



MES 2018

Middle East Summit (Social)

Primary Topic

Internally Displaced Peoples

Secondary Topic

Cultural Erosion in Big Cities

Foreword

Dear delegates welcome to the 2018 Middle East Summit's (MES) Social Committee!

This council delves into the primary issue of Internally Displaced People in the Middle East and the secondary issue of Cultural Erosion in Big Cities. Both issues have been selected by the Chairs for their intrinsic significance and ability to provoke introspection and thought. By crafting solutions for these issues, delegates are expected to engage with the two issues to generate fruitful and conducive debate over the course of the conference.

Regarding the primary issue of Internally Displaced People in the Middle East, the facets of the issue explored entails tackling the core issues from which internally displaced people stem from, but more pertinently the measures that will address how to deal with internally displaced people currently in the present. In discussing Cultural Erosion in Big Cities, delegates will also be given the opportunity to grapple with a sensitive issue which requires in-depth understanding and a nuanced approach that comprehends multiple considerations. We can look forward to council sessions being host to a great deal of intellectual stimulation and rigour.

As aforementioned, the issues delegates will be tackling require involvement and dedication, given the scale of the issues themselves. Having to understand both regional and national considerations, the Chairs hope that delegates will come prepared with an adept understanding of their nation's perspective on the issues at hand, and simultaneously remain flexible to any additional developments should they arise in council. This way, delegates will truly be able to benefit from what this council has to offer.

Should you have any clarifications or require any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact your Chairs at s@middleeastsummit.org. The Chairs look forward to three days of robust debate and wish you all the best in your preparations for the upcoming conference!

Best regards,

Michael Lee Jing Long, Head Chair

Amanda Lim Si Hui and Jeremiah Tan, Vice Chairs

Internally Displaced Peoples

Introduction

Many Middle Eastern nations, most prominently Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, have been plagued by long-term conflict and strife, which in turn has resulted in a major refugee crisis. Refugees fleeing to other, more stable nations in Europe and the Middle East are common knowledge and have received the bulk of media coverage. However, an even larger issue that has received significantly less attention, both by the media and the larger international community, is the problem of Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs). IDPs are citizens who have been forced out of their homes by conflict, but who do not flee to other countries. Instead, they move to a safer region in their country of residence.

This is a problem of increasing magnitude, one that dwarfs the problem of refugees, as detailed by the table below:

Country	IDPs (2017)	Refugees (2017)
Iraq	Upwards of 3 million	260 thousand
Syria	6.4 million	5 million
Yemen	2 million	180 thousand

There are several reasons as to why the number of IDPs tends to be higher than the number of refugees. First, fleeing to another nation for safety is often a dangerous option filled with uncertainty. These families, some with little financial might, have to withstand storms on makeshift, overcrowded boats, sometimes for an exorbitant fee. If they survive the journey, they still might be turned away by nations. Running low on food and water, they might not have the luxury of visiting multiple countries in the hopes that one will take them in. It, therefore, makes sense for many to stay in their country, but merely move to regions that are not war-torn.

Second, because conditions in refugee camps can sometimes be appalling, resulting in refugees choosing to return to their country of residence. Al-Jazeera reported a trend of Yemeni refugees, who had previously fled to other nations like Djibouti, a country in North-West Africa

which has the Mazarki camp in its northern region to cater to the influx Yemeni refugees. However, living conditions in these camps tend to be extremely poor, be it due to overcrowding (at one point, 6000 refugees lived in this camp), poor sanitation, or other pertinent factors. Therefore, many Yemeni refugees choose to return to their war-torn nation, “preferring the uncertainty of [war] to the conditions in the camp.” The problem of IDPs is thus exacerbated by the living conditions in refugee camps.

Third, the problem of IDPs is not only massive: it’s growing. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), there were 40.3 million people living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence in the world by the end of 2016. This number has nearly doubled since 2000 and has increased sharply over the last five years. Countries around the region are becoming increasingly strained due to the sheer mass of refugees. For example, whilst Turkey, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia have jointly collaborated to accept refugees from war-torn countries, the burden this is placing on their infrastructure means that they face pressure, both infrastructural (because there are more refugees than can be accommodated), and political/social pressure by citizens concerned about potential threats to national security. In a similar vein, other nations that have been helping out in the effort are closing their doors. The US is the obvious example, but also countries like Germany where Chancellor Angela Merkel faces increasing pushback from citizens who believe refugees are a threat to their society.

Key Terms

Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs)

IDPs are citizens who have been forced out of their homes by conflict, but who do not flee to other countries. Instead, they move to a safer region in their country of residence.

Refugees

As of 2011, the UNHCR itself, in addition to the 1951 definition, recognizes refugees as persons “who are outside their country of nationality or habitual residence and unable to return there owing to serious and indiscriminate threats to life, physical integrity or freedom resulting from generalized violence or events seriously disturbing public order.” IDPs do not fall within the legal definition of refugees.

Key Players

Yemen

The Yemeni Civil War began in 2015 between two factions claiming to constitute the Yemeni government: The Houthi-led Supreme Political Council, and the Hadi-led government and allies. This civil war has henceforth resulted in a massive humanitarian catastrophe in the poorest country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, exacerbating internal displacement of persons within Yemen.

The Task Force on Population Movement (TFPM) has reported that as of March 2017, 2 million Yemenis (7% of its total population), are internally displaced. It is interesting to note that 76% of IDPs prioritise the need for food, as compared to the seemingly less desired requirement for shelter, prioritised by only 4% of IDPs. As stated by the TFPM report, the greatest percentage (36%) of IDPs in Yemen live with host families, while the second largest category is that of rented accommodation (22%). These are then followed by the 19% of individuals who live in collective centers or spontaneous settlements, comprising the next most common housing setup for IDPs.

The reasons behind these housing setups can be related to traditional support mechanisms existing in Yemen. This encompasses the welcoming of IDPs by extended family or friends through sharing the hosts' space, income and food amongst other resources. Additionally, when surveying IDPs, they expressed their preference for staying with host families mainly because it gives them higher chances to find jobs and other profit-making opportunities.

Turkey

With the spectre of terrorism that has been looming over the MENA region for the past twenty years, as well as the overall treacherous geopolitical climate of the region (Evidenced by the Arab Spring and its related political uprisings/sectarian divides), Turkey is no stranger to the influx of refugees neighbouring nations. Turkey in the status quo holds the greatest number of Syrian refugees, with 3.381 million registered as of December 2017.

In response to the refugee situation, which is part of the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War, Turkey, along with Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and other UN Agencies and NGOs have launched the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP), a coordination effort that has been described to be "a strategy document, coordination platform, advocacy tool, and funding appeal"

With regards to internal displacement within Turkey itself, the Turkish government has placed great emphasis on the successful return of its displaced citizens on a voluntary basis. To this end, they launched the "Return to Village and Rehabilitation Project" (RVRP) in 1994, which aimed to facilitate a more coordinated response and develop ties with civil society organisations working to resolve the issue of internal displacement.

Syria

More than half the people fleeing the Syrian Civil War were internally displaced. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that approximately 7 million Syrians were internally displaced and in need of humanitarian aid as a result of the protracted conflict in the region as of 2017. Most of these IDPs live in homes that often happen to be badly damaged by the war. Due to security concerns, lack of accessibility to sectors of need, as well as the overall volatile climate, humanitarian efforts were directed at emergency aid. The difficulty of logistical processes and a finite number of NGOs allowed to operate in Syria are also claimed to be deterrents to the overall efficacy of providing aid. Provision of shelter for IDPs is administered by the Global Shelter Cluster, which is a joint effort by the UNHCR, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and well as the Syrian Ministry of Local Administration). Despite the fact that no official camps have been set up, a few public buildings in Syria were revamped to serve as temporary shelters for IDPs.

Scope of Debate

There are several reasons as to why the problem of IDPs is one that needs immediate attention. First, the nature of wars in the Middle East is that they are often extremely fluid civil wars (ergo, the battlefields are constantly changing, rather than opposing armies digging trenches and waiting it out), battles are often fought in centres of population, and combatants have a general inclination towards blunt, indiscriminate instruments of war (chemical weapons, missiles, mines). This means that, as long as IDPs remain in their country of residence, they face mortal peril on a daily basis. Their survival depends on being as far away from the conflict as possible:

because as long as they are within a certain distance from the battle, or from a known combatant encampment, there is the constant danger of a chemical weapon attack or a missile strike by the opposing army. Moreover, even if they are far away, safety is still a concern: Saudi Arabia, for example, has been conducting widespread carpet bombing of Yemen, including civilian areas far from the known battle zones. Therefore, ideally, these IDPs should be able to receive timely updates on how the conflict is developing, such that they can escape from regions that might become probable war zones, while also avoiding any conflicts on their journey to their next destination. However, these wars also tend to destroy the infrastructure necessary for such updates (electricity lines, data transmission cables, radio stations, etc., more on this later).

In contrast, however, these wars rarely extend beyond borders (the war on the Islamic State a notable exception), because doing so would involve bringing in a third party and forcing combatants to fight a war on multiple fronts. This is why conflicts like the Syrian Civil War, Yemeni Civil War, or the Iraq-Kurdish conflict have generally stayed within borders. Therefore, refugees in countries, even if they may be bordering war-torn regions, are much safer than IDPs still residing in conflict zones.

Second, while the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees assures protection and safety for individuals who have fled to another country, they do not encompass IDPs. Ergo, the duty of caring for IDPs falls to the country they reside in. The problem, therefore, is that war-ravaged and weak governments do not have a strong rule of law, or an abundance of resources. This means that caring for IDPs (by building shelters, sending them food, water, and medical aid, etc) is often the lowest priority. Even if these governments are willing to help them out, in most cases, they simply do not have the economic power to do so. The international community, meanwhile, is not obligated to do anything.

Moreover, these wars often result in huge amounts of infrastructural damage: to power cables, gas lines, water lines, data transmission cables, roads, etc. This makes it extremely difficult to maintain living conditions in camps for IDPs, simply because the infrastructure required to support lighting, sanitation, transport or other elements that constitute a “liveable” environment has sustained large amounts of damage.

Furthermore, because the burden does not fall to the international community and instead to local government, it is highly possible that certain internally displaced peoples will be given better care than others. This is especially given the backdrop against which the problem is playing out: where wars are often over racial, ethnic, religious, or ideological differences.

Third, a related problem is the quality of living: because it falls within the local government's purview and not the international community, shelters (if any), will have poor sanitation, poor connectivity, and poor living conditions, to name a few. It might even be unguarded, which is problematic in a war zone and might lead to internal problems because there is little to no internal government and policing in these shelters.

Fourth, another problem is that it is difficult for aid efforts to be effective. IDPs are not confined to specific locations unlike refugees in refugee camps. They may be dispersed, their location unknown, and their movements can be fluid depending on which regions are war zones at any point in time. Therefore, it is extremely challenging to deliver aid to IDPs, because it is difficult to pinpoint their location at any given point. Moreover, as there is no system in place to distribute this aid to these peoples (a task delegated to the home country of these IDPs), it may lead to feuding and infighting amongst different groups of IDPs.

Fifth, a final problem lies in post-conflict reconstruction, where these internally displaced peoples have to be re-integrated back into the country. This can be a huge burden on a country that has just emerged from a devastating war. Moreover, they can be overlooked and their reintegration neglected. This is both because it is out of the international community's purview, and because, as they stayed within the same nation, countries underestimate the extent of help which they need to reintegrate.

Proposed Solutions

In the spirit of not feeding the delegates the answers, instead of detailing actual solutions by nations, we are going to pose a series of questions and give some explanations so the delegates can understand the implications of the questions asked.

1. Are the problems facing IDPs inherent to their situation? In essence, this asks if there has been any scenario in which individuals who were internally displaced were better off than those who became refugees of another country. This does not require delegates to deal with counter-factual narratives, rather, find instances (if any) where such a situation occurred, analyse the policies and factors that led to this phenomenon, and see if any of it can be incorporated into a resolution to improve the living conditions of IDPs.
2. Refugees: How do we incentivise nations to accommodate more refugees? We operate on the premise that all governments have a certain amount of political capital. They gain this capital by enacting policies that the people support, and spend it on necessary policies that might not garner the support of the people. Accepting refugees is, in most countries, the latter, because individuals feel that accepting large swathes of refugees is a threat to national security and a burden on public infrastructure. This, in turn, means governments are less incentivised than ever to help refugees. What measures/compromises can be taken to solve this?
3. Are there methods to facilitate the passage of refugees from one country to another? Have there been any similar historical scenarios?
4. How can we decide how the burden of accepting refugees should be split amongst nations -- is it by size, by wealth, by proximity, by ethnicity? Are certain countries better suited for/more accepting of certain types of refugees?
5. Do we want individuals to become refugees over IDPs? How can we incentivise individuals to choose to become a refugee?
6. What are some of the perverse incentives for individuals to stay within their borders rather than flee to another, safer nation? Is it the uncertainty/danger of the journey? Is it due to certain extenuating circumstances such as an injured or elderly member of the family? Is it because the conditions in refugee camps are poor? Is it because of the persecution they face in other nations? By resolving the reasons as to why individuals actively choose to stay within a country torn apart, perhaps we can incentivise them to become refugees instead.

7. Internally displaced peoples: Does the country in turmoil/war have a duty to bear at least a portion of the burden of caring for its civilians? Would asking it to, for example, contract out the building of camps for IDPs to other nations/organisations jeopardize its stability and harm its ability to fight its battles? Would it be practical to demand post war reparations for accepting the burden of IDPs/refugees?
8. How do we incentivise other nations not involved in the conflict to accept the burden of caring for internally displaced people? This involves sending in troops, medical aid, constructing and defending camps, building infrastructure, and other measures to ensure the safety of these civilians at a large human and financial cost.
9. Which nations should bear the burden for internally displaced people? If there are multiple nations sharing the burden, how should the burden be distributed -- is it by size, by wealth, by proximity?
10. When coming up with a resolution, delegates have to actively consider the nuances of the region that the resolution will be enacted in. Therefore, one should consider if there are specific policies that might better divide up the pool of refugees, to both increase the quality of life of refugees, as well as reduce the opposition towards taking them in.
11. What is the most effective method by which aid can be delivered to these IDPs? Are there examples of where aid has been effectively delivered to internally displaced peoples? What was the economic/human cost on the nations/organisations that delivered the aid? What problems did they run into? How much of the aid actually made it to IDPs?
12. Are there ways to ensure the protection of IDPs? Delegates may consider implementing systems where any act of aggression upon them, or on those guarding their camps can be clearly recorded such that the perpetrators can be convicted of war crimes. Delegates might also want to consider implementing and enforcing no fly zones over certain regions, or methods by which IDPs can be moved around should the need for evacuation rise.

Conclusion

Whilst the problem surrounding IDPs is intrinsically linked to political strife and conflict in the region, the problem itself ultimately has to be solved by local governments themselves, instead of the global community. The problem, thereafter, lies within each nation's capability to uphold a set standard of living of IDP camps themselves. The Council therefore needs to devise sustainable solutions towards the protection of IDPs specifically, as whilst solutions towards dealing with refugees have been implemented in the status quo, there has yet to be specific measures taken to ameliorate the problem of IDPs. The Dais sincerely hopes that delegates will be able to generate effective solutions unique to the aforementioned problem.

Relevant Documents

Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons. (n.d.), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. <http://www.unhcr.org/4794b3042.pdf>

Kalin, W., Williams, R. C., Koser, K., & Solomon, A. (Eds.). (2006). Incorporating the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into Domestic Law: Issues and Challenges. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/0119_internal_displacement_Ch9.pdf

Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2005) Addressing Internal Displacement: a Framework for National Responsibility, http://www.brookings.edu/projects/idp/20050401_nrframework.aspx

Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (2007) When Displacement Ends: a Framework for Durable Solutions, http://www.brookings.edu/reports/2007/~media/Files/rc/reports/2007/09_displacementends/2007_durablesolutions.pdf

Further Questions

1. What are the conditions countries should keep in mind before deciding on a location for a camp for internally displaced peoples? How would countries ensure that internally displaced peoples are able to make their way to these camps?
2. How can we uphold a basic quality of life in these camps? What measures need to be met before the camp can be built? How can we strike a balance between cost, speed, and quality of construction?
3. Are there certain ways the population should be divided up amongst these camps? By ethnicity, by geography, etc.?
4. Many of the current policies are reactionary rather than preventive. Are there certain clauses delegates can include in their resolution to deal with future refugee/IDP crises?

Further Readings

The Concept of Internal Displacement and the Case for Internally Displaced Persons as a Category of Concern (E. Mooney in "Refugee Survey Quarterly", 2005)

http://www.brookings.edu/articles/2005/fall_humanrights_mooney.aspx

COHRE (2005) UN Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (Pinheiro Principles), available at:

<http://www.cohre.org/store/attachments/Pinheiro%20Principles.pdf>

Fisher, D. (2006) Guide to International Human Rights Mechanisms for Internally Displaced Persons and their Advocates, available at:

http://www.brookings.edu/projects/idp/2006_guidebook.aspx

Bibliography

Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre - Turkey: progress on national IDP policy paves way for further reforms . (2007, July 26). Retrieved December 27, 2017, from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/library/Europe/Turkey/pdf/Turkey-Overview-July07.pdf>

Brookings-LSE - Project on Internal Displacement: Mapping the Response to Internal Displacement: The Evolution of Normative Developments. (2014, October 12). Retrieved December 27, 2017, from <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapping-the-Resource-to-Internal-Displacement-The-Evolution-of-Normative-Developments-October-10-2014-FINAL.pdf>

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). Internally Displaced People. Retrieved December 28, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/internally-displaced-people.html>

Mattar, V., & White, P. (2005, March).

Consistent and predictable responses to IDPs A review of UNHCR's decision-making processes. . Retrieved December 28, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/423551522.pdf>

Internally Displaced People. (2016, July 07). Retrieved December 27, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/sy/29-internally-displaced-people.html>

Questions and Answers about IDPs. (n.d.). Retrieved December 28, 2017, from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/IDPersons/Pages/Issues.aspx>

Motahar, G., & Al-Sabahi, M. (2017, July 18). Internal Displacement and Social Cohesion in Yemen. Retrieved December 29, 2017, from <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2017/07/18/internal-displacement-and-social-cohesion-in-yemen/>

Syrian Arab Republic: Aleppo Situation Report No. 12 (04 January 2017). (n.d.). Retrieved December 29, 2017, from <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/node/138151>

Cultural Erosion in Big Cities

Introduction

Cultural erosion is an endemic issue, most notably manifesting itself in big urban metropolises, i.e., the “megacity.” This can be seen all over the world; one only has to look the vast swathes of cultural monuments that have been lost in the pursuit of urbanisation and economic development to gain an understanding of the severity of the issue at hand.

Perhaps the main cause of cultural erosion is globalisation. Globalisation, in effect, increases foreign influence in the Middle East. This can be seen regarding Western multinational companies opening stores in Middle Eastern nations, affiliations between Middle Eastern organisations and major sports teams or events (World Cup 2022), or international products flooding Middle Eastern markets.

This globalisation erodes culture through two main mechanisms: First, globalisation causes the whittling down of certain aspects and tradition in culture due to population members adopting the new influx of ideas globalisation heralds in place of the old. As recently as 2017, for instance, Saudi Arabia lifted its ban prohibiting women to drive. This comes in lieu of global ideas such as gender equality and liberalism, which give agency to the individual and in cases such as those above, the marginalised. However, the effects of globalisation are still observed to be limited in altering certain respects of culture. Blasphemy laws are still widespread, and the right to freedom of speech remains scarce in these nations. Clearly, there are areas of belief that, founded on the roots of long-standing and as of now stable tradition, are not likely to bow to global pressure just yet. Globalisation has altered the culture in the Middle East, especially for the more pliable and modern youth, but for the majority of these countries, their older generations seem relatively unreceptive and stoically loyal to the culture of their origins.

Second, globalisation also causes the resurgence of traditionalism, eroding more ‘current’ iterations of Middle Eastern culture. For example, this backlash manifests in the rising popularity of certain schools of thought, which denounce globalisation as akin to Western imperialism in the Middle East. Globalisation is a disruption that exposes Middle Eastern countries to the sentiments and influence of a global scale - it is natural that the region struggles with balancing the preservation of its own with culture and modernism.

Another cause of cultural erosion is economic development. Much of the Middle East is still considered to be less economically developed. Even the more economically developed countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, still tend to be heavily reliant on oil to drive economic growth, and to that end, there are very few (if any), mature economies in the region. To that end, many countries are undergoing, or have plans to undergo rapid expansion. This rapid expansion often erodes culture, for three main reasons. First, cultural landmarks and artefacts are destroyed or lost in the process of widespread industrialisation and urban expansion. Second, an increase in the standard of living leads to a consumerist culture that places more value on material wealth rather than cultural values. Third, a proliferation of smartphone technology and the increasing accessibility to the internet increases global influence on impressionable youth that gradually erodes cultural mindsets. Undeniably, the widespread proliferation of an upcoming middle class has resulted in a dramatic increase in smartphone usage in the Middle East. According to the Global Mobile Market Report of April 2017, 80.6% of the United Arab Emirates' population own smartphones, allowing the nation to boast the highest smartphone usage percentage globally. There are also 21,337,000 smartphone users in Saudi Arabia, and 40,010,000 smartphone users in Turkey, to cite a few substantial usage numbers.

Thirdly, the youths of Middle Eastern nations have become increasingly estranged from their culture. Youths are increasingly bold in their rejection of past ideals with the onset of the internet. Jordan's youth are notably subverting tradition, what with the escalating trend of Jordanian youth getting tattoos for themselves - an act considered haram according to Islamic principles. An interview with an owner of a controversial tattoo parlour in the Middle East revealed his tattoos were an avenue for expression. Evidently, there is a desire among youths to initiate change in exchange for opportunities for freedom of expression. This creates a schism between traditional values and the values popular among the youth. Considering 65% of the population of the Middle East are below 30, this will be a concern especially because the youth with constitute a large portion of the working population and thereby yield significant economic influence in a matter of years. They are anticipated to define culture and given the current trend, many old traditions and thoughts would be in jeopardy of being faded out.

Key Terms

Cultural Erosion

From a societal context, a loss of customs, traditions and social behaviour, as well as physical manifestations of human intellectual development, including various forms of art.

Globalisation

The process by which businesses or other organizations develop international influence or start operating on an international scale.

Key Players

Consequently, nations with dense urban populations in major cities would be considered key stakeholders. In the Middle East, this would pertain to Turkey, Egypt, and Iran for their notable cities, as well as nations that are relatively more modernised such as the United Arab Emirates. Driving factors of cultural erosion in big cities, in particular, have been identified to be globalisation, economic progress, and burgeoning youth culture. These factors are distinct but largely interdependent and have been explained at length above. The following excerpts will exemplify how these nations are affected by Cultural Erosion and considerations.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is undergoing a period of rapid expansion and urbanisation. Riyadh, its capital city, is filled with skyscrapers and modern architecture. It just announced the NEOM project: which aims to build an ultra-modern mega-city, 33 times larger than New York, to drive economic growth in the region. It will also connect to Jordan and Egypt to increase connectivity and, by extension, economic ties.

This would lead to cultural erosion: both in the demolition of historical sites to make way for office buildings, and because of the increased globalisation and interconnectivity citizens of these cities will inevitably face. The government seems to be willing to sacrifice all of its culture and history for the relentless pursuit of urbanisation and economic progress. The Islamic Heritage Research Foundation in London estimates that 98% of Saudi Arabia's historical and religious sites have been destroyed since 1985.

Perhaps the most striking examples can be found in the modernisation of Mecca and Medina, two of the most culturally significant sites in the world. These cities have received a large influx of capital investment, and Saudi Arabia has actively chosen to boost this investment at the expense of Islamic heritage. Kaaba, the black cube in the center of the city, was once encircled by carved marble columns dating back to the 8th century. The columns surrounding the Kaaba have since been demolished to make way for Saudi Arabia's \$21 billion "Mecca Grand Mosque," to accommodate the Muslims making their pilgrimage to Mecca.

It is thus clear that delegates from Saudi Arabia would most probably place economic development over cultural preservation, and would, therefore, require some economic incentive to preserve or restore what little culture they have left.

Qatar

Qatar is one of the most developed, and richest economies in the region, boasting the highest GDP per capita of any Middle Eastern nation. Doha, like Dubai, is one of the most developed metropolises in the region and is certainly no stranger to global influence: the 2022 FIFA World Cup will be held there. Moreover, Qatar has strong military ties with the US and is strengthening economic ties with China and Russia. However, it has made a concerted attempt to preserve the region's culture. Qatar's former culture minister is in the running to be the next director-general of UNESCO, and Qatar's national museums recently had an exhibition on "Art and the destruction of Iraqi cultural heritage." The Qatari government has said it is planning more school trips and public lectures to raise awareness of its cultural sites and approved a draft law to ensure the preservation of Arabic, by switching the language of instruction for classes in law, international affairs, media and business administration from English to Arabic.

UAE

As typical of many global cities, UAE's Dubai is host to a significant congregation of different ethnicities and immigrants. It is an amalgamation of several other cultures. Owing to its prosperity, much of its current culture is now tinged with aspects of commercialism and materialism. This is seen most manifest in the extravagant buildings the city is so renowned for - though elegant and cutting edge, they are irrefutably a departure from more modest architectural roots of the past.

In 2013, the total population of UAE was recorded to be 9.2 million. Out of the 9.2 million, the expatriates contributed to around 7.8 million with the Emirati Nationals holding a population share of 1.4 million. The expatriates in Dubai are mostly purported not to integrate that extensively into Emirati culture but alter the cultural landscape of the country. Emiratis from the older generations express their increasing concern for the loss of culture in the UAE.

The Emiratis are even relegated to the more remote areas of the country, with foreign investment in property in the megacities being actively promoted. According to the Economic Adviser of the Gulf Cooperation Council, “through TV shows, books, and the media, the dissemination of these ideals have resulted in a shift in concepts and values, and have ‘polluted the environment.’”. The native culture of the UAE has been quelled to a large degree, causing the citizens of Emirati heritage to feel as though their way of life is at stake, and that they no longer have claimed to land that is traditionally theirs.

There have been efforts to preserve culture, however. For example, 2010 saw the Abu Dhabi Authority of Culture and Heritage pledge to “conserve, protect, manage and develop the tangible cultural heritage of the emirate [...] to make Abu Dhabi the cultural hub of the region”.

Turkey

Istanbul is noted to be the cultural, economic and historical centre of Turkey, boasting a population of approximately 14.7 million. Serving as the imperial capital for the once highly influential Byzantine Empire, this city was once a contender for the epicentre of the world regarding trade, culture and academic thought. Following the fall of Turkey’s prominence, Istanbul only regained much of its former prestige in the 20th century. Though much of its culture in the form of arts, music, film and cultural festivals have been revived in a sense, there still poses a threat of cultural erosion in the nation.

As one of the most rapidly expanding metropolitans in the world, Istanbul runs the risk of letting its fast pace of urbanisation overrun cultural considerations. In 2011, the Guardian even dubbed one of Turkey’s government decisions as a ‘Great Leap Forward’ mirroring China’s pernicious campaign which caused widespread loss of culture. Apparently, a rush to build dams, hydro and nuclear power plants infringed upon the territory of indigenous nomadic people who allowed their camels and sheep to graze upon the land used for thousands of years. Due to demand for

energy in the city, the sacred traditions of the country's citizens were lost. This, of course, would only be one manifestation of an overarching trend in a nation such as Turkey.

Egypt

Cairo is a robust city that is known as the world's "most 24-hour city". Its population is predominantly Sunni Muslim, with Christians being the second largest denomination. Cairo is also dubbed the "city of a thousand minarets" for the prevalence of Islamic architecture.

The culture of ancient Egypt still undergoes rather significant preservation. Egypt is renowned for its artifacts and is the subject of study for many archaeologists. Egyptology, the study of Egypt, has been established as an academic discipline ever since 1880.

The ancient culture of Egypt is easily one of the most studied cultures in the globe, making its value something that delegates of Egypt must take into account. Its later Islamic culture, too, hosts a wealth of value to the nation. Historic Cairo, an area within Cairo itself, is a part of the city which is recognised as one of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The monuments in Historic Cairo are facing the threat of neglect and decay, exemplifying the struggle Egypt faces with preventing cultural erosion. Delegates of Egypt should endeavour to be as involved in the council to produce concrete solutions which will effectively curb the issues it faces.

Iran

Many historians and archaeologists are concerned about the effect of Iran's developing economy on cultural erosion. This is especially the case in modernising cities such as Tehran, where most historic buildings and monuments have been demolished or lost, replaced by new, modern buildings. For example, the historic eight gates of Old Tehran have all been destroyed, and the Gardens of Shemiran in Northern Tehran were paved to build housing blocks. Another prominent example would be the construction of the Sivan Dam. A failure to properly account for its impact on the surroundings led to the flooding of 130 archeological sites. More worryingly, Persepolis and Pasargadae, two historical sites (the latter being the capital of the Persian Empire) are continually at risk to flooding and destruction as a result of the construction of the Sivan Dam.

Cultural preservation efforts in Iran have also faced legal barriers. While there exists a National Heritage List, which is continually updated to include all of Iran's historical or culturally significant sites, the Iranian Supreme Court ruled in favour of striking of buildings from the list,

allowing land-owners to purchase the sites and build over it. In response, the Cultural Heritage Organization declared that it would not add any building to the list without the owner of the property's consent. This has led to increasing concerns over the preservation of ancient Iranian houses, bazaars, and even city centers, where it is much more economically profitable for owners to build new, modern buildings (that can, crucially, accommodate more people) in their place.

Scope of Debate

There are several problems caused by cultural erosion. First, understanding culture is important in shaping our worldview: people's takes on issues in the world are heavily influenced by their background, their heritage, and their culture. For example, people born in Germany are likely to be more sensitive towards racial or ethnic issues because of the legacy of the Holocaust that has profoundly impacted them as a people. Therefore, a rejection of culture is, in essence, a failure to understand how one's worldview is shaped and therefore a failure to approach issues with the depth of understanding, objectivity, and maturity that this metacognition lends itself towards. This means individuals are not aware of their preconceptions and biases: products of the culture one was raised in. In contrast, understanding one's culture allows individuals to distance themselves from their emotions because they understand that their immediate emotional response is a by-product of their culture and not necessarily the accepted universal truth.

This "metacognition" has practical benefits: most significantly, it is the strongest counter to extremist and nationalist movements. This is because understanding one's culture is conducive to the construction of civic nationalism, rather than ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism conceptualises states as champions of universally accepted values and cultures, and thus its citizens are those who immerse themselves in the culture, and who choose to buy into these values. Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, is based on authoritarianism, fear-mongering, and an exceptionalist worldview that is based on race. An understanding of one's history and culture, therefore, helps in protecting against the rise of ethnic nationalism, because one is likely to observe issues more objectively and understand that their perspective, or the perspective of their government, is not necessarily the universal truth. For example, understanding the history of Israeli-Palestinian tensions makes an Israeli more likely to understand that his or her initial reaction to the Palestine government claiming sovereignty over a certain disputed territory or

increasing military presence along the West Bank might be found on his or her upbringing rather than because their actions are innately immoral.

Second, the related problem is that understanding one's culture helps to protect against revisionist history (the main mechanism by which nationalism and extremism are spread). As cultural landmarks fade away, and lessons on culture disappear from the syllabus, history becomes more malleable. Events that were once considered universally accepted truths become skewed and twisted as individuals attempt to bend the narrative to fit their political or ideological goals. In turn, this leads to a population that is more willing to buy in to such nationalist and extremist rhetoric.

This can be seen in multiple nations: a failure to learn about the widespread acceptance and abuse of slaves being an integral part of pre-Civil War American culture leads to confederate apologists and white nationalists who believe that they are unfairly persecuted, who believe that there is no such thing as "white privilege." A failure to learn about Japanese exceptionalism and imperialism in the years leading up to World War 2 means that the government can alter history books and make amendments to the constitution without widespread outcry. Most relevant to the region, a failure to learn about the ethnic tension between Armenians and Ottomans leads to the Turkish government being allowed to deny that the Armenian genocide ever took place. An understanding of one's culture, therefore, protects one against such revisionist history.

Third, patriotism is often firmly rooted in understanding where one came from and were proud of the culture of one's home country. Too often, especially in the Middle East, is patriotism defined as pride in one's government or one's ethnicity. In contrast, patriotism ought to be an understanding of what defines one's country, a pride in a certain set of values championed by one's people, and a pride in what a nation has accomplished. Understanding this creates a unifying force, a bond that ties countrymen together to work towards realising the patriotic ideal, by, for example, enacting laws that uphold the nation's values. A failure to foster this patriotism has three practical ramifications. First, the failure of proper post-conflict resolution in the Middle East can be attributed to alliances breaking up because they have different conceptions of what the country should be, rather than a common ideal to strive towards. Second, it means that often, politicians act on self-interest rather than some greater common good, which only comes about if one feels proud of one's country and people, and wants to see it succeed on the world

stage. Third, it breeds ethnic tensions because countries tend to be built along racial lines rather than ideals.

Proposed Solutions

Similar to the first guide, we will pose a series of questions and give some explanations, so that delegates can understand the implications of the questions asked, thereafter devising solutions to address these questions.

1. How are landmarks, statues, and other sites of cultural significance going to be conserved in countries with economies that may demand the usage of that land for other means? Could preservation efforts be encouraged through helping Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)?
2. Can culture be adapted and shaped in order to work with modern day trends or lifestyles and blend with modernity, instead of being viewed as diametrically opposed? An example of a nation with an age-old cultures that has been abridged for modern life is Italy - youths in Rome, for example, are actively engaged with their culture. What has allowed this to happen, and can this positive aspect of their society be emulated?
3. Should regulations among Middle Eastern countries be set in place to standardise how culture should be actively promoted and fostered? Would this entail the establishment of a regulatory board across nations on this topic?
4. Would it be right to censor parts of a nation's culture/history if that aspect of culture would foster ethnic/religious strife, or even discord between nations? For example, how would Turkey respond if other nations in the Middle East started acknowledging the Armenian genocide and how it affected their culture?
5. Given that social media distracts citizens from cherishing culture in certain instances, should the government have social media campaigns to convince citizens otherwise?
6. Should there be active censorship of content (be it social media, film, music) that portrays aspects of history/culture in an inaccurate, fictionalised light?

7. Could the taxation of foreign industrialists be a measure to alleviate the progression of globalisation in the country by reducing foreign influence in the economy? How can economic needs and the preservation of culture be balanced if 'protecting culture' could possibly result in weaker economic outcomes?

Conclusion

The topic of cultural erosion in the Middle Eastern region is one of pivotal importance and the Chairs look favourably upon fruitful and comprehensive debate on this topic. As previously stated in the above commentary on the issue, the cultural background of an individual tinges the person's worldview and, by extension, a national identity.

Relevant Documents

1. **The Arab World and the Collective Memory: An Overview**
http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/mow_3rd_international_conference_nada_itani_en.pdf
2. **Cultural Treaty of the Arab League, November 20, 1946:**
https://www.jstor.org/stable/4321863?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents
3. **Cultural Heritage and Development in the Arab World:**
http://www.bibalex.org/arf/en/gra1106_df_20081102_book.pdf
4. **Protecting Cultural Heritage Under Conflicts:**
https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/myreformstory_nada-al-hassan.pdf

Further Questions

1. Is it important to preserve artefacts/buildings of historical/cultural significance? Or is it enough to teach culture/history in the classroom? What is the real world significance of preserving these landmarks?
2. Through what means can youths in the Middle East be engaged with their traditional culture? Is this a matter of education and promotion, and where would this cross the line

into indoctrination?

3. To what degree should age-old traditions be upheld, if they are bound to cause strife? Does this entail an active policing of private life i.e. the suspension of women's rights?
4. How can countries ensure that the preservation of a nation's culture is not the preservation of the largest ethnic group's culture? What is the difference between "Chinese" culture and "Han" culture, for example? Especially in nations where the ethnic majority is a huge demographic block, how can national culture be promoted whilst ensuring the customs of smaller cultural groups are not drowned out?

Bibliography

Rubin, B. (2003, January 16). Globalization and the Middle East: Part One. Retrieved December 22, 2017, from

<https://web.archive.org/web/20150925034217/http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/globalization-and-middle-east-part-one>

Griffel, F. (2003, January 21). Globalization and the Middle East: Part Two. Retrieved December 22, 2017, from

<https://web.archive.org/web/20030210174023/http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=771>

Springer, K. (2017, February 08). The forbidden art that's booming in Jordan. Retrieved December 22, 2017, from <http://edition.cnn.com/style/article/amman-ink-jordan-tattoo/index.html>

Dhillon, N. (2016, July 28). Middle East Youth Bulge: Challenge or Opportunity? Retrieved December 24, 2017, from <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/middle-east-youth-bulge-challenge-or-opportunity/>

Samahi, M. A. (2015, April 11). Materialism in the UAE. Retrieved December 26, 2017, from <http://gulfnews.com/your-say/your-view/materialism-in-the-uae-1.1489852>

The Economist - Unholy silence. (2015, January 27). Retrieved December 26, 2017, from <https://www.economist.com/news/international/21640747-middle-east-free-expression-rarity-blasphemy-laws-are-favoured-tools>

Mohamed, E. (Ed.). (2008, May 26). The debate on UAE national identity. Retrieved December 27, 2017, from <http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/general/the-debate-on-uae-national-identity-1.106921>

Gibbons, F. (2011, May 29). Turkey's Great Leap Forward risks cultural and environmental bankruptcy. Retrieved December 28, 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/29/turkey-nuclear-hydro-power-development>
Two Iranian Projects win the 2017 Asia- Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation. (n.d.). Retrieved December 29, 2017, from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/tehran/about-this-office/single-view/news/two_iranian_projects_win_the_2017_asia_pacific_award_for_cu/

Rouhani, B. (n.d.). DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL HERITAGE IN IRAN: Policies for an ancient country. Retrieved December 29, 2017, from <https://www.researchgate.net/file.PostFileLoader.html?id=5740824c3d7f4b0eaf4794a1&assetKey=AS%3A364208853143552%401463845565452>