maneuvering continues between the Saudis, the State Department and the FBI.

Despite the political wrangling, Al Ghazi becomes increasingly comfortable with the FBI team, going beyond his mandate to help them collect evidence. Visual and auditory images are inserted into the film narrative at this point depicting camels, mosques, afternoon prayers, and the sound of the muezzins calling the faithful to prayer – reminding the American audience this is indeed the Middle East. That evening, al Ghazi is shown at his home playing with his three young children; he is depicted as a very kind, honorable man and father.

The narrative then cuts away to show a terrorist bomb-making factory in the Riyadh Wahabbi enclave of Suweidi. This is the headquarters of al Hamza, the cleric who masterminded the attack. The story then moves to a hospital, where the FBI female medical officer is assisted in examining the slain Saudis by Officer al Ghazi, because non-Muslims are not permitted to touch the bodies of deceased Muslims. He is very impressed by her skill. She finds several marble-like objects in the bodies, which are the shrapnel used in the explosion.

One terrorist cell is located and destroyed by the FBI and Saudi police, but it is not the primary headquarters of al Hamza. Despite this, the FBI team is ordered by the State Department to leave Saudi Arabia, "now that their mission is over". On the way to the Riyadh airport, their convoy is attacked by terrorists using rocket-propelled grenades. Several members of their Saudi escort are killed. The Jewish FBI agent, Leavitt, is kidnapped and taken to the Wahhabi enclave, where his captors intend to videotape his beheading. Al Ghazi and the FBI agents chase his captors and engage in a violent firefight at the al Hamza headquarters. Leavitt is saved, but al Ghazi and al Hamza are both killed. The Black FBI agent visits al Ghazi's family to give them condolences. He tells al Ghazi's son, "Your father was a very brave man; he was a good friend of mine".

The FBI team makes its way safely to the airport and says goodbye to Sgt. Haytham. Upon their return to the US, the FBI Director thanks them for their excellent service. The film ends with a recollection of a conversation between the Black FBI agent and the female medical technician prior to their departing for Saudi Arabia "We are going to kill them all!" they say angrily. The narrative then shows the last words spoken by the Wahhabi Imam to his son "We are going to kill them all!"

Once again, this narrative reiterates the tragic consequences of the US (and Western) involvement in the economics and politics of the Middle East. Honorable people in both cultures are lost to violence and bitterness. Certainly members of the Saudi royal family are complicit in some acts of terrorism and the Saudi political system has been corrupted by decades of oil affluence. Yet the United States is shown to be similarly corrupted by its manipulation of Saudi politics and its willingness to look the other way, even when terrorist acts result in the deaths of their own citizens and security forces, in order to keep the oil flowing. The film also projects the growing cynicism of everyday Americans with their government's various agencies, e.g., the FBI, the US State Department, maneuvering to avoid blame for negative events and continuing to jockey for power and resources at the national level.

Body of Lies (2008)

As with *The Kingdom*, this film is a fictionalized account of actual events occurring in the early to mid-2000s. After 9/11, Western Europe became increasingly a target for the Salafi-jihadi strand of Islam. Referring to themselves as *mujahedin*, from the al Qaeda doctrines taught in Afghanistan, these guerrilla warriors were often directed by or sympathizers with Osama bin Laden. They resented the intrusion of Western powers, especially the United States, in Iraq in 2003 and earlier into both Iraq and Kuwait. Their primary goal was to generate mass civilian casualties in major European cities, similar to the 9/11 strikes in the United States (Armed Services Committee 2016, Gordon 2020, Rosenberg 2021).

These were deemed justified by the thousands of Muslim civilians killed during the Gulf Wars. In 2004, the Madrid Spain train system was attacked by bombers, resulting in 52 killed and 700 injured. In 2005, the downtown London subway system was bombed and an above ground two-tier bus in central London was blown up; the result was 192 killed and 2000 injured. By purposely targeting civilians in urban areas, the *jihadis* intended to force Western powers to stay out of the Middle East both politically and militarily (Armed Services Committee 2016, Rosenberg 2021).

Body of Lies opens with an Iranian imam affiliated with al Qaeda recording a videotape calling for a jihad/holy war in response to the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the US and Western coalition forces. In the background the call to prayers echoes from several mosques. (There is documentation that Iran did/does harbor several senior al Qaeda members, despite the fact the fact that Iran is Shi'a Muslim and al Qaeda is affiliated with Sunni Islam --- often in bitter conflict with one another. This follows from the Arab dictum: the enemy of my enemy is my friend).

The next scenes show a British SWAT team breaking into a building in Manchester, UK where a group of 5 or 6 young jihadis are building bombs. The bomb-makers talk among themselves in Arabic and, when attacked by the SWAT team, choose to blow-up themselves, the building and several SWAT team members. The scene shifts to the US CIA torturing an Arab prisoner at a black site facility. The senior CIA official comments to a younger CIA operative, "Our enemy will adapt and grow stronger".

The US citizenry is weary of the War on Terror. Public opinion is turning against US involvement in the Middle East. The senior CIA officer lives outside of Washington DC where he has a home and family; he speaks with a Texas drawl and has grown deeply cynical about the war. He views Muslims, whether cooperative or enemies, as lower forms of humanity. The narrative shifts to US military forces bombarding Middle Eastern targets. The senior CIA official continues his conversation, "our supposedly unsophisticated enemy has realized we (i.e., the West) are an easy target." The narrative then shows terror cells in several Western European cities, while other shots depict US Special Forces blowing up targets in the Middle East.

The young, male CIA operative meets with an Arab CIA informant in an urban Middle Eastern setting. The informant has identified an al Qaeda member who wants to defect to the US with his family in exchange for information on planned al Qaeda attacks. They drive to a remote, dry, dusty stone house and meet with the informant. The young CIA agent speaks both Arabic and Farsi fluently. He is honorable and sees his Arab assistant as a friend and ally. The CIA watches their interaction from an overhead drone which broadcasts images back to CIA headquarters in Langley, VA.

These visuals communicate well the emotional and cultural gulf between the US intelligence services and the Arab population under surveillance. To the Americans, Muslim life appears to be a large-screen television program, while to those on the ground it is flesh and blood reality. The informant's information is valid and valuable. The young CIA agent wants to now send the informant and his family to the US as promised, but the senior manager back in Virginia says no; "Put him back on the street, we will use him as bait". The informant is soon kidnapped by his former al Qaeda comrades and must be killed by the younger agent to prevent his disclosing the CIA contact.

The young agent and his Arab colleague next call in Black Hawk gunships to 'take down' the al Qaeda cell, which is in Amman, Jordan. In essence, they traded the life of the informant (and his family) to kill the members of the cell. Both the younger agent and his Arab friend are wounded in the Black Hawk attack – the Arab friend dies.

The young agent next meets with the head of Jordanian intelligence services, Hani Salaam, who is very intelligent, well- dressed, and professional. Hani agrees to support the CIA in identifying terror cells in Jordan, but requires that the young agent be honest with him. He has had prior negative interactions with the CIA, especially with the senior CIA officer who currently is supervising the young agent. The young agent agrees. Amman, Jordan is depicted as an oasis of cosmopolitan, urban civility. The buildings are modern, there are green gardens and a thriving multi-national culture (al Sahana 2015). .

Shortly after, the young agent is again injured and taken to a local medical clinic. Here he meets a young, Iranian-Palestinian nurse and they begin seeing each other very discreetly. The nurse's older sister is very suspicious of the young agent; she is deeply angry at the American intrusion into the Middle East.

The senior CIA manager tells the young agent he knows about his interest in the nurse -- the implication being that the CIA spies on its own operatives as assiduously as it spies on the 'enemy'. (Obviously, the CIA is portrayed in this narrative as a highly amoral, secretive, paranoid institution).

Additional terror attacks occur at a marketplace in the Netherlands, killing and wounding tourists from many Western countries. Back in Amman, Hani tutors the young agent by showing him a Palestinian al Qaeda member he has turned into a loyal informant by helping the potential terrorist's mother find an apartment in Amman. He tells the young agent, “Watch and learn”. In other words, one can make much more progress by befriending potential adversaries than by torturing them.

The senior CIA officer arrives in Amman and pressures both Hani and the young CIA agent. On the senior agent's orders, the CIA blows up the terrorist cell safe house in Amman, destroying any opportunity to gain additional information of planned European attacks. While attempting to capture the Iranian Imam, the young agent sets up a sting operation which again results again in the death of an innocent man. At this point, the agent decides to quit the CIA. However, the young nurse he loves is kidnapped by the Iranian imam's operatives. Thus, he has put her in danger as well. The CIA arranges a trade of the young agent for the nurse intending to locate the Iranian cell. The trade is made, but the CIA drones lose track of the agent. Ultimately, it is Hani who rescues him using a Jordanian rescue team. The young agent resigns from the CIA and remains in Jordan – still under CIA surveillance.

What is especially notable about this film is the higher morality and nobility it ascribes to the Jordanian intelligence officer and the Iranian nurse versus the clumsy, corrupt, brutish behaviors attributed to the senior CIA manager (see e.g., Weiner 2008). In many ways the story line mirrors that in *City of God* (2005) where the Christian Templars, who were supposed to be saving the Middle East from the Muslim Saracens, were depicted as morally corrupt, greedy invaders, while the Saracens, under Saladin, were shown to be honorable, open-minded rulers.

The Green Zone (2010)

US government security agencies suffer another damning critique in the next film: the *Green Zone* which is set in the initial phases of the Second Iraq War (2003). During the internecine Iran-Iraq war (1980 - 1990), the President of Iraq, Sadam Hussein, deployed chemical weapons against both the Kurds and Iranians in violation of United Nations proscriptions against their use (Filkins 2009). Hussein was ordered to dispose of all chemical weapons and halt attempts to produce nuclear weapons under UN Resolution 1441. After the 9/11 attacks, the United States and the UK accused Iraq of secretly maintaining a stockpile of chemical weapons (termed Weapons of Mass Destruction or WMDs) (Filkins 2009). US President George W. Bush claimed that Hussein's regime was serving as a “safe-harbor” for Al Qaeda terrorist operatives and was producing WMDs, intending to use them against neighboring countries and the United States. Despite Bush’s claims, the United Nations inspection team monitoring Iraq determined that Iraq had indeed dismantled its chemical and nuclear weapons capability and was generally in compliance with UN Resolution 1441 (Filkins 2009).

The United States and the UK, in defiance of the United Nations Security Council, declared war on Iraq in 2003. International public opinion polls found that the invasion was viewed very negatively by most countries and seen as a sign of United States aggression Upon entering Iraq, US military forces were provided with a map specifying where the WMD's were believed to be stockpiled . *The Green Zone* narrative is set at this point in the invasion.

At the opening, General al Rawi, a member of Sadam Husseins's cabinet, is shown meeting with a high-level group of politicians and military leaders. A few weeks later, the first US military WMD units arrive in the Iraqi capital and begin looking through warehouses which the US State Department claims contain Weapons of Mass Destruction. The soldiers are outfitted in chemical weapons/hazmat gear and have sensors to detect various poisonous compounds. The leader of the WMD team, Roy Miller, fully expects to find large caches of WMD in the designated locations and is dismayed when site after site comes up empty. A female reporter for the *Wall Street Journal* is traveling with the WMD team; she had written several stories on the WMD caches helping to make the case for the US attack on Iraq.

At US intelligence and military sites in Baghdad, enormous video screens carry images of the search process. Miller reports to his military superiors, “The Intel's no good; there aren't any WMDs.” He is warned by his superior officer, Clark Poundstone, to 'not make waves'.

Back in the US, the public is clamoring for images of the WMDs they were told Sadam Hussein had stockpiled. When Miller attempts to inform the foreign press reporters in Baghdad that none have been found, Poundstone silences him.

Meanwhile, the presence of the US military is disrupting life throughout Iraq. Various Iraqi ethnic groups, e.g., Kurds, Sunnis, Shi'as, are jockeying for power. Electricity, water and medical services are disrupted. The US military moves through the country in full battle gear looking like an alien invasion force. Several cities are reduced to rubble. Yet in Baghdad, the US has established a special Green Zone for its military and intelligence officers, as well as the international press. Here Westerners swim in pools, live in luxury buildings and enjoy all the amenities of 'home' (Filkins 2009).

While in Baghdad, Miller comes into contact with an Iraqi, "Freddy", who wants to assist him. Freddy speaks English well and has an artificial leg, due to an Iran-Iraq war injury. He tells Miller where several high level corrupt Iraqi politicians are meeting. The US military captures one of them and takes him in for interrogation. Miller and Freddy visit the US military prison, where they see several Iraqi detainees being tortured and talk briefly with the political suspect. The man tells them that al Rawi and other corrupt politicians conspired with the US Defense Department and the Bush administration during secret meetings in Amman, Jordan. They planted stories of WMDs in key US newspapers in order to gain political power in post-Saddam Iraq. Miller and Freddy make contact with a helpful, (and honorable) CIA agent, Marty Brown. Marty agrees with Miller that the US entry into Iraq was a set-up: "Now all we have is bad choices".

The Department of Defense representative, Poundstone, hires former Special Forces personnel, i.e, mercenary contractors, to kill Iraqi politicians who might reveal the fraudulent US entry to the war. When he learns that Miller and Freddy have gone in search of al Rawi to reveal the fraud, he orders his mercenaries to murder them, saying, "this is a 'kill, no capture' mission". Despite being outnumbered, Miller and Freddy survive. Freddy tells Miller he wants the US to leave Iraq, "It is not for you to decide what happens here." Despite this same sentiment now being widespread among the US citizenry, the US leadership sets up a puppet government in Iraq.

Zero Dark Thirty (2012)

Our next two films, *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo* both appeared in 2012 and were nominated for Best Picture. *Argo* won. Both are historically accurate and present two different sides of American ideology with respect to Islam. *Zero Dark Thirty* tells about America's search to revenge itself against the man deemed responsible for the 9/11 attacks -- Osama bin Laden. At the time the film was released, this search had ended one year earlier with the slaying of bin Laden by a SEAL team (Parnell 2012). *Argo*, by contrast, relates events concerning Iran's attempts to revenge itself against the country it held responsible for the brutal reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi – the United States. In the first narrative Americans are the hunters, in the second film the prey.

Zero Dark Thirty (2012). The narrative opens with images from the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the crash of United Flight 93 -- the most traumatic day in memory for most Americans. The story shifts to the CIA interrogation of a Muslim prisoner being held in a 'black site' facility in the Middle East. The interrogator is large and muscular; his prisoner, Ammar, is a small man strung from chains on the ceiling with one side of his face bloodied. The interrogator tells him, "You and your uncle murdered 3,000 innocent people; I have your name on a five thousand dollar transfer to a 9/11 hijacker. Tell me about the Saudi group." When Ammar refuses to talk, he is water-boarded. "Give me their e-mail and I will give you a blanket and some food", says the interrogator. Ammar refuses and is strung back up in the chains. A young red haired woman, Maia, attends the interrogation.

Maia is newly arrived at the CIA station in Islamabad, Pakistan. The sound of imams calling for prayers is heard from minarets outside her window. She returns to the interrogation. The prisoner has been kept suspended during the night with loud music playing to prevent sleep. The interrogator demands, "Who is in the Saudi group? When you lie to me, I will hurt you." He strips the man naked in front of Maia, puts a dog collar on him and walks him on a leash. "When is the next attack?" No response. The man is locked into a small wooden crate. Later, after being fed, clothed and allowed to sit at a table, he gives them a name: Abu Ahmed.

In May, 2004 Westerners are attacked in Saudi Arabia. Additional Muslim prisoners at various 'black site' facilities are interrogated. Some are chained to the ceiling, some to tables, some to the floor. One man is force fed through a hose on the floor. The attacks on Westerners continue. The Marriott hotel in Islamabad, Pakistan at which Maia and a female CIA station chief are dining is bombed, several hundred people are killed. Maia and the station chief survive. Maia continues searching for Abu Ahmed.

In 2009 a Jordanian doctor affiliated with Al Qaeda contacts the female Islamabad CIA chief and tells her he will provide information on bin Laden in exchange for the $25,000,000 reward and treatment for his kidney disease. The station chief meets him at Bagram Airforce Base in Afghanistan. As the informant's car enters, it explodes, killing the station chief, several other CIA personnel and military officers. The CIA Director in Washington is furious, “They killed 3000 of our citizens in cold blood. I want targets. Bring me people to kill.”

Maia learns that Abu Ahmed's real name is Saeed Ibrahim, and that he is a close confidant of Osama bin Laden. Using $400,000 to bribe a Kuwaiti prince, the CIA obtains Saeed's phone number and tracks his car to a fortified villa in Abbottabad, Pakistan. Layers of discussion then ensue at CIA headquarters in Washington DC. Surveillance indicates that 2 men, 3 women and 7 children are visible on the grounds of the compound, but the top of the building is covered by a trellis. Could a third man be walking there?

After months of debate, permission is given for a Special Forces raid on the compound. Maia tells the members of SEAL Team 6, “bin Laden is in there, and you are going to kill him for me.” The SEALs enter the compound at half past midnight (i.e., 'zero dark thirty' in military parlance), locate bin Laden and kill him. They take documents and computer discs from the compound, along with bin Laden's body. The search is over. The enemy is slain. Americans are jubilant.

A significant feature of the film is its emphasis on using the motive of **revenge** as justification for torturing and killing Muslim prisoners in order to gain information on America’s target: Osama Bin Laden. The next film reverses these roles.

Argo (2012)

At the beginning of *Argo* (2012), a series of Marvel comic-like illustrations recount the history of the Persian Empire, now Iran. These illustrations show (accurately) that in 1953 the US and Great Britain used their espionage personnel (the CIA and MI6) to stage a coup in Iran, replacing the democratically-elected president, Mohammad Mossadegh and the Iranian Parliament with their puppet ruler Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, who became the Shah of Iran (see e.g.,Forozan 2018, Meyer and Brysac 2008, Kinzer 2004). The reason for the overthrow of the democratic Iranian government by the US and Britain was that Mossadegh intended to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil company, directing its profits to the Iranian people, rather than to overseas corporations in the US and the UK (Vassiliou, 2009).

Shah Reza Pahlavi was quite happy to restore the Western corporate status of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and also moved the country toward secularism. This angered the Shi'a Muslim clergy. The Shah's family and friends became extremely wealthy on the profits from petroleum exporting, while most of Iran remained underdeveloped (Dreyfus 2005).

To prevent challenges to his policies, the Shah built a secret police force, SAVAK, with the assistance of the CIA (Dreyfus 2005; Forozak 2018, Weiner 2008). SAVAK would arrest, torture and murder political opponents of the Shah over the next 22 years (Matin-Asgari, 2006). In 1978, the Shah became ill and was brought to the US for treatment. In his absence, the Shi'a clerics organized a rebellion which was supported by a majority of the Iranian population. In February 1979, the Shah's reign ended. The United States Embassy in Tehran was attacked by protesters who were angry at the US for supporting the Shah's misdeeds (Kidder and Oppenheim, 2007).

With this history review, it is now easier to grasp why employees at the US embassy in Tehran would be terrified when hundreds of angry Iranians come pouring over the fence, onto the embassy grounds and into the embassy. It is also easy to grasp why concerted efforts are made by the staff to destroy classified documents and personnel files, even as the angry demonstrators take them hostage: it is payback time. Amidst the chaos, 6 American staffers run into the back street. They run past posters of Ayatullah Khomeini, down a street full of embassies and are taken in by the Canadian ambassador. The narrative reports that both the US State Department and the CIA are hesitant to try to rescue the runaways. As one CIA staffer explains, “If these people die, they die badly, publicly.”

The State Department comes up with alternative escape plans. These include: “Waiting 'til the weather clears; then delivering bikes and providing them maps to the Turkish border”. (The border is 300 miles away over dirt roads and mountains). “Let's have them pretend to be agricultural advisers.”(It is winter and snowing in Iran). “Have them pretend to be CARE teachers.” (That program was shut down 5 years earlier). A CIA officer, Tony Mendez, offers another possibility: “Let's have them pretend to be scouting a movie location in Tehran; then they can fly out with me.” This option is selected as being “the best of our bad ideas.”

Mendez has contacts in the American movie industry and a science fiction script, *Argo*, is chosen as their ‘cover story’. To make the film look genuine, advertisements are placed in Hollywood trade magazines and a production office is set up in Los Angeles. Meanwhile, the 76 American embassy personnel who were captured by the Iranians are publicly displayed and charged with war crimes: “The US talks about human rights, but ignores those in other countries”, says a female Iranian spokesperson.

Mendez, posing as the movie's producer, flies into Tehran. He meets with the run-aways in the Canadian ambassador's residence and provides them with instructions on the movie production roles they must play. Concurrently, the Iranian Republican Guard have become suspicious of the Canadian's 'guests' and also realize from reconstructing the embassy's files that six US staffers are missing. Despite several very tense moments in the narrative, the run-aways and Mendez board a Swiss Air jetliner and safely depart Iran. They celebrate with champagne once the plane clears Iranian air space.

While creating tremendous empathy for the run-aways, *Argo* also provides American audiences with important historical context regarding the reasons underlying Iranian antipathy toward America and the West. When coupled with the graphic images of the CIA torturing persons suspected of terrorist activities in *Zero Dark Thirty*, these films provide portrayals of American political activities inconsistent with what most citizens believed to be their national ideals. We now turn to a film in which an American warrior fighting against what he has been told was the Muslim Threat realizes that "right" and "wrong" often are difficult to discern on the battlefield.

American Sniper (2014)

Chris Kyle was an American SEAL who served 4 tours of duty in Iraq. While there, he killed 160 Muslims as a sniper and received multiple medals for bravery and valor (Kyle 2012). He returned to the US where he was haunted by Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). To assist other returning veterans, Kyle set-up a shooting range near his home in Texas. It was at that shooting range that he was killed in 2013 by a fellow Iraq War veteran who had become mentally unbalanced during military service. The film made of his autobiography won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 2015. It is a deeply troubling narrative that 'brings the war home' to Americans in all its horrifying aspects. We focus on the film's portrayal of Muslims.

Using what has become ***the*** iconic marker for Islam in American cinema, the film opens with the Muslim call to prayer. (Perhaps it is the utter foreignness of the language and rhythm that signals "Other" to American ears.) Kyle is positioned with his sniper rifle on an Iraqi rooftop protecting a military convoy. A woman in a burqa and her young son appear carrying a grenade launcher; Kyle shoots and kills both of them. The narrative then turns to his childhood in rural Texas learning to hunt with his father and younger brother. The family is deeply religious and strict: "We protect our own", his father tells him.

As a young man, Kyle is greatly affected by the 9/11 terror attack and decides to join the Navy SEALS. At the SEALS California military base, he marries and then is immediately deployed to Iraq. Always carrying his Bible, Kyle becomes an effective and accurate sniper, competently protecting American troops. The houses and urban landscape of Iraq are depicted (accurately) as battered rubble, covered in dust. The people there are poor, speak little English and live in constant dread of both the American forces and the Al Qaeda fighters who occupy their country. One particularly vicious Al Qaeda member is called "the Butcher" because he carves up his victims alive.

After promising to protect an Iraqi informant and his family, Kyle is unable to save them from the Butcher, who murders them as an example to others assisting the Americans. After completing his first tour of duty, Kyle returns to the US; he and his wife have a young son. Kyle now wears dark aviator-style glasses to protect his privacy and is experiencing PTSD symptoms. Unable to connect emotionally with his family, he re-enlists for a second tour.

Once back in Iraq, Kyle encounters fellow service members who are expressing doubts about the purpose of the war and questioning the competence of their US military commanders. House-to-house searches for terrorists become common with Kyle and his group breaking down civilians' doors in full combat gear. Iraqi residents are terrified of them. Homes are taken over and occupied by US forces in strategic neighborhoods, the families evicted.

Kyle's group is invited to dinner by one family; nearby they find a cache of weapons and the Butcher's hideout. A firefight ensues and their host is killed. Kyle returns home, his PTSD and social isolation increase. His daughter is born, but he is unable to connect emotionally with his family. He re-enlists for a third tour, now famous for his prowess as a sniper.

Iraq has deteriorated markedly over the course of the war; cities are now desolate ruins. American troops move through them in armored vehicles emblazoned with death's head insignia. Soldiers embark on unauthorized missions killing Muslims they believe are militants. A SEAL is killed during one of the skirmishes and the team returns to the US to bury him. Kyle has become stone-like, emotionally dead. He returns for a fourth tour of duty. The Iraqi landscape—once productive and fertile – is now arid, monochromatic and strewn with ruins. Civilian residents are no longer visible.

Unmanned US drones are used to pinpoint targets to be bombed. The war has become a deadly video game filled with dust, smoke, shadows, ghosts, confusion and rifle fire. There are no good or bad guys; no purpose and no rules. During one final, brutal fire-fight, Kyle calls his wife crying and says, "I'm ready to come home, baby, I'm ready to come home".

He returns to the US and regains some of his humanity by working with wounded veterans and returning to his childhood roots in Texas. On February 2, 2013 Kyle is shot by an emotionally damaged veteran he was helping. He is buried on a rainy day in Texas with a memorial service attended by thousands of veterans. In many ways Kyle's life and death are a metaphor not only for American involvement in Iraq, but American involvement in the Muslim world: in trying to save it, both are destroyed.

13 Hours: The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi (2016).

In 2011, Libya's Muammar Gaddafi was felled by an internal revolt. As various regional, tribal, political and religious groups vied for power, the country sank into chaos – a condition in which it still resides. As with Iraq (*American Sniper*), Libya is depicted as a shambles, with entire cities razed, infrastructure blown-up and buildings reduced to rubble. US, French and NATO forces make efforts to stabilize the country, but it remains classified as a 'failed state' (Armed Services Committee 2016, Gordon 2020, Lobban 2014).

The eastern Libyan city of Benghazi is one in which the United States desires to maintain a diplomatic mission, despite the unstable political environment. The US ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, took up residence in Benghazi in 2012. His quarters were guarded by a handful of Marines. The only other US military presence was a secret CIA facility a few miles away. In the film's narrative, a former SEAL arrives and joins several other 'private contractor' former Special Forces personnel to provide security for the CIA base. He and his wife have 4 children and inadequate income; the private contractor job pays very well, so he took it.

The film narrative states that when Gaddafi fell, Libyan rebels and Islamic extremist groups from outside the country captured great quantities of sophisticated weaponry from the Libyan military. Thus, there are now roving bands of militants throughout Libya and especially in Benghazi. On their daily patrols, the US security contractors are confronted by several hostile groups who are well-armed and deeply suspicious of the US. In the film these persons are shown clothed in black head-dresses and dark apparel, increasing audience perceptions of their hostile nature. The atmosphere of the narrative is one of extreme vulnerability, tension and constant threat for the Americans. They are outnumbered, out-gunned and without a safe haven.

An additional source of conflict arises between the arrogant CIA administrator (we have seen this stereotype in several previous films) and the security contractors, based on education and social class. The CIA administrator views the contractors as working class employees, beneath him in intelligence and capability.

Providing additional security for the US embassy and the CIA base are several local Libyans, who are generally underpaid and unmotivated. On the anniversary of 9/11, the Muslim morning call to prayer is heard from the mosques. That evening a large group of armed Islamists attacks the Embassy, quickly overrunning the tiny security force, entering the residence, and setting it on fire.

Ambassador Stevens and a few staffers take refuge in a 'safe room'. The attackers are shown to be violent and ruthless. They tear down the American flag outside the Embassy.

At the CIA base, which is some distance from the Embassy, the security contractors are skyping with their families 'back home' and reading books. When news of the attack on the Embassy arrives, the CIA administrator orders the contractors *not* to help, stating that it is not their responsibility. After initial hesitation, the contractors put on full combat gear, round up some Libyans who are willing to assist them, and head for the Embassy. Along the way they pass some other Benghazi residents watching a local soccer game attempting to preserve some sense of normalcy in their lives.

Once they reach the embassy compound, a fierce firefight ensues; some staffers are rescued, but the contractors are unable to reach the 'safe room' holding the ambassador. In the night sky above, American CIA drones track every movement, but are unable to assist. Similarly, American technology on board military vessels in the Mediterranean and from orbiting satellites provides quantities of numerical data, but no help to the few American fighters below – a commentary on the US military being technologically sophisticated, but tactically incompetent.

The contractors, their Libyan allies, and the embassy staffers make their way back to the CIA compound, which is now also under attack. A very long, brutal struggle takes place overnight with the small force of contractors and Libyans defending the CIA staff. A SEAL unit sent to Tripoli from Croatia finally makes it into Benghazi, but is unable to get transportation to the CIA base.

The next morning the call to prayer echoes again from the mosques, reminding the audience this is a Muslim country. Heavy bombs are fired into the CIA base killing several, mutilating others. Additional American forces finally arrive. The security contractors learn that Ambassador Stevens died at the embassy. As the US security contractors depart from Benghazi airport, they ask themselves “what was the meaning of all this?” The answer: “We get to go home”. The Libyan volunteers who helped them ask for the Americans’ Humvee vehicle. The contractors toss them the keys. The narrative suggests that US involvement in the Middle East will conclude in just this way – not with a bang, but a whimper. And in August 2021 with the US evacuation from Afghanistan much of it did.

DISCUSSION

The overarching theme stretching across these films resides not merely in the content of positive or negative Muslim stereotyping, but rather in the question *why. What purpose do these images serve?* Why are these stereotype structures built in the first place, and why do they exhibit *particular kinds* of content? We propose that the answer lies in the history of Western Colonialism that blankets the Middle East and North Africa and continues to affect the entire region politically and economically.

Many treatises have been written by scholars about Western Colonialism in Muslim nations (see e.g., Huntington, 1996, Fukuyama, 2006, 2014). However, none of them has examined how American cinema depicts the same phenomenon. Movie-goers as *active meaning-makers*. They construct meaning from their own past experiences and from what they are viewing on the screen in front of them. However their interpretations of cinematic depictions are necessarily *grounded in the narratives circulating in their surrounding culture* (Madianou, 2011). The films discussed here have served to form the societal inter-text regarding Islam and Muslims over the past ten decades throughout the West, and especially in the United States (Wang, 2014).

After a brief efflorescence of viewing Muslims as fully-formed human beings during the 1960s and 1970s, American culture appears to have returned to its previous ideology that Muslims were sub-standard beings, incapable of self-determination and in need of Western forms of political economy. It is only in the time period since the late 1990s that American cultural attitudes *began to shift again* toward the position that Muslims have a right to self-determination.

First, consider the perspective on Colonialism (particularly British) displayed in the three films from 1921, 1938 and 1941. In *The Sheik* (1921), colonialism has a positive face. It provides the audience with the independent and adventurous Lady Diana, daughter of British aristocracy. Further, since the US and Britain had just fought a war as partners against the Germans, American audiences were happy to view their British forebears and allies in a kindly light.

Prince Ahmed is shown to be undisturbed by the British colonization of Algeria. He is free, rich and enjoys the cigarettes and casinos Colonialism has provided to his country. His people carry on their warrior way of life and are not inhibited by the European presence in their cities. Similarly, in *Suez* (1938), the European architect de Lesseps, is presented as a boon to Egypt. He brings technology, organization, funding and vision to a country where these are depicted as sorely lacking, according to the narrative. The natives are untrained and unmotivated. They need someone like de Lesseps to "create a structure (the canal) that will serve all mankind".

However, the backstage maneuvering of Western politicians is put on brief display, as well. The French president declares himself emperor; the British prime minister fears the canal will help the Germans more than the British; the Ottomans fear losing control of Egypt. But the ending is happy, and European ingenuity creates a canal. In 1941's *The Thief of Baghdad*, political manipulation is on display as well, but this time it is undertaken by a Muslim, Jafar, the vizier. The key point here is that 'behind the scenes' nefarious activities by politicians are entering the American consciousness. After the Great Depression, there was a loss of faith in government and business which is subtly reflected in these story-lines (McElvaine, 1993).

By the 1960s, British Colonialism becomes an overt semiotic villain; *Exodus* (1960) shows the British Empire to harbor ethnic brutality beneath a veneer of propriety and order. Both Arabs and Jews are treated with contempt by the British. The key resource being sought by the British is Palestine's crucial linkage to the oilfields of Arabia and North Africa (Brenchley, 1989).

Retaining control of the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal are key to the American and Western European strategy of containing Communism post World War II, as the Cold War is initiated (Kupchan, 2011). This goal becomes so crucial to the United States and Britain that in 1953, the US Central Intelligence Agency and the British MI6 plan and carry out a coup d'état in Iran which topples the democratically-elected Parliament and President in order to replace them with Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's authoritarian (but pro-Western) rule (Azimi, 2009).

Authoritarian dictators were placed in power or kept in power across the Middle East and Gulf regions first by the British and later the United States from the late 1940s up until the Arab Spring of 2011 (Chomsky, 1996; Badiou, 2012, Fukuyama, 2014).

The cinematic recognition of international political and economic manipulation such as this is present (using the British as the 'face') not only in *Exodus*, but also in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1965) and *Khartoum* (1967). By 1975, the British 'mask' had been replaced in American cinema by American imperialism in the form of President Theodore Roosevelt, who is portrayed as having ordered the illegal invasion of Morocco to rescue an American diplomat's wife in *The Wind and The Lion*.

The Wind and The Lion represents a turning point in terms of American political ideology, because it is the first time an American leader (Roosevelt) is depicted as having lower moral standards than his opponent, Sheik Rasuli, a Muslim Berber. The narrative asserts that Rasuli was 'in the right' -- a remarkable statement ideologically, but an appropriate one, since Rasuli is depicted as fighting for religious freedom, whereas Roosevelt is fighting for economic and political power. It is at this juncture that the US metaphorically replaces Britain as the global bully in American films.

A series of attacks on US military personnel in Muslim countries, as well as airliner hijackings by Islamic extremists, led to a series of American films during the 1980s and 1990s that let audiences place themselves in the higher moral position of fighting against a seemingly more powerful and ruthless enemy. US Special Forces military personnel acted out story-lines in which unjust acts against America were avenged (Kellner, 2003).

But by the late 1990s, in films such as *State of Siege* and *Three Kings*, there is a rethinking of this proposition. Why are American rights more important than those of, say, Iraqis (*Three Kings*), or Muslims, generally (*State of Siege*)? Other films (*The Green Zone, Body of Lies*) reveal the cynical and corrupt nature of US government agencies such as the CIA and State Department. When we arrive at *Zero Dark Thirty* (2102), it has become public knowledge that the United States tortured Muslim prisoners, bribed officials in Muslim countries, and assassinated Muslim politicians who were more democratic, but less favorable to the United States, than their rivals.

Finally, in 2014 and 2016 we arrive at *American Sniper* and *13 Hours*. Both films (accurately) portray the countries the US was attempting to save as now reduced to economic and political wreckage. But perhaps most telling in terms of Americans' current ideology regarding these military incursions into the Muslim world, at least as portrayed in film, are the statements made by the warriors sent to battle: “We want to come home.”

In *Politics and Film* (2006, p. 4), Franklin states, “American political culture is shaped by a unique national heritage... Because the United States was populated *de novo* by political and economic refugees of one kind or another, the political context of this country is heavily influenced by the shared experience of flight from governmental oppression and economic upheaval... Most of the original settlers were from Western Europe, [therefore] American politics reflects the European politics of the eighteenth century...The result is a society that has the ethic of the Wild West, where anything goes, and the culture of the Puritans, Pilgrims and Plymouth Rock... Liberal freedom and Protestant ascetism come to clash in freedom of thought and expression.” As these films suggest, American ideology still struggles with conflict between the desire to ensure national economic security and respecting the rights to self-determination of other peoples, especially Muslims.

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