

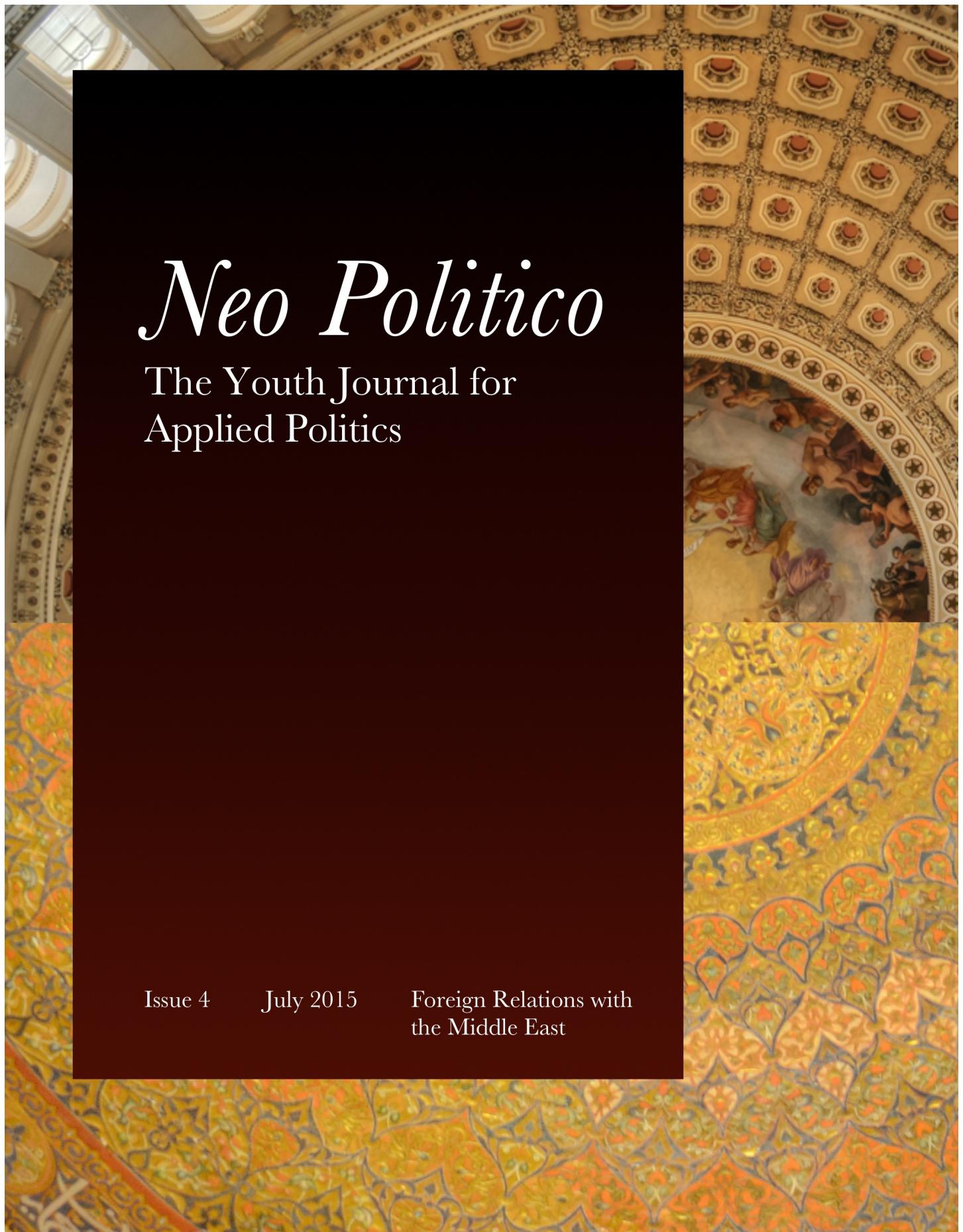
# *Neo Politico*

The Youth Journal for  
Applied Politics

Issue 4

July 2015

Foreign Relations with  
the Middle East



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## Our Philosophy

Everything is political. Everything we do is implicated in, intertwined with, and swimming through spheres of politics. Whether it is the material politics of capitalism, where certain groups of people attain more wealth at the cost of others, or the black radical politics around the U.S., we are all participants in one way or another.

While it is true that everything is political, it is also equally a lie to say politics is everything for people. It is common to find high school students hating politics, either because of a deep resentment of a politician's subject-position or because of a perceived disconnect between politics and the student. It is an undeniable trend that high school students are gradually divesting from politics. Politics is seen as an external structure that denies the student any agency in changing politics.

However, though the downward trend is strong, we can do more to give students opportunities to garner agency. Whether the politics is engaged with the stability of American democracy or the progression of a feminist group, creating spaces for students to express their agency, their energy, their opinions can go a long way towards revealing their relation to the world.

We created Neo Politico to establish that space where any student, regardless of their prior experience, can voice their opinions on certain issues. Every opinion matters because everyone matters. We only hope that more students across the entire world can join us in increasing political engagement and producing a critical consciousness of the world.

## Fashion Police Gone Wrong

Author: Winfred Darko from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

There is a country that takes fashion police to another level. In fact, there are several countries that do this: banning certain articles of clothing from view in public. Some may believe that a government which would invade the rights of an individual to the extent that it would try to control what someone wears must be the sort of government that Orwell always feared. 'It must be a country far away from Western influence,' some may believe. This is often true. But not always.

History has shown that this invasion of one's freedom is not a new thing within many Western countries, as seen with Britain's impressment of American ships, the infamous "Intolerable Acts", and the silencing of political opposition under the Alien and Sedition Acts of the late 1700s. However, what could push lawmakers to support a control of one's clothing? One answer is a variation of the same thing that has incentivized a large portion of invasions of privacy by governments: war.

Soon after the fall of the Twin Towers on the infamous date of September 11, 2001, people scrambled for answers as to who to blame. Conveniently, there was someone who took responsibility for his monstrous actions: Osama bin Laden. He was from a "foreign" place that average Americans previously did not have to worry about, which is in a region now called the Middle East. As a result of the attacks, people blamed one thing that differentiated themselves from people in this region: religion. When Osama bin Laden – and al-Qaeda, the terrorist organization he created – took responsibility for 9/11, he linked the justification of his terrorism with the religion of Islam.

Since muslims were a small percent of the U.S. population, meaning that most Americans did not know many muslims, it was easy to spread the idea that most terrorism was motivated by Islam, that Islam was a religion of pure, barbaric hatred and violence. Portions of the Quran were quoted by many non-muslims in the media to prove that Islam was a religion of violence. Soon, terrorism was often associated with being "muslim" – Non-muslim peoples are often mistaken to be muslim, because of those who do not understand that being "brown" or Middle Eastern does not mean that one is muslim. For example,

Sikhs are often mistaken to be muslim, although they are not.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this association, many muslims have faced prejudice on account of their religious (and sometimes racial) background.

This is especially the case for women who wear religious veils. For example, as one British woman – who wishes to remain anonymous – walked to pick her children up from school, several women walked up to her and began to ask her about her hijab. Then, they “pulled my headscarf off and started punching and kicking me,” she said.<sup>2</sup> Another person in the Czech Republic attacked a woman wearing a veil, trying to rip off her hijab, and threatened to cut off her head.<sup>3</sup> On a United Airlines flight, after being denied a can of unopened soda, a man told Ms. Tahera Ahmad that, “You Muslim, you need to shut the f\*\*k up... Yes you know you would use it as a weapon so shut the f\*\*k up.”<sup>4</sup>

In some places, this discrimination goes so far as making face veils illegal to wear in public. All across Europe and in other countries such as Syria and Tunisia, there has been legislation passed and enforced so that religious veils are banned.<sup>5</sup> Of course, at least in Western Europe, there is little opposition to these laws by public opinion, as shown by poll results that state that the “French public overwhelmingly endorses this measure; 82% approve of a ban on Muslim women wearing full veils in public, including schools, hospitals and government offices, while just 17% disapprove. Majorities in Germany (71%), Britain (62%) and Spain (59%) would also support a similar ban in their own countries.”<sup>6</sup> Oddly enough, the polls also show that the country that faced arguably the biggest and most influential terrorist attack in the recent history of western world, the United States, did not have as widespread support of a public religious headscarf ban, with 28 percent in support of a ban.

Throughout centuries, we have seen large amounts of the oppression of simple rights we take for granted today. Some wonder, 'How could so many people support these heinous acts against those who are only trying to live day by day and live normal lives'. In response, it is thought, 'I would hate to be on the wrong side of history'. For something as simple as allowing people to wear their religious attire, please do not go on the wrong side of the history books.

# When the Eagle Turns the Cheek: US-Saudi Relations and the Oil Curse

Author: Nicholas Duffee from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

The most controversial issue with American democracy today is the concern that money might have too much control over the working of government such that the government is no longer democratically legitimate. The foundation of the political process in the USA depends upon money in order to operate, and thus, absent regulations regarding the extent of campaign contributions, elections may be purchased by any billionaire without the consent of the American people. This is specifically detrimental not just to the rights of the people, but to the legitimacy of the United States government itself.

Concern for the American electoral process is well founded, but its fundamental thesis is one which is not commonly extrapolated to the actions of the government the aforementioned process hopes to create. Good government, one established to protect the rights of its constituents, cannot exist without the consent of the governed. This is generally accepted as a principle of democratic governments, but few attempt to hold all nations to the standard. It is one stance to argue that the foundation of a government is the people which it serves, but it seems only the next logical stance to make certain that a legitimate government only cooperates with other governments grounded in the backbone of democracy.

It is not entirely uncommon for democratic nations to denounce the existence of illegitimate governments - The European Union requires nations be wholly democratic before allowing them to enter – but the glaring exceptions to this phenomenon often have a shared characteristic which shows the lack of moral decision-making in American leaders. Oil has been blamed for sparking United States intervention in the Middle East, but the oil curse runs deeper than the actions of the United States Military.

When President Barack Obama visited India this January he made clear that the government of India had to increase its democratic participation and expand women's rights.<sup>7</sup> His next stop was Saudi

Arabia, and the leader of the free world did not make a single comment on democracy or the rights of women in one of the world's last absolute monarchies where women are legally inferior to men.<sup>8</sup> Saudi Arabia is a key ally to the United States; they are the extractive foundation of the petrodollar oil industry, and they are the largest partner in the coalition to defeat the Islamic State, but this military alliance only emerged from the already solidified economic alliance between the United States and the autocracy.<sup>9</sup> Oil is only recently starting to falter from its position as the greatest international market for the United States, but the effects of it continue to alter the way the United States interacts with some Middle Eastern nations.

Fundamentally, a government cannot claim to conduct its policies with principles if those principles are not equally applied to every entity it interacts with. Connecting the theory that government draws its power from the governed, the principles it uses are, by definition, those of its citizens. Understanding that government must equally apply its principles and that commodities such as oil are able to create a misdistribution of justice by the United States government, it is clear that the alliance between the United States and Saudi Arabia is one which violates the legitimacy of the United States as a nation.

It is clear that the United States must abandon all relations with the nation of Saudi Arabia, but it is also necessary to understand the nature of the United States and other nations. When a nation takes an exception to its morals in order to work with a productive ally, it abandons its ethical orientation towards the world and compromises its principles. Saudi Arabia is not the only nation which represents the compromised ethics of the United States in foreign policy, but it is one of the worst examples of unethical orientation.

The lack of principle held by the United States in foreign policy mirrors the control of elections domestically by corporate interests. The legitimization of the government by the people means nothing if the government itself acts against the principles prescribed to it by its constituents.

# American Relations with Syria

Author: Phillip Kadaev from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

The Syrian Civil War has ravaged the nation of Syria for over four years leaving the nation in political turmoil. The death toll of the conflict has eclipsed two hundred thousand, with over ten thousand child casualties.<sup>10</sup> Large terrorist organizations including Al-Qaeda and ISIS have flourished in the region throughout the course of the war and the United States has conducted air strikes on terrorist strongholds in the nation. The United States also suspended diplomatic relations with President Bashar al-Assad's government in March of 2014. Although United States and Syrian relations have come to light with the outbreak of the civil war, both nations have maintained complex diplomatic relations that have spanned over the course of seventy years. The current instability in Syria to some extent is dependent on earlier American involvement in Syria, which ultimately destabilized the nation and promoted anti-American sentiment.

After twenty-three years under the French mandate system, Syria obtained independence in 1943 and by 1944 the United States established diplomatic relations with the new nation. The United States and Syria had relatively cordial relations for several years, but the United States was unsatisfied with Syria's lack of democratic representation and thus supported a military coup d'état to overthrow the government. Although the coup was successful in placing pro-American Husni Zaim in power, several coups shortly followed and ended with the formation of a government more sympathetic to communism than Zaim's government. With the cooperation of Great Britain, the United States conducted Operation Straggle to topple anti-western leaders in Syria, but the plan was disrupted by Egypt's seizure of the Suez Canal. However, the United States continued its attempt to topple the new Syrian government with Operation Wappen to put pro-American Shishakli in power, but the plan was discovered and foiled by Syrian intelligence<sup>11</sup>. These series of American backed coups destabilized Syria during the early 1950s and it led to the development of anti-American sentiment in the region.

The Arab-Israeli War in 1967 marked the culmination of the deterioration of American and Syrian

relations. This conflict arose when a coalition of Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian forces invaded Israel in response to Israel's air strike of Egyptian forces. This conflict created a large rift between the governments of the United States and Syria and American and Syrian relations did not normalize until 1974. By this time President Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, had assumed total control of Syria in 1971 by overthrowing radical leader Salah Jadid. Hafez al-Assad spoke against pan-Arabism, but he stringently supported Arab protection from Israel. Although American relations with Syria during the 80's and 90's were relatively amicable, they quickly deteriorated in the early 2000's, due to Syria's inability to prevent the transit of foreign soldiers into Iraq. In addition, Syria's history of human rights violation and interference in Lebanese affairs further exacerbated tensions between Syria and the United States. However, in 2009 the Obama administration attempted to reduce regional tensions and foster Middle East peace with Syrian cooperation. Although these attempts appeared promising, the Syrian Civil War began in the March of 2011.

The Syrian Civil War eventually led to the suspension of diplomatic relations with Syria and the removal of Syrian diplomats from the United States.<sup>12</sup> The civil war began in response to the Syrian government's arrest of students who wrote "Down with the Regime" on various walls in the southern city of Dara'a. The arrest of the students led to a large movement that called for freedom of speech and an overthrow of President Assad.<sup>13</sup> The war has raged on for over four years and claimed the lives of over 200,000 people and displaced over 9 million Syrian residents. In response to the growing crisis and reports of the Syrian government's use of inhumane tactics, use of chemical weapons and human rights violations, the United States called for all Syrian diplomats to leave the United States and it suspended all relations with the Syrian government, and called for Assad's resignation. The United States government has provided nonlethal aid as well as weapon shipments to Syrian rebels to fight Assad's forces and it has conducted air raids on ISIS and Al Qaeda strongholds in Syria.<sup>14</sup>

One of the largest problems the United States faces in Syrian relations currently is that large numbers of terrorist fighters have joined the rebel ranks and thus there is great difficulty in ensuring that

weapon shipments reach non-radical rebels and does not fall into the hands of jihadists. The United States has claimed that it is only sending aid to non-radical forces, but this claim is ultimately quixotic and unrealistic. With the massive influx of terrorist fighters into the Syrian Civil War it has become virtually impossible to regulate which type of soldiers are receiving aid. Therefore, American military aid to the region is to some extent fueling the fighting. There is no simple solution to ending the Syrian Civil War; it is a highly convoluted war with various factions that include both progressive and extremist groups that fight on each side. This war began with a purpose to topple Assad's oppressive regime, but a large part of it has now become a fight for power between Assad's government, progressive rebels and Islamic extremists.

The stabilization of Syria is essential to the establishment of lasting peace within the Middle East. The Syrian war has served as a catalyst for the growth of ISIS and other terrorist organizations in the Middle East and the war has affected the economies and security of neighboring countries such as Lebanon and Iraq. Therefore, the stabilization of Syria is crucial for the stabilization of the Middle East itself. Unfortunately, the end of the Syrian Civil War does not appear to be near and there is no single solution to ending the war quickly. Currently, the United States continues to send nonlethal aid and arms to Syrian rebels and the Obama administration has pledged to send 500 million dollars in aid to Syrian insurgents.<sup>15</sup> Although humanitarian aid should be provided to Syrian civilians, weapon shipments should be halted, because the influx of weapons into the nation will not expedite the conclusion of the war, instead it will fuel the growing violence. The proliferation of terrorist organizations in Syria, pose a large threat to not only Middle Eastern security, but to global security, and thus airstrikes on terrorist strongholds must be continued. Although airstrikes are not an ideal method for fighting these terrorist organizations, they are one of the few effective ways of weakening these organizations without having to send American troops. In addition, the United States must closely work with Syria's neighbors to limit the amount of weapons that enter the country and to prevent the movement of terrorist groups and foreign mercenaries in and out of the country. As stated earlier, this civil war is a highly complex war that has no

single or correct solution and thus it is incredibly difficult to decide the appropriate course action for ending the war. American action in Syria is essential in ending the war, because the unfortunate reality is that American backed coup's in the nation in the 1950s and other Middle Eastern nations did play a role in the development of this instability that plagues Syria and neighboring countries.

The Syrian Civil War has ravaged the entire nation of Syria and it has destabilized the Middle East, and thus the United States policy of dealing with this conflict is essential in preserving global security and ending the war. The civil war has fostered the growth of several terrorist organizations in the region including ISIS and Al Qaeda, who threaten the security of the United States. The war has also displaced nearly 9 million Syrian civilians and it has become a large humanitarian crisis.<sup>16</sup> The war is highly complex and there is no single solution to quickly end it, but it is in the United States' interest for this war to end quickly and with minimal bloodshed. There is no clear or entirely correct approach to dealing with the Syrian Civil War, but the United States and other nations must continue to provide humanitarian aid and attempt to weaken the terrorist organizations in the nation. The United States must suspend its shipment of weapons to Syria, and instead adopt a policy of preventing weapons and foreign fighters from entering the country as a means to expedite the end of the war and qualify the death toll.

# **International Drones Norms: The American Legacy**

Author: Arjun Reddy from The Kinkaid Schools, TX

Drones provide a necessary tool for military use both for surveillance and combatant purposes; however, there is little international consensus about the usage of this new technology. The United States controls and deploys most of the drones, so it has the capability to establish norms and set precedents for future usage. Unfortunately, current U.S. drone use is hidden from the general public, occurs without international acceptance, and rarely achieves its intended goals. Therefore, the United States should make drone strike information open to the general public and foreign leaders and establish a judicial review process to approve future strikes. These measures are necessary to influence international usage of the expanding usage of drones and to prevent war in the Middle East.

International acquiescence of peace through mutually assured destruction has brought in an era of relative stability and supposedly prevents a large-scale conflict occurring in the middle East; however, with the introduction of drones “states may be more willing to engage in drone overflights which test the resolve of their rivals or engage in ‘salami tactics’ to see what kind of drone-led incursion, if any, will motivate a response.”<sup>17</sup> International usage of drones has steadily increased in recent years and promises to grow. Both Russia and China have been steadily increasing its drone usage, and other countries are starting to develop programs to develop drone capabilities in the Eastern hemisphere and in the Middle East.<sup>18</sup> These instances of secret drone build ups have been controversial for many nations and has already produced minor tensions and will create future skirmishes that have the potential to escalate. These confrontations are especially likely for India and Pakistan who would be tempted to secretly spy on the other’s nuclear program or arms capability.<sup>19</sup> This breach of security would erode relations and could be misinterpreted as a threat or an attack by either country. Another example is Israel who has conducted a missile strike in Lebanon to destroy Lebanon’s expensive drones.<sup>20</sup> China has flown its first stealth drone over Chengdu and has created over 900 different types of drones for different purposes, indicating its intention to use drones to monitor China Sea Islands.<sup>21</sup> These Islands currently have territorial disputes

with Japan, Taiwan, and Philippines and secret drone monitoring could certainly be seen as aggressive suspicions by any of the three countries and lead to future strife. The process of drone build up and its usage without other countries knowing leads to preemptive warfare and international tensions.

Currently, “the behavior of the United States right now is structuring how the world will think about, build and use drones for the foreseeable future. Given this, U.S. policymakers should perhaps devote a touch more attention to the precedent they’re setting.”<sup>22</sup> If the U.S. would map out a strategy of judicial review and create a procedure that made the usage of drones transparent, then it would be establishing new norms in the field of drones that other countries would be willing to follow because they still lack regulations. Furthermore, other countries have justification for unregulated drone strikes because they follow the U.S.’s example. A U.S. representative told the U.N. assembly that the U.S. justifies its secret strikes because it is a “key military power [and is] facing a unique threat from transnational terrorist networks.”<sup>23</sup> This arbitrary justification allows other countries to claim similar motives, especially when Middle Eastern countries are bordered by terrorist organizations like ISIL and Al-Qaeda and are surrounded by countries they believe are illegitimate.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore the new rise in drones is a change from the current approach to international law because there is a lack of regulations on this new form of technology. Even if the killings do in fact work, “Without a new doctrine for the use of drones that is understandable to friends and foes, the United States risk achieving near-term tactical benefits in killing terrorists while incurring potentially significant long-term costs to its alliances, global public opinion, the war on terrorism and international stability.”<sup>25</sup> There are rules and regulations for what happens for a downed pilot and manned aircraft, but not so for unmanned vehicles like drones.<sup>26</sup> “Absent a clear norm... incidents involving drones could snowball quickly. And that is why the United States should develop a clear policy about the targeting of drones. It should be designed to prevent united escalation.”<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, because the U.S. is neither transparent nor accountable, we lose sway with our allies.<sup>28</sup> If we would like to restrict future illegal and war-likely drone operations by foreign countries through U.N.

rulings or international pressure, it would be very hard to create such appeals when we carry out the same procedures that we would like to prevent.<sup>29</sup> This is because the current U.S. policy on drones, “significantly diminishes the moral authority of the US to condemn similar tactics used by other states, whether against rebellious populations in their own territory or enemies abroad.”<sup>30</sup> This means when China conducts drone strikes or creates surveillance drones, the U.S. does not have the authority to condemn them because they use similar tactics. Furthermore there have been many incidents from attacks made by Iran in Syria conducted secretly, to Russia’s messing with gas lines in Ukraine and Georgia, to Turkey’s usage of a predator to kill Kurdish militants. These all came from the vague justification of terrorism, and they could all say they learned these tactics by pointing to the United States conduct similar drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> In order regain influence with other countries to prevent a new arms (or drones) race, we would need to maintain an accountable procedure ourselves, which would show other nations how drones can be responsibly used. If we plan to expand our capabilities, we must do so openly. An arms race traditionally happens when we pursue advanced military capabilities, and other countries suspect us of doing so, so they also build up more arms; conversely, if we make the usage of drones transparent, other countries won’t be as alarmed and preemptively build up.

The current process is not neutral and is determined by and justifies breaking the Constitution in times of distress. Although this shift away from the law may be justified due to threats of terrorism, it is harmful because it sets the precedent that the Constitution can be broken. “The political branches may switch the constitution on or off at will would lead to a regime in which they, not the Court, say what the law is.”<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, allowing only the president to determine whose life through targeted killings is clearly unconstitutional because this act violates the separation of powers of three branches and destroys foreign credibility. Attacks would be more meaningful and not cause unnecessary deaths or irritate the countries if we got strikes approved by a judicial review and it was revealed both to the U.S. public and to the countries, which the attacks are conducted in, there would be too many problems. Countries believe that secret targeted killings violate international law, cause human rights violations, and intrude on

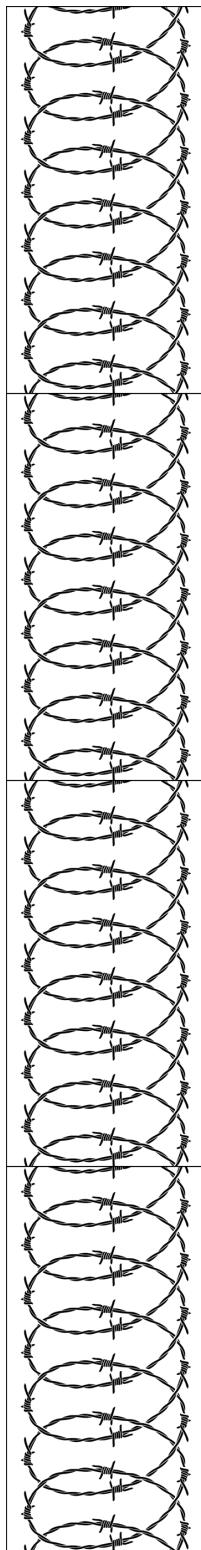
democratic freedoms which deters from U.S legitimacy. Other countries become skeptical of the U.S.'s claim to bring or instill democracy when it is one of the biggest violators of such a principal. Maintaining U.S hegemony without the power of legitimacy breeds foreign distrust and causes violent transitions; only through establishing an open, reviewed process can we further achieve peace in the ever-changing technological world of ours.

July

# “The Fence”

Author: Jason Qu from the Bronx High School of Science, NY

There was a fence between us...it was tall, and adorned with barbed wire and Arabic graffiti reading words like horaiya and peace signs and curses and blessings and love letters. It was built when I was younger but my parents tell me it has always been there. Arab only. Israeli only. The fence never looked very large when I was younger, not even when my cousin, was killed trying to cross it to Jerusalem, not even when my grandfather was denied a permit to Amman to visit my sick grandmother, not even when my mother was in labor and crying because they wouldn't let her drive to Bethlehem. But now that I am alone, and must work, and must eat, and must breathe the air of my land, the fence seems like a mountain. It keeps coming close and closer until I suffocate, until I feel like I can no longer live but somehow I do. On the other side of the fence are guns, but behind those guns, are happy children and men and women with jobs and families. Why don't they see us behind this fence? Why do they hate us? I hate this dreaded fence.



There was a fence between us...it was tall, and adorned with barbed wire and it was covered in Hebrew graffiti reading words like shalom and peace signs and curses and blessings and love letters. It was built when I was younger but my parents tell me it has always been there. Israeli only. Arab only. The fence never looked very large when I was younger, not even when someone threw a stone over it and it gave my uncle a concussion, not even when I had to stop seeing my friends because my parents said they didn't belong on this side of the fence, not even when someone threw rocks at my classmates on our way to school. But now that I am grown up, and must work, and must speak, and must think for myself, the fence seems like a restless ocean, we can never pass it and it can never be broken no matter how hard we try to navigate it. On the other side of the fence are guns, and behind those guns, are restless children, and angry men and women. Why don't they see us behind this fence? Why do they hate us? I hate this dreaded fence.

Inner Dome of the U.S. Capitol Building: (on front cover)  
<http://wallpapers.fansshare.com/gallery/photos/13709571/capitol-rotunda-mm/?displaying>

Outer Dome of the U.S. Capitol Building: (on back cover)  
USCapitol. *U.S. Capitol Dome*. October 13, 2011. Wikimedia Public Domain.

Inner Dome of the Dome of the Rock: (on front cover)  
<http://imgkid.com/the-dome-of-the-rock-interior.shtml>

Outer Dome of the Dome of the Rock: (on back cover)  
Werner, Berthold. *Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock seen from the roof of the Austrian Hospice*. November 11, 2008.  
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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

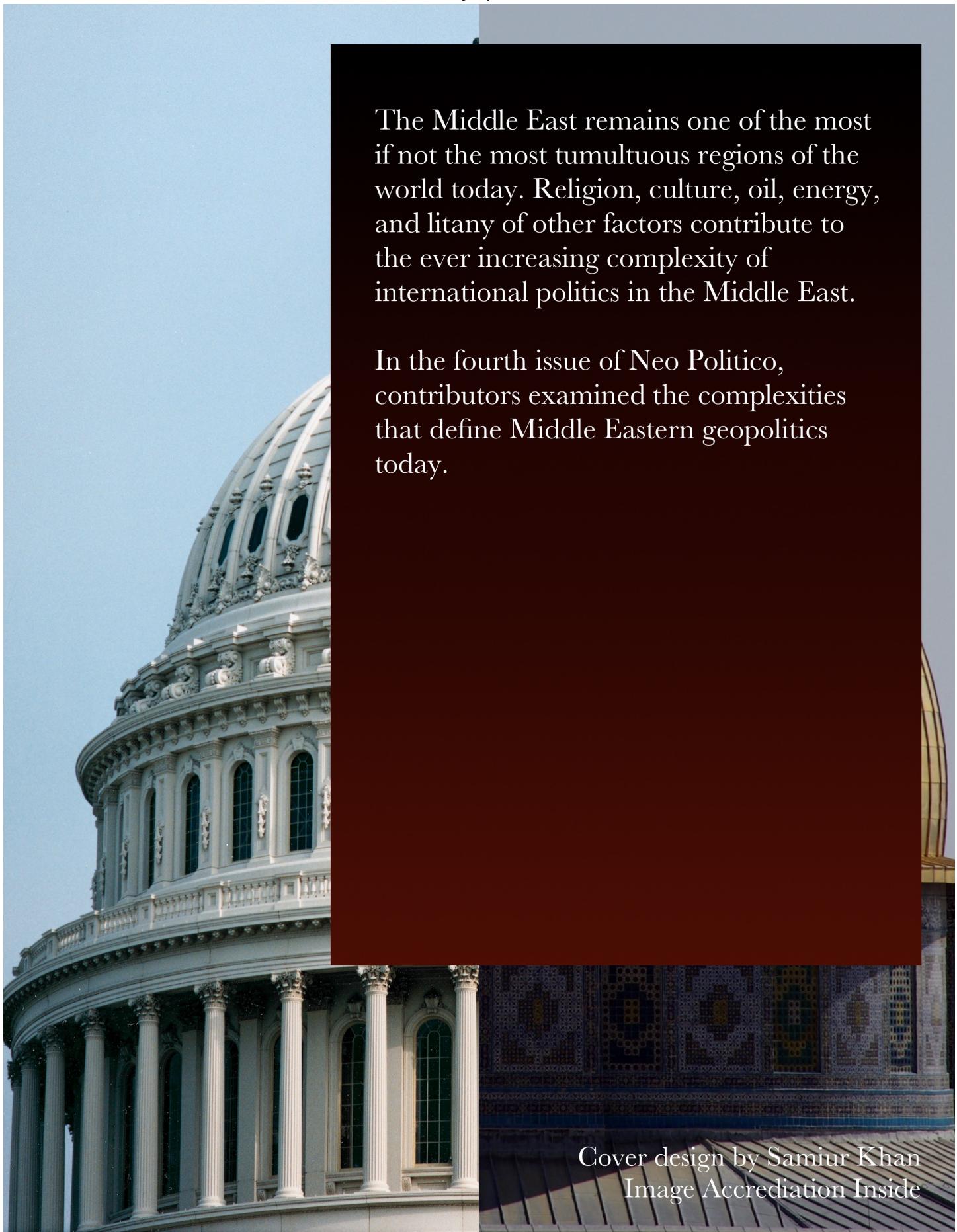
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The Middle East remains one of the most if not the most tumultuous regions of the world today. Religion, culture, oil, energy, and litany of other factors contribute to the ever increasing complexity of international politics in the Middle East.

In the fourth issue of Neo Politico, contributors examined the complexities that define Middle Eastern geopolitics today.

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