

NEW MIDDLE EAST SOURCES

İlker Aytürk
Kian Byrne
Sam Hirst
Onur İşçi
Barın Kayoğlu
Guy Laron
Asher Orkaby
Christian Ostermann
Or Rabinowitz
Sergey Radchenko
Daniela Richterova

Conference Proceedings



History and Public
Policy Program



CENTER FOR
RUSSIAN STUDIES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Summary	3
Conference Program	4
Asher Orkaby	5
Sergei Radchenko	6
Ori Rabinowitz	7
Daniela Richterova	8
Barın Kayaoğlu	9
Guy Laron	10
İlker Aytürk	11
Onur İşçi	12
Samuel J. Hirst	14

SUMMARY

On 17-18 October 2019, the **Bilkent Center for Russian Studies** hosted a two-day international conference on the Cold War in the Middle East, organized together with the U.S. Congress-chartered **Wilson Center**. Prominent academics from Iraq, Israel, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States gathered to discuss a range of subjects, from Carlos the Jackal to the Yom Kippur War, and the civil war in Yemen.



The conference, entitled “**New Middle East Sources**,” illustrated the importance of regional players during this critical period, including Israel’s role in

Reagan’s Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) and Iran’s ordeal during the late Cold War period. The first day of the conference (17 October) was open to public and was attended by academics, graduate students, and diplomats. One of the three panels examined Turkish domestic politics during the Cold War and Ankara’s interactions with Moscow.

The second day of the conference (18 October) included closed-sessions amongst conference participants that explored recently declassified diplomatic records from various countries’ archives and possible venues of cooperation between state archivists and historians.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Session I (Opening Remarks)

9:30-10:30 a.m.

Erinç A. Veldan (Bilkent University)
Christian Ostermann (Wilson Center)
Kian Byrne (Wilson Center)

Session II

11:00-12:30 a.m.

Moderator: Onur İççi (Bilkent University)

Sergey Radchenko (Cardiff University)
The Yom Kippur War: New Evidence on the Soviet Involvement in the Middle East in October 1973

Daniela Richterova (Brunel University London)
Liaison Behind the Iron Curtain: Carlos the Jackal and Middle Eastern Diplomats

Asher Orkaby (Princeton University)
Revisiting a Civil War in Yemen: From the Individual to the International

Session III

2:00-3:30 p.m.

Moderator: Eliza Gheorghe (Bilkent University)

Barrin Kayoojju (American University of Iraq in Sulaimani)
Iran's Cold War: From Weak Client State to Ambitious Regional Hegemon to Proud and Able Pariah

Guy Laron (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Soviet Involvement in the War of Attrition (1969-1970)

Or Rabinowitz (Hebrew University of Jerusalem)
Israel's Participation in Reagan's SDI: 'It's a long, long road?'

Session IV

4:00-5:30 p.m.

Moderator: Christian Ostermann (Wilson Center)

İlker Aytürk (Bilkent University)
Islam, Labor and Socialism in Turkey: The Cold War Legacy

Onur İççi (Bilkent University)
Non-Aligned? Turkish Diplomacy and the Cold War

Sam Hirst (Bilkent University)
Soviet Oil for Turkish Oranges: Early Soviet Economic Involvement in the Middle East

Asher Orkaby

Princeton University

Revisiting a Civil War in Yemen: From the Individual to the International

When Yemen's centuries-old Imamate was overthrown in 1962, the country was overrun by dozens of foreign militaries, clandestine services, international organizations, corporations, missionaries, and individuals seeking to achieve political victories, financial gain, or personal adventure. A pivotal part of Middle East history that involved this great a number of actors should also be documented through an international history that makes an effort to incorporate a wide range of voices in order to recreate the diplomatic circles, local intrigue, and regional tensions that dominated the 1960s in Yemen. Beginning with the Yemeni presidential archives and the memoirs of Egyptian military leadership, my recent book on the Yemen Civil War spans relevant global archives including the Canadian Royal Airforce, the UN, the Soviet Foreign Ministry, the personal papers of British mercenaries, missionary records, and the personal archive of the deposed Imam's self-appointed secretary of communication. Rather than simply a showcase of "who's who in Yemen during the 1960s", the use of remote and relatively inaccessible archives is an attempt to evaluate and critique sources that would have otherwise remained hidden in dusty basement storage rooms, in an effort to better understand a transformational historical moment in the history of Yemen.

Sergey Radchenko

Cardiff University

The Yom Kippur War: New Evidence on the Soviet Involvement in the Middle East in October 1973

This paper explores the evolution of Soviet policy in the Middle East in 1972-1973. The author looks in particular at Soviet motivations in the lead-up and during the October/Yom Kippur War of 1973, and the impact of the war on Soviet-Egyptian and Soviet-Syrian relations. Drawing on newly declassified archival materials, the author shows why and to what effect the Soviet leadership engaged in brinkmanship, and why Washington reacted the way it did to Soviet threats.

Or Rabinowitz

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Israel's Participation in Reagan's SDI: 'It's a long, long road?'

In April 1985 Israel was invited to participate in the Reagan administration's SDI initiative, formally accepting it in 1986. The invitation outlined the administration's growing motivation to 'weave' Israel into its strategic plans to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East. By doing so, the initiative also cemented Israel's role as a key regional strategic ally, counter-balancing pre-existing anti-Israeli views within the Reagan administration. Reagan's invitation to Israel to join SDI has not been explored to date in the academic literature. This study will address the gap in the literature by focusing on several questions: what was the administration's motivation to issue the invitation, how did this move fit with the administration larger Israel policy? How was it perceived in Israel, and how did develop in the bilateral context of US-Israeli strategic relations?

Daniela Richterova

Brunel University London

Liaisons Behind the Iron Curtain: Carlos the Jackal and Middle Eastern Diplomats

This paper explores the relationship between Carlos the Jackal and a number of Arab embassies based in Prague during the Cold War. Probing this secret landscape, it argues that a number of Prague's Middle Eastern allies violated their diplomatic privileges as defined by the 1961 Vienna Convention in order to aid their violent non-state partner. In 1978, when Carlos the Jackal began searching for a home in Central and Eastern Europe, he sought the company and assistance of Syrian, Iraqi, Libyan and South Yemeni diplomats. This assistance ranged from storing or supplying the Carlos Group with arms, through providing diplomatic documents, finances, cars, to granting access to locations protected by diplomatic privileges. In order to maintain the strategic relationship with Baghdad, Damascus, Tripoli and Aden - Czechoslovakia initially anxiously tolerated the Middle Eastern diplomats' liaisons with terrorists. Through surveillance and a web of informers, which included Iraqi exiles, PLO representatives, and informers working at embassies, Prague's Security Service (StB) monitored these alliances. By mid-1979, as Carlos became less predictable and the issue of state-sponsored terrorism turned increasingly toxic, Prague changed strategy. After officially warning the suspect diplomatic missions, the Czechoslovak authorities eventually used them to oust the international terrorist from its territory.

Barin Kayaoglu

American University of Iraq in Sulaimani

Iran's Cold War: From Weak Client State to Ambitious Regional Hegemon to Proud and Able Pariah

Iran's trajectory during the Cold War underwent three phases. From 1945 until 1953, Iran remained mostly neutral in the Cold War struggle while leaning on the United States for assistance against the perceived Soviet threat. Following the 1953 coup, Tehran switched to the U.S.-led Western camp although economic and political uncertainties meant it would maintain its client status into the mid-1960s. But Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi's consolidation of his power in the mid-1960s, the increase in oil revenues, rapid socioeconomic development, U.S. choices transformed Iran from a client state into a strong and mostly independent (though still broadly pro-U.S.) regional hegemon in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf by the early 1970s. Following the 1979 revolution, the hostage crisis with the United States, and the Iran-Iraq War, Tehran became something of a diplomatic pariah on the international scene. But curiously, Iran has continued to pursue its regional objectives with much success. This presentation discusses the factors underlying the three critical turning points in Iran's Cold War saga, along with the state of recent scholarship on Cold War Iran, along with an inventory of archival and other primary sources and potential topics for future research.

Guy Laron

Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Soviet Involvement in the War of Attrition (1969-1970)

Why did the Soviet Union send a 10,000 strong expeditionary force to Egypt in March 1970? Israeli historians have long debated that question as the Soviet intervention proved quite disastrous for Israeli interests. The Red Army came to Egypt armed with the latest generation of surface to air missiles (SAMs) and a MiG squadron. Despite heavy bombing by the Israeli air force, Soviet air defense forces were able to push their SAM batteries up to the Suez Canal. This campaign forced Israel to agree to a cease-fire in August 1970 and sowed the seeds of Israel's military debacle in October 1973.

Israeli historians have tried to read Moscow's decision within the larger context of the Cold War and Soviet imperial designs. According to that interpretation plans to send Soviet forces to Egypt had been drawn long before Israel started bombing targets in Egypt's rear (known as "the depth bombing"). In this paper, I will outline the context of Soviet and Egyptian decision making and show there was a direct link between Israel's actions and Soviet reactions.

Ilker Ayturk

Bilkent University

Islam, Labor and Socialism in Turkey: The Cold War Legacy

The Cold War context constrained the behavior of domestic actors in Turkish politics for decades and established behavioral patterns that survive in contemporary Turkey. In this paper, I turn the spotlights on the Turkish *ulema* (*sing. alim*, a Muslim scholar of religious law) and attempt to analyze why Turkish interpreters of *sharia* were, overall, anti-labor and did not support workers' rights, whereas more labor-friendly interpretations of *sharia* did emerge elsewhere in the Muslim world. Drawing from the labor-related *fetva* corpus in Turkey from the 1960s to the 1980s, I argue that the reluctance of the Turkish *ulema* to address labor questions and—when they had to—their neo-liberal refusal to empower the workers reflected Cold War concerns in Turkish domestic politics.

Onur Isci

Bilkent University

Non-Aligned? Turkish Diplomacy and the Cold War

This paper looks at a defining moment in Soviet-Turkish relations during the Cold War, when representatives of the two states signed an agreement in 1967 according to which the Soviet Union was to build seven industrial plants in Turkey. The Soviet-Turkish agreement came just a year after a similar Soviet-Indian agreement that entailed significant Soviet commitment to the oil and energy sectors. Turkey remained a member of NATO, but tension with the West – particularly over the status of Cyprus – created certain parallels between Ankara’s foreign policy and the policies of non-aligned countries. Outreach to the Soviet Union was the most dramatic move in a foreign policy gambit that lessened Turkey’s dependence on the United States. Most of the Soviet and Turkish leadership crossed the Black Sea in 1960s and 1970s. Ultimately, Turkey became a target for Moscow’s export of an economic model to the Global South and Turkey once again paid off Soviet investments in figs and raisins. If Turkey stood out among the Soviet Union’s Third World partners, it was only the fact that Moscow did not send military aid to this NATO ally.

Economic questions, however, were the heart of Soviet-Turkish rapprochement. As bilateral economic exchange picked up, Moscow continued to emphasize the cost of Turkey’s military obligations. After being appointed ambassador in 1966, Andrei Smirnov lamented to his

hosts that Turkey had an army twice the size of West Germany's but no industry. Soviet-Turkish trade increased steadily in the following years, with the Soviet share of Turkish total trade peaking in 1972 at nearly 7%. Ultimately, this paper demonstrates why Turkey's successive governments – from both left and right ends of the political spectrum – continued to support the idea that Turkey should ally with both Moscow and Washington, and, in case of conflict between the two, attempt to stay neutral. Until the 1980 coup, this strategy of balancing Washington and Moscow allowed Turkey to complement consumer-focused Western investment with industry-heavy Soviet assistance.

Sam Hirst

Bilkent University

Soviet Oil for Turkish Oranges: Soviet Economic Involvement in the Middle East

The Soviet Union's investments in the Middle East began long before the Cold War and the earlier history tells us much about the process that accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. As scholars like Oscar Sanchez-Sibony and David Engerman have shown, Moscow's involvement in the construction of Egypt's Aswan Dam was part of competition with the United States to lead development in the Third World. Egypt is just one example, but it is a telling one. Ivan Komzin, the chief Soviet engineer on the Aswan Dam project, had helped build textile factories in Turkey before World War II. With Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey, Moscow negotiated contracts to assist industrialization in the 1930s. These agreements were meant to be mutually beneficial – the Soviet Union's partners exported agricultural materials that not only paid off industrial equipment but also deepened bilateral economic ties. In these first steps to use its own recent industrialization to project economic power abroad, the Soviet Union established what was, in effect, a barter system. The methods worked out in the interwar period had direct relevance for the Cold War – the Soviet-Turkish clearing agreement of 1937 served as the basis for a 1967 agreement that brought extensive Soviet contributions to Turkish heavy industry. This paper argues that this earlier framework which was more akin to exchange among equals is important to balance an understanding that emphasizes the Soviet Union's role as a superpower in the Middle East.