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# *The long-term geopolitics of the pre-modern Middle East*

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## **Abstract**

*The geopolitical shape of the Middle East has varied greatly over time. This article is concerned with the period from Late Antiquity to the end of the eighteenth century, during which four basic configurations succeeded each other. Late Antiquity was marked by the coexistence of two large empires, one based in the western Middle East and the other in the eastern Middle East; the early Islamic period saw the dominance of a single empire the location of whose centre was unstable; the medieval period was characterised by the absence of large and lasting empires and a shifting plurality of smaller states; finally in the Ottoman period we see the renewed dominance of a single empire, now based in the western Middle East. Are these changes to be seen as random fluctuations, or can they be explained in terms of a small number of underlying factors? The point of this article is to argue that a focus on the potential imperial heartlands of the Middle East can help us to explain much—though not all—of the changing geopolitical configuration of the region.*

The Middle East today is made up of sixteen states, more or less.<sup>1</sup> The exact number depends on what is to count as a state; as I write, an entity that calls itself one is seeking to erase the border between Syria and Iraq, and achieving some success in this enterprise. Most of the region is currently composed of well-defined middling-sized states, but there are also two clusters of small states, one in the southern Levant and the other along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf. What we do *not* find in the Middle East as now constituted is a giant state. In comparative terms this absence is striking. The contemporary world contains several such states—the United States, Brazil, Russia, China, and India. At the same time the Middle Eastern past provides further examples, the three Iranian empires of pre-Islamic times based in the east, and the Roman—later Byzantine—Empire based in the west; and this despite the fact that in those days long-distance communications were much harder to sustain. In short, in historical terms the geopolitical make-up of the Middle East is highly contingent.

This raises an obvious question for historians: to what extent can we hope to explain the changing geopolitical configuration of the Middle East? Is it just chaos, or can we identify some factors that help us to make sense of the changes? Is there just the noise of one thing

<sup>1</sup>An earlier version of this article was the basis of one of the Merle Curti Lectures which I gave in 2014 at the University of Wisconsin, where David taught for many years. I am indebted to Timothy May for his comments on a draft.

after another, or is there a causal signal? In an attempt to answer this question, I propose in this essay to survey some fifteen hundred years of Middle Eastern history, starting in Late Antiquity and ending in the eighteenth century.<sup>2</sup> For this purpose I shall divide the history of the Middle East over this time-span into four periods. In other words I shall range over time with the same abandon that historians of the Mongol empire—not least the honoree of this *Festschrift*—range over space.<sup>3</sup>

### Late Antiquity

Some things about Late Antiquity are horribly complicated—the recurrent Christological disputes, for example. By contrast, the geopolitical configuration of the Middle East in this period is bracingly simple. In the first place, there are two and only two empires, the Byzantine in the west and the Persian in the east, and not much else—just some client states that don't last, mostly in the north, and a vast expanse of desert inhabited by Arab tribes to the south.<sup>4</sup> In the second place, this configuration is remarkably stable. It holds up from the mid-fourth century to the end of the sixth; indeed, if we are prepared to overlook the shift of the Roman capital from Rome to Constantinople, we can think of the two-empire pattern as having been stable since the second century BC, ever since the Parthians moved into Mesopotamia and the Romans into the Levant. That's a pattern with a very long shelf-life—some seven centuries.

Another way to make this point is to note the three things that are conspicuously *not* happening in this geopolitical epoch. First, while we have recurrent wars between the two empires, down to the end of the sixth century there is no war to the death, no war in which the winner takes all or even most; the two-empire configuration proves very resilient. Second, if we set aside the move of the Roman capital in the fourth century, the location of the heartlands of the two empires shows no serious signs of instability. Third, we have no instance of the familiar historical phenomenon of imperial disintegration—the process whereby an empire breaks up into a plurality of independent states.

What accounts for this two-empire pattern and its stability? At least part of the answer is easy: there were two and only two potential imperial heartlands in the Middle East of Late Antiquity. We are looking for regions characterised by the massive agricultural wealth that enables a state to extract a substantial fiscal surplus without too much effort, and thereby put itself in a position to pay for a large army and bureaucracy. One region that met this

<sup>2</sup>From time to time I will refer to configurations as far back as Achaemenid times, but no further. The geopolitics of the region before the coming of the Medes and Persians were clearly different, and I make no attempt to cover them in this essay, even in asides. See, for example, P. R. Bedford, "The Neo-Assyrian Empire", in I. Morris and W. Scheidel (ed.), *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2009), p. 30.

<sup>3</sup>One consequence of this is that many of the claims I make in this article will be left unfootnoted. Even where I do give supporting references, I make no attempt to be comprehensive in citing relevant literature.

<sup>4</sup>This desert is just the kind of territory that the second-century historian Appian of Alexandria tells us that a sensible empire would *not* wish to rule; from an imperial perspective it was populated by "barbarian tribes, which are poor and unprofitable" (*Appian's Roman History with an English Translation by Horace White* (London 1912–13), vol. I, pp. 10–11, quoted in K. Hopkins, "The political economy of the Roman Empire", in I. Morris and W. Scheidel (ed.), *The Dynamics of Ancient Empires: State Power from Assyria to Byzantium* (Oxford, 2009), p. 185). As to the client states, the kingdoms of the Albanians, Armenians, Georgians, Ghassānids, and Lakhmids had all disappeared before the rise of Islam.

description was western Anatolia and the south-eastern Balkans; thanks to what by Middle Eastern standards is a relatively privileged supply of rainfall, this region could form the heartland of the Byzantine Empire. Another privileged region was Mesopotamia, whose twin rivers made possible a highly intensive irrigation agriculture; the standard formula for an Iranian empire since Achaemenid times had been to combine the manpower of Iran with the tax-power of Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> There was also a third such region, Egypt, but we will see later why it was not a plausible imperial heartland.

The two heartlands certainly do something to explain the stability of the two-empire configuration. But it remains surprising, for the simple reason that the Middle East wasn't big enough for two empires. To be secure an empire needs to surround itself with loose packaging—seas, client states, no-man's-lands, wildernesses inhabited by tribes too fragmented to be likely to pose a serious threat. But in the Middle East of Late Antiquity we have two empires cheek by jowl. The mountains of the north and the deserts of the south could at least be relied on to impede the movement of armies, but this cannot be said of the plains of the Fertile Crescent: here the two empires were eyeball to eyeball, with the Sasanian capital uncomfortably close to the Byzantine frontier. In other words, there must always have been a potential for a cataclysmic struggle between the empires that would destabilise the two-empire pattern. The surprise is that it did not happen till the early seventh century. But it happened then with a vengeance, marking the end of Late Antiquity.

### **The early Islamic period**

What we see in the early Islamic period—from the seventh to the ninth century—is that all three things that had not been happening in Late Antiquity now happened one after the other.

First, as just indicated, there was the war between the empires of 604–28. It could have been just a repeat of previous wars, except that the Persian ruler Khusraw II developed the ambition to take all and hold it. Even then, when he failed, his Byzantine antagonist Heraclius showed no signs of the same ambition—he was content to bring about regime change in the Persian Empire and go home. But a generation of warfare had wrought havoc in the empires and prepared the way for one of the great Black Swan Events of history: the Arab—and Muslim—conquests. It was thus to be the Caliphate that came out of the wars of the seventh century as the winner that took possession of the lion's share of the Middle East.

Second, this new empire showed acute instability in the location of its heartland, which shifted twice in the course of prolonged civil wars. Its original heartland was the Ḥijāz, because it was in this stateless wilderness that Muḥammad had founded his state; but once the Arabs had conquered rich territories outside Arabia, the Ḥijāz had neither the manpower nor the tax-power to sustain its role. Unsurprisingly, it had never been the centre of an empire

<sup>5</sup>The complementarity was already alluded to by Cyrus the Great, if we are to believe Herodotus: "Soft lands breed soft men; wondrous fruits of the earth and valiant warriors grow not from the same soil" (Herodotus IX. 122; Greek text and English translation in *Herodotus with an English Translation by A. D. Godley* (London, 1946–50), vol. IV, pp. 300–301).

before, and would never be again.<sup>6</sup> The heartland then shifted to Syria, and remained there for the best part of a century under the rule of the Umayyad Caliphs. This made sense in terms of the presence of significant numbers of Arab troops who were kept on their toes by their proximity to the Byzantine frontier; it also made sense in that Syria is not a wilderness, but rather a land of at least Mediterranean agriculture. But like much of the territory adjoining the Mediterranean, Syria is too hilly, not to say mountainous, to be a good place to collect taxes. It had only been the centre of an empire once before, in the days of the early Seleucids; even then, the real basis of their empire while it lasted was Mesopotamia, and once they lost it they no longer ranked as an imperial power. In the same way, Syria was never to be the centre of an empire again.<sup>7</sup> But to return to the Caliphate: in the middle of the eighth century the heartland moved once more, when an army hailing from north-east Iran—and shaped by its proximity to the Central Asian frontier—established the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate in Mesopotamia, or as we can now call it, Iraq. So at this point the Caliphate had finally restored the pattern that had worked so well for the old Iranian empires: the combination of military manpower from Iran with the tax-power of Iraq. We might accordingly have anticipated several centuries of stability for the new configuration, but this was not to be.

Third, after about a century of ‘Abbāsīd rule the new empire started to disintegrate. As always there are many stories to be told here, but there is one underlying fact that makes wider sense of them: our sources report a sharp downturn in the fiscal yield of Iraq in the second half of the ninth century—the result, no doubt, of a drastic downturn in agricultural production.<sup>8</sup> This was surely linked to the long-term vulnerability of the Iraqi agricultural system, in contrast to the much more robust Egyptian system: bad drainage meant loss of agricultural productivity through salination, and good management of the system required good government.<sup>9</sup> Just why this potential for disaster should have been realised in the later ninth century and not before is far from obvious. But the fact that it was realised then does much to explain why the ‘Abbāsīd empire, unlike the Iranian empires of the past, now started to disintegrate.

So by the end of the early Islamic period all three things that were not happening in Late Antiquity had happened, ushering in a very different geopolitical pattern.

### The medieval period

We now confront five or six centuries of instability and fragmentation, lasting more or less from the tenth century to the fifteenth. It would make no sense in an essay such as this to

<sup>6</sup>The widespread recognition of Ibn al-Zubayr while he resided in Mecca as Caliph during the civil war of the 680s constitutes an exception, but a transient one, and in terms of the exercise of real power doubtless a hollow one. See G. R. Hawting, *The First Dynasty of Islam: The Umayyad Caliphate AD 661–750* (London, 1986), pp. 48–49.

<sup>7</sup>Thanks to the Zangids it served a crucial role in the twelfth century as a stepping stone from the Seljūq empire based in Iran to the Ayyūbid empire (if we can call it that) based in Egypt, but the Zangid state was not itself an empire.

<sup>8</sup>D. Waines, “The Third Century Internal Crisis of the Abbasids”, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, XX (1977), pp. 286–287. As Waines aptly comments, “Iraq had lost its primacy in the empire as a source of revenue”.

<sup>9</sup>For a concise discussion of the Iraqi irrigation system and the damage it sustained in this period, see Waines, “The Third Century Internal Crisis of the Abbasids”, pp. 287–295.

tell the geopolitical history of this period as a story; instead let us pick out four basic features that characterise these centuries.

The first is the absence of any state based in the eastern Middle East that was *both large and lasting*. There were indeed large states, like those of the Seljūqs, the Īlkhāns, and Tīmūr, but unlike that of the Sāsānians, none of these remained an empire for more than a few decades. Likewise there were lasting states like that of the Artuqids, but they were not large.<sup>10</sup> This pattern is not hard to explain. There was still plenty of military manpower in the eastern Middle East, particularly when the steppe nomads moved into Iran, but the tax-power of Iraq was no longer there to support them in the old style. This reflects the fact that the Iraqi downturn of the later ninth century had turned out to be permanent, as Iraq changed from a land of tax-paying peasants to one of tax-resistant tribesmen; this meant the downsizing of any state that cared to base itself on Iraq, and the elimination of the one potential imperial heartland in the eastern Middle East.

The second feature of the period was the loss—not in this case permanent—of the potential imperial heartland of the western Middle East. This was a very different story. It is an obvious feature of the Byzantine heartland that its Anatolian and Balkan territories were divided by sea—not much sea, but enough to constitute a significant impediment to the projection of military power.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, both parts of the heartland were exposed to a serious danger of invasion by land—Anatolia from the east and the Balkans from the north. Putting these two things together, it follows that the two parts of the heartland could easily come to be in different hands. And that is more or less what was to happen in the medieval period: once the Slavs had taken the Balkans and the Turks Anatolia, Constantinople was left looking more like a city state than an imperial capital. Until someone could cross the sea in force and reunite the heartland, there would be no large and lasting empire in the western Middle East either.

The third feature of the period follows straightforwardly from the fact that both potential imperial heartlands were now out of service. This meant that the Middle East had neither a single geopolitical center nor a pair of such centers; instead, it displayed a polycentric and unstable configuration, a confusing and shifting array of regional states. This is accordingly where most of the Middle Eastern states covered by the handbooks of Islamic dynasties are concentrated.<sup>12</sup> The kind of analysis attempted in this paper cannot, of course, explain the specifics of this period, but it does shed light on its general character.

The fourth feature is by way of being a qualification of the third. The general conditions of the period made it possible for Egypt to assume a higher profile than it usually did. In one way Egypt looked like an ideal imperial heartland: it was a tax-collector's paradise, with great agricultural wealth laid out along an optimal system of water transport. And yet pre-modern Egypt never served as the heartland of a large empire. Historically Egypt tended to play one of two roles. One was to be a province in someone else's empire, with its agricultural

<sup>10</sup>For the longevity of the Artuqids in the Jazīra—from around 1101 to 1409—see the entry on the dynasty in C. E. Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties: A Chronological and Genealogical Manual* (New York, 1996), no. 96.

<sup>11</sup>A telling detail is the fact that five hundred Turks who crossed the Dardanelles in the early fourteenth century to join the Catalans in raiding in Thrace then found themselves stuck for two years on the European side of the straits, unable to cross back (*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, second edition (Leiden, 1960–2009), vol. II, p. 983, in the article “Gelibolu” (H. İnalçık)).

<sup>12</sup>See Bosworth, *The New Islamic Dynasties*, Chapters 4–6, 9–12, 14.

wealth siphoned off—whether in grain or in cash—by its imperial rulers.<sup>13</sup> This was its situation from the first century BC till the ninth century AD, and again from the sixteenth century to the eighteenth. Its other role, which it could play only in the absence of a lasting and expansive empire elsewhere in the Middle East, was as the locus of an independent state; this was its situation from the late ninth to the early sixteenth century. During this period the rulers of Egypt typically sought to secure their position by extending their power as best they could to Syria, and adding some territories sheltered by geography from the armies of the northern Middle East—such as the Ḥijāz, Yemen, or Nubia. But once they had done this their posture was fundamentally defensive; there is no sign of the explosive military power that we see so often in the northern Middle East, no Egyptian conquest of Anatolia, Iraq, or Iran. Thus the invasion of eastern Anatolia by the Mamlūk sultan Baybars was short-lived,<sup>14</sup> and even the Jazīra was usually beyond the reach of the rulers of Egypt. This is easily explained. We are in the age of the cavalry, and Egypt was not a horse's paradise; it was bereft of the pastureland that makes it so convenient to raise horses in the steppes, and so easy for those who tend them there to become expert riders from an early age.<sup>15</sup> Nor was there better horse country on either flank of Egypt, only desert and the occasional oasis—in contrast to the position of Iraq with the uplands of Iran running alongside it. The result was that Egyptian states in this period regularly imported their cavalry from outside the country; in the case of the Mamlūks, for example, they were importing it all the way from the steppes, a practice that was both expensive and insecure. The result was to impose a low ceiling on the size of Egyptian cavalry armies, perhaps normally something well below twenty thousand.<sup>16</sup> By the standards of the northern Middle East, such armies were distinctly small.<sup>17</sup> It is thus no accident that Egypt's one truly imperial moment in its entire history came with the age of the infantry, when Meḥmed 'Alī in the early decades of the nineteenth century was able to create explosive military power by recruiting large numbers of native Egyptians into the army—for the first time since the age of the Ptolemies.<sup>18</sup> The result was

<sup>13</sup>For indication of the extent of this exploitation in the sixteenth-century Ottoman context, see H. İnalcık and D. Quataert (ed.), *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300–1914* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 82–83, 540. We have no comparable data for Late Antiquity.

<sup>14</sup>Baybars left Aleppo early in April 1277 and was back in Syria in mid-May (R. Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: The Mamluk-Ilkhānid War, 1260–1281* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 168, 175–176).

<sup>15</sup>Syria was far better endowed with pastureland than Egypt, but a letter addressed by Hülegü to Louis IX in 1262 implies that the limited extent of Syrian pasturage was a constraint on Mongol military activity there (D. O. Morgan, “The Mongols in Syria, 1260–1300”, in P. W. Edbury (ed.), *Crusade and Settlement* (Cardiff, 1985), p. 233; for a translation of the passage, see R. Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260–1335)* (Turnhout, 2013), p. 30. Compare the Turcoman abandonment of Syria in the 1090s (C. Cahen, “The Turkish Invasion: The Selchūkids”, in *A History of the Crusades*, (ed.) K. M. Setton (Madison, 1969–89), vol. 1, Chapter 5, pp. 164–165).

<sup>16</sup>For the figures given in the sources for the number of Royal *mamlūks* under the Mamlūk Sultanate see D. Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army”, in D. Ayalon, *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt (1250–1517)* (London, 1977), pp. 222–228; for the numbers of *mamlūks* of Amīrs, see Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army—II”, in the same volume, pp. 462–464; and for figures for the size of the Mamlūk army as a whole, see Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army—III”, in the same volume, pp. 70–73. The highest total figure with any credibility is 24,000 horsemen, given by Maqrīzī for 1315–16 (Ayalon, “Studies on the Structure of the Mamluk Army—III”, p. 70).

<sup>17</sup>For figures relating to Mongol armies, see D. O. Morgan, “The Mongol Armies in Persia”, *Der Islam*, LVI (1979), pp. 82–88 (where the surprise is the small size of Seljūq armies).

<sup>18</sup>For the role of native Egyptians in the armies of the Ptolemies, see A. B. Lloyd, “The Ptolemaic Period (332–30 BC)”, in I. Shaw (ed.), *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 401–402. For the exclusion

not just to revive the earlier presence of Egyptian military power in the Ḥijāz, the Sūdān, and Syria; Egyptian armies now reached the Morea and, at one point, central Anatolia. Indeed at that moment only the intervention of powers located outside the Middle East prevented an Egyptian capture of the Ottoman centre. But that takes us outside the chronological limits of this essay.

### **The Ottoman period**

Our final period runs from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, and here the pattern changed again.

The major development in the western Middle East was the geopolitical reconstitution of the Byzantine Empire of Late Antiquity by the Ottomans. The Slavs of the Balkans had shown no sign of crossing the sea to take over western Anatolia; instead it was the Turks of Anatolia, under Ottoman leadership, who took over the Balkans. With the old imperial heartland once more under a single management, the Ottomans went on to conquer Syria and Egypt, which came again to be ruled from Constantinople, or as we can now call it, Istanbul. As in Late Antiquity, this was to prove a stable configuration: despite the decentralisation that set in at the end of the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire did not disintegrate over this period of three centuries in the manner of the ‘Abbāsīd empire.

What then of the eastern Middle East? The basic factor here was the permanence of the Iraqī downturn, so that while the western heartland had now been reconstituted, there was no analogous development in the east. This had two main consequences.

The first was a downsized Iran. For a few years at the beginning of the sixteenth century the Ṣafawīd state was large, but it soon showed itself unable to stand up to the Ottomans and even the Özbegs. Potentially its best provinces were Azerbaijan and Khurāsān, but their proximity to those two hostile powers effectively denied the Ṣafawīds the fiscal benefit of them. The very fact that Azerbaijan was now located on a major frontier as a result of the early loss of eastern Anatolia marks a significant—and permanent—geopolitical change.<sup>19</sup> Iraq too was for some decades part of the Ṣafawīd domains. Though fiscally no longer worth much, its fate nevertheless provides another striking illustration of a balance of power very different from that of Late Antiquity: the Ottomans, based the best part of a thousand miles away, were able to reach over and take Iraq more or less permanently from the Ṣafawīds, despite the fact that they were based just next door in Iran; by contrast, from the tenth century down to the early sixteenth, just as in the days of the Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sāsānians, it had been axiomatic that anyone who ruled Iran could help himself to Iraq. Of course even in the Ottoman period an Iranian ruler of unusual military talent and energy could shift the balance of power, as in the cases of Shāh ‘Abbās in the early seventeenth century and Nādir Shāh in the eighteenth; but in each case the pendulum soon swung back.

The other major consequence was that the Arabs of eastern Arabia were left pretty much to their own devices; until the arrival of British naval power in the nineteenth century, no

of Egyptians from the Roman legions, see R. K. Ritner, “Egypt under Roman Rule: The Legacy of Ancient Egypt”, in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*, (ed.) C. F. Petry and M. W. Daly (Cambridge, 1998), vol. I, p. 6.

<sup>19</sup>See D. Morgan, *Medieval Persia 1040–1797* (London 1988), p. 117.

state played the long-term hegemonic role of the Persian Empire of Late Antiquity. This made for a very fragmented political geography along the southern coast of the Persian Gulf, and at the same time left space for an unlikely historical development, the rise of the Saudi state in the eastern Arabian interior.

The result was to intensify an effect that was already favoured by the rainfall map of the Middle East—the fact that, overall, the further east you go the more arid it gets.<sup>20</sup> As the Middle East entered the nineteenth century, the state was a much stronger institution in the western Middle East than it was in the eastern Middle East—a difference strikingly illustrated by the contrasting histories of the Ottoman Empire and Iran.

### Conclusion

Before concluding, it may be worth a brief sally beyond the chronological limits of this essay to link the analysis to modern times. The overall story here is the impact of the rise of Europe on the geopolitics of the Middle East and the ways in which this has favoured the relative fragmentation that characterises the map of the region today. But the process was very different in the western Middle East from what it was in the eastern Middle East.

In the western Middle East, the story is the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. This took place in two stages. In the first stage the European impact was indirect, and led to the effective independence of Egypt in the early nineteenth century. The key developments here were the rise of Egyptian cotton exports, giving Meḥmed 'Alī unusual wealth, and the coming of the age of the infantry, which made it possible for him to form the most powerful army in the region by recruiting the Egyptian peasantry. The British occupation of Egypt in 1882 merely confirmed this effective detachment of Egypt from the Empire. In the second stage the European impact was direct, involving the deliberate detachment of the Levant from the Anatolian rump of the Empire in the aftermath of the First World War, and its division into four distinct states.

In the eastern Middle East, apart from the creation of an independent state of Iraq, the effect of the European impact was not to create new fragmentation but rather to preserve an already fragmented landscape. Iran remained pretty much as it was, on its southern flank at least; the petty chieftaincies of the south coast of the Persian Gulf were frozen; and room was still left for the Saudi state to wax and wane in the hinterland. All this was to prove vitally important for the geopolitics of oil: had there been an eastern empire analogous to the old Iranian empires, the great bulk of Middle Eastern oil would have been within the frontiers of a single state.

The general conclusion of this essay can be stated much more briefly. There was no lack of noise in the geopolitical history we have surveyed. Naturally the advent of invaders from outside the Middle East—be they steppe nomads or European powers—cannot be satisfactorily explained in endogenous terms. At the same time there were significant factors at work within the Middle East that are not covered by the framework of this essay. For example, outstanding rulers—a Baybars or a Nādir Shāh—could temporarily disturb the patterns we

<sup>20</sup>More precisely, the aridity gradient runs from the north west to the south east: very little of Turkey is desert, whereas most of Saudi Arabia is.



have detected. More lasting was the effect of religion, whose role was central to the Black Swan Event that created the Caliphate. But this survey has shown that despite the noise there is a signal: at least some of the story makes sense if we focus our attention on the location and condition of the Middle East's potential imperial heartlands. <[mcook@princeton.edu](mailto:mcook@princeton.edu)>

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