

ISSUE BRIEF

History's Lessons for Resolving Today's Middle East Conflicts

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It might be true that history does not repeat itself, but it can provide examples of what to do and what does not work. In the spirit of the adage that “those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it,” this paper examines past precedents for resolving highly complex conflicts, by delving into seven historic examples of peacemaking. Each conflict is different, but there are common patterns for resolving them. Based on our study of historical precedents, we list seven key requirements for success based on outcomes in these examples and have highlighted several of the precedents of special relevance to the situation today in the Middle East.

Middle East conflicts are particularly complex and intractable. The Syrian conflict is first an internal civil war between government forces and a range of disparate opposition forces. However, it is also a proxy war involving a large number of outside players, including Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, the United States, Europe, Turkey, and Russia. The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) could be categorized as both an internal and external actor as its area of control spans both Syria and Iraq. Syria is the biggest and bloodiest of the current conflicts, but many of the same external actors are also playing a role in conflicts in Yemen, Iraq, and Libya.

There are any number of historical precedents to draw on, but our criterion was to examine those involving multiple players, replicating the broad-based and mixed nature of current Middle East conflicts. Such historical parallels as the Thirty Years’ War, the Napoleonic Wars, and World War I jump to mind. In addition, we chose the 1989 Ta’if Agreement, which ended the fifteen-year Lebanese Civil War, and the Dayton Agreement settling the Bosnian conflict because of the parallels with the ethnic and religious conflicts today. We also considered the Helsinki Act in 1975 as a possible template for lowering tensions and building cooperation across political and ideological divides. Finally, the 1991 Madrid conference seemed pertinent in view of its effort to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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The first part of this paper describes the successes and failures with key lessons for each historical case; afterward, we conclude with a section on key lessons and application of those lessons for the current Middle East conflict.

Peace of Westphalia: Exhaustion Wins Out

The peace of Westphalia, which was negotiated in the two Westphalian towns of Munster and Osnabruck in 1644-48, ended two of the longest and bloodiest conflicts in European history: the Thirty Years' War triggered by the religious conflict between Protestant and Catholic states in the Holy Roman Empire and the Eighty Years' War between Habsburg Spain and its Dutch possessions. These wars had sucked in multiple countries, but ended as a contest between France and the Habsburgs (Austria and Spain) for European preeminence. Before the Thirty Years' War concluded, the major powers were nearly bankrupt. Germany lost 25 to 40 percent of its population with its male population decimated by half.

The Peace of Westphalia was a victory for France, Sweden, The Netherlands, and the small German states, downgrading and fragmenting the Holy Roman Empire. Lutherans and Calvinists were granted religious toleration throughout the Holy Roman Empire except in lands, such as Austria, directly owing their allegiance to the Habsburgs. The smaller German states—in all about three hundred different types of principalities, bishoprics, etc—were accorded full territorial sovereignty, a provision which has been seen as laying the legal foundation for the modern, sovereign nation-state, including the principle of non-interference from outside powers in the domestic affairs of independent states.

Success or Failure?

The Thirty Years' War was the last large-scale religious war fought across continental Europe. By establishing the principle of sovereignty for all political entities, the Peace of Westphalia gave birth to the European nation-state system until the foundation of the Common Market/European Union where a new concept of “blended” sovereignty has been developing.

The Peace of Westphalia did not eliminate war between European powers. If anything, the late seventeenth century through early nineteenth century saw a Europe almost constantly at war. The rise of Britain, Prussia, and Russia coupled with the declining Habsburg and

Ottoman empires intensified the struggle for primacy in Europe.

Key Lessons

Peace negotiations were a process extending over several years, which continued despite ongoing military campaigns. It set a precedent for inclusiveness: there were delegations from sixteen European countries, sixty-six Imperial Holy Roman states, and twenty-seven interest groups. Westphalia's success was largely due to exhaustion on the part of all the principals. France and Sweden won military victories against the Holy Roman Empire in 1645 but weren't able to deliver a knockout blow. In dealing decisively with the root causes of the religious struggle by according new sovereign rights to all German states constituting the Holy Roman Empire, it established a principle that far outlasted the actual peace settlement. Ironically, today, many of the newer powers, such as China and Russia, invoke the Westphalian principle of non-interference to defend their opposition to “regime change” in Syria.

Congress of Vienna: Creating A Balance of Power to End Conflict

The Congress of Vienna was convened in September 1814 and concluded in June 1815 after Napoleon's final defeat at Waterloo. France's defeat brought an end to twenty-five years of near-continuous war, killing (including from disease) an estimated five million soldiers. The scale of warfare dramatically increased during this period with large-scale increases in the numbers of armed combatants fighting on all sides. With the size of armies in the hundreds of thousands, the Napoleonic Wars are considered the first examples of “total war.”

Napoleon swept away the Holy Roman Empire and many of the individual principalities, duchies, bishoprics, and other small entities making up Germany and Italy, which paved the way for the later unification and consolidation of those states in the nineteenth century. Continental Europe was briefly united for the first time under Napoleonic rule.

While exercising autocratic powers in France, Napoleon spread many of the liberal features of the earlier French Revolution throughout much of Europe, including the abolition of serfdom, reduction in the power of the Catholic Church, and due process in courts. The Napoleonic Code remains the cornerstone of the judicial systems in most European states to this



Le Congrès de Vienne by Jean Godefroy, 1819-20. Image credit: RMN-Grand Palais.

day. Additionally, as a result of weakened Spanish power, the Napoleonic Wars indirectly spurred the independence movements in Spanish Latin America.

Success or Failure?

The goal of the Congress of Vienna was not simply to restore old boundaries abolished by Napoleon's invasions but to resize the main powers, so that they could balance each other and remain at peace—which was largely accomplished. No major wars among the key powers broke out for almost a half century until the Crimean War in the 1850s, and then nothing approaching a total war until World War I. The Congress also established a "Concert of Europe," including the vanquished French, that later served as a partial model for the League of Nations and the United Nations.

One of the key, shared goals of Austria's Foreign Minister Klemens von Metternich and Russia's Tsar Alexander I was to stop liberal and revolutionary movements; this soon proved impossible, as demonstrated by the

breakout of revolutions in 1830 and 1848. While wars were prevented between powers in Europe, the period following the Congress of Vienna saw a huge colonial expansion with many European states focused on carving up the rest of the world. It was only with the Crimean War that those outside contests began to weigh on European instability.

Key Lessons

The Congress is a misnomer in that it hardly met in plenary sessions. The discussions were informal, mostly face-to-face sessions among the five great powers: Austria, Britain, Russia, Prussia, and including a defeated France. Those discussions benefitted from the fact that the key negotiators were well known to each other and drawn from the same aristocratic culture, with key negotiators even swapping mistresses in some cases. Equally important for the endurance of the pact was the devastation of the wars. None of the major players could afford a repeat. Britain, the richest country, was in debt to the tune of more than

20 percent of gross domestic production (GDP), and the years of austerity afterwards triggered civil strife and fears of revolution.

Paris Peace Talks Ending the First World War: What Not to Do

The First World War was triggered by the June 1914 assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian empire, but blame has also been placed on the increasing Anglo-German rivalry, as well as on the European alliance system that risked total war whenever conflict arose between two opposing nations. Twenty million died on the battlefield. The war caused four empires to collapse—the Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires—but boosted the United States into a global player.

The Paris Peace Conference and Treaty of Versailles that ended the war set a new bar for global representation of countries as well as interest groups—women, labor, African-Africans, and colonized peoples were all represented. Historians blame the settlement for laying the ground for World War II. Unlike the Congress of Vienna, Germany and other defeated powers were excluded. The armistice that Germany signed was not tantamount to an unconditional surrender in its eyes. In view of Germany's rapid recovery in the 1930s, historians now dispute the harshness of terms meted out to it that John Maynard Keynes so famously deplored.¹

Russia was also excluded, and the Brest-Litovsk treaty, which it signed with Germany in March 1918, was annulled. At the time of the Paris talks, Allied powers were waging war with the “White” forces against Bolshevik Russia. The Bolsheviks believed time was on their side, and the Allied powers would soon be overturned in their own countries by communist/socialist forces.

US President Woodrow Wilson's principle of national self-determination gained popular traction at this time, even if it opened up a can of worms. France and the United Kingdom (UK) extended their empires in the Middle East despite growing anti-colonialism fervor. Trying to divide Europe into territorial states, such that each was inhabited by ethnically and linguistically

homogeneous populations eventually led to the mass expulsion or extermination of minorities.

Success or Failure?

No new balance of power was achieved. For Germans of all political stripes, Versailles had no legitimacy and a resurgent Soviet Russia was also left out. Allied unity had been fraying at the talks but deepened in the interwar years, with the United States and the UK not backing France's more aggressive policies against Germany. Wilson also failed to build a strong bipartisan coalition for continued US engagement. Weak Central European states were wedged between a Germany that wasn't knocked out and a Soviet Union seeking to avenge its Brest-Litovsk concessions. Britain and France struggled to impose colonial regimes in Lebanon/Syria and Palestine/Iraq, which they then had to disband after World War II. Turkey's siege mentality can be traced to its perceived ill treatment by the Allies at this time. The League of Nations proved a testing ground for many ideas and people important in the later establishment of the United Nations (UN), even though it failed to counter aggression in the interwar years.

Key Lessons

The need for inclusiveness, allied unity, and a sustainable postwar balance of power are the most obvious lessons learned, but the “peacemakers”—with the exception of Wilson—did not adequately factor in the growing ideologies of decolonization and communism.

The Helsinki Final Act/OSCE² and Reducing Cold War Tensions: A Case of Unintended Consequences

The Helsinki Accords were signed by leaders of the Communist Bloc states and Western leaders in 1975 after three years of negotiations. The accords constituted a nonbinding political commitment—not a treaty—among the political leaders of all the countries. Originally, Soviet leaders were keen to negotiate the agreement, which they saw as legitimizing their control over Eastern Europe. The agreement provided for the inviolability of national frontiers and respect for territorial integrity. US leaders were initially disengaged and uninterested. Then Secretary of State Henry

¹ In 1919, economist John Maynard Keynes, then British Trade representative, resigned his post over the terms of the Versailles Treaty. He later wrote “The Economic Consequences of the Peace,” as a critique of the negotiations and treaty.

² The 1973 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) led to the negotiation and signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, a new Charter of Paris was agreed and, as part of that process, the CSCE was restructured and renamed the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) which still operates today.

Kissinger was famously quoted as saying “we never wanted it but we went along with the Europeans.” As the signing in Helsinki grew closer, President Gerald Ford came under pressure not to go to the summit because of concerns that any US agreement would weaken objections to the Soviet Union’s annexation of the Baltics. At the time of the signing, the United States, as well as the NATO allies, reiterated in separate statements their objections to the Soviet occupation of the Baltics, but they did not postpone the signing.

Over the longer run, the tables were turned on Soviet leaders such as Leonid Brezhnev, who thought he had staged a coup over the West. What the Soviets had not paid enough attention to was the Helsinki Act’s stipulation that the treatment of citizens by governments within their borders is a matter of legitimate international concern. Brezhnev thought he could handle the Soviet dissidents, but the Helsinki Act mandated the creation of the Moscow Helsinki Group, an independent nongovernmental organization (NGO) monitoring the government’s compliance with the civil rights provisions in the Helsinki Act. This gave the dissidents a platform, setting in motion a long, drawn-out process of the Communist Bloc regimes being undermined from within.

Success or Failure?

Fifteen years separated the signing of the Helsinki Act from the final collapse of the Soviet empire. By the end of the Cold War, all sides had acknowledged the key role that it played in ending the Cold War. Importantly, by mobilizing civil society on both sides, the Moscow Helsinki Group and its nongovernmental organization allies accomplished more than purely state-on-state dealings could have done to publicize and advance civil rights in the Soviet bloc. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has arguably been less successful in the past fifteen years in forging collective security in Europe. Moscow increasingly has viewed OSCE human rights efforts as a tool for Western states to impose their democratic values on Russia ever since the OSCE called for a “political settlement” in Chechnya in 1999. Russia wants to “reform” the OSCE in order to give Moscow more veto power over its activities. In the recent Ukraine crisis, Kiev accused

OSCE officials as taking the side of Russian separatists in the Donbas region. Nevertheless, unlike NATO or the EU, it remains one of the few inclusive bodies, bridging East and West.

Key Lessons

A scholar who has extensively studied the impact of the Helsinki Act on the Cold War believes the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) worked “because it offered important benefits to all official sides involved and because it worked on both the state as well as societal level.”³ In many ways, the statesmen were hoodwinked at their own game, opening up a new society-to-society dimension of international relations that particularly disadvantaged the Soviet bloc because of its underestimation of non-

state power. It’s debatable whether authoritarian leaders would be as amenable today to allowing the same scope for civil society. Whatever their differences, Russian, Chinese, or Gulf leaders all agree on the desirability of controlling, if not expelling, international NGOs.

[B]y mobilizing civil society on both sides, [the Helsinki Process] accomplished more than purely state-on-state dealings could have done. . .

Ta’if Agreement Ending Civil War in Lebanon: Unfinished Business

The Arab League-sponsored Ta’if agreement (officially “Document of National Accord”) was negotiated over three weeks in October 1989

with the sixty-two surviving members of the Lebanese Parliament in the small mountain resort of Ta’if, Saudi Arabia. It ended a fifteen-year bloody conflict among Shias, Sunnis, Maronite Christians, Druze, and Alawites that tore the country apart. The sectarian power-sharing arrangements that originated with the founding of modern Lebanon in 1943 were enshrined, but Muslims—whose proportion of the population had grown—were accorded expanded representation more commensurate with their demographics—though still not proportional. The government shifted from being a semi-presidential system with powerful prerogatives

3 Remarks made on September 23, 2008 by Dr. Oliver Bange, senior researcher and lecturer at the University of Mannheim in Germany at Wilson Center conference on Bange’s volume on the CSCE process entitled *Helsinki 1975 and the Transformation of Europe* (2008). See more at: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/helsinki-1975-and-the-transformation-europe#sthash.KTidcSYm.dpuf>.



US President George H. W. Bush addresses the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid, Spain on October 30, 1991.
Photo credit: US National Archives and Records Administration/Wikipedia.

for the (always) Maronite Christian President to one in which important executive power was transferred to the Council of Ministers, led by an (always) Sunni Muslim Prime Minister. Parliamentary seats were also divided fifty-fifty between Christian and Muslim communities (previously six to five), and the Ta'if accord reaffirmed Lebanon's Arab identity.

The Ta'if agreement could only have been achieved with the effective participation of outside powers—Saudi Arabia actively mediated and Iran gave its blessing. Yet the outsiders' role was equally—perhaps even more—critical in the Accord's implementation. The United States, newly empowered from the Soviet Union's dissolution, gave the go-ahead for the Syrians to implement the accord. The Syrian army's subsequent defeat and exiling of Maronite General Michel Aoun—who rejected the terms of the settlement—allowed the implementation to go forward, including the deployment of 30,000 Syrian peacekeeping troops, in an effective occupation. US resignation of Lebanon to Syrian tutelage was widely seen as a reward for Syria's

backing of the US-led anti-Saddam Hussein coalition during the First Gulf War. All national and non-national militias were disarmed, but Hezbollah was exempted, branded as a force of “national resistance,” and used by Syria as leverage against Israel and its occupation in south Lebanon.

Success or Failure?

Ta'if ended the major violence, but it's been a fragile peace. Israel occupied parts of southern Lebanon until 2000 and has since periodically intervened against Hezbollah. Syrian troops were only completely withdrawn in 2005 after the outcry over the alleged Syrian involvement in former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri's assassination. Ta'if called for the eventual “abolition of political sectarianism,” but set no mechanism and no timeline for implementation. Power sharing and strict quotas among confessional groups has remained the name of the political game inhibiting any broader political reform or social change. Lebanon hasn't had a president or functioning parliament since 2013.

Key Lessons

The parallels between pre-Ta'if Lebanon and war-torn Syria are striking. Besides the internal factional fighting which led to 100,000 deaths, it was a battleground for outside forces. The large-scale Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) presence in the early 1970s triggered the civil war, provoking many Israeli interventions. The 1979 Iranian revolution led to the creation of Hezbollah and Tehran-backed efforts to establish an Islamic republic in Lebanon. The relative peace achieved under the Ta'if agreement could only have happened because it occurred at a "specific historical juncture when movement toward internal reconciliation coincided with favorable regional and international developments."⁴

Madrid Conference on Middle East Peace: Process over Substance

Using its political capital from the 1990-91 US victory over Iraq and liberation of Kuwait, the George H. W. Bush Administration set out to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors, including the Palestinians. The conference, held in Madrid in late October/early November 1991, was co-sponsored with the Soviet Union. It was organized along two parallel tracks including bilateral peace treaties and a multilateral track, which was supposed to solve shared regional challenges, such as water, environment, and arms control.

The Conference almost did not occur because of bitter debate between the Bush Administration and the Yitzhak Shamir government in Israel over \$11 billion in requested loan guarantees to deal with the cost of Jewish emigration from Russia. The Bush Administration wanted assurances that it would not be used for settlement expansion, as they suspected had happened with an earlier \$400 million loan. The Shamir government tried to get Congress to force the Administration's hand. Meanwhile, the Palestinians viewed the Administration's handling of the issue as a

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test of whether the United States could be an honest broker at the conference. In the end, the Administration asked Congress for a delay of 120 days in granting the loan guarantees to ensure Palestinian and Arab participation at the conference.

Success or Failure?

The bilateral talks between Israel and the Palestinians provided cover for the Oslo track two process that eventually produced an agreement on limited Palestinian self-rule. Success was even more tangible between Israel and Jordan, as they signed a peace treaty in 1994. Israel and Syria held talks and came close, but failed to sign a similar bilateral accord.

The Conference set a precedent for comprehensive, direct peace talks. Gregory Harms and Todd Ferry, Madrid Conference scholars believe "the symbolic significance of the Madrid conference far outweighed its accomplishments. Madrid conference represents the first time all these countries had been gathered 'face-to-face'."⁵

The Madrid Conference had broader implications—easing tensions between Muslim states and Israel. An Israeli liaison office with Morocco was opened in November 1996; an interest office in Tunisia and trade offices in Oman and Qatar followed in 1996. The Gulf States announced a review of the Arab boycott in 1994, effectively abolishing the secondary and tertiary boycott against Israel.⁶

Key Lessons

The United States was in a dominant position in the Middle East after enlisting many Arab countries (with the notable exception of the Palestinians) in its fight to reclaim Kuwait from Iraq. The Soviet Union was dissolved shortly after the Madrid Conference and lost much of its regional clout with Washington's success in wooing Damascus to join the anti-Iraq coalition. US power in the region has never since been as great.

4 Hassan Krayem, "The Lebanese Civil War and the Ta'if Agreement," The American University of Beirut, <http://ddc.aub.edu.lb/projects/pspa/conflict-resolution.html>.

5 Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine-Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 153.

6 Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The Fruits of Peace," August 22, 2000, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/THE%20FRUITS%20OF%20PEACE.aspx>.

Despite its dominance, the United States was not able to bring about a comprehensive peace. Nevertheless, the Madrid Conference broke the taboos on Arabs sitting down in public with Israel and on Israel dealing with the PLO.

Dayton Accord: Rebuilding Has Proved a Lot More Difficult

In 1992-95, war broke out between the three populations—Serbian, Croat, and Muslim Bosniaks—in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the wake of the breakup of the Yugoslav state. 100,000 people were killed with over 2.2 million displaced. The fighting involved indiscriminate shelling of urban areas and rampant targeting of civilians. Ethnic cleansing and the systematic mass rape of Muslim women were notable features of the savage war.

The Bosnian war began after the Bosnian Serbs supported by the Serbian government and the Yugoslav People's Army secured Serb territory and began the ethnic cleansing of the Bosniak Muslim and Croat populations. Bosniak Muslims and Croats were originally allied, fighting the Serb forces, but fell out when neighboring Serbia and Croatia agreed on the partition of Bosnia. Following the 1994 Washington Agreement, Bosniak Muslim and Croat forces reunited again, establishing a joint Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The war was brought to an end after Bosniak and Croatian forces allied themselves against Republika Srpska and NATO intervened against Serbian forces.

The negotiations at Dayton were held in September/October 1995 after strong pressure on the three factions from outside powers, including the United States, Russia, and Europe. The Wright Air Force base at Dayton, Ohio was chosen because it was secluded, and the hope was that the lack of distractions would force the leaders to come to an agreement. Bosnia, after the Dayton Accord, became highly decentralized and a divided state that nevertheless retained central institutions such as a rotating state presidency, a central bank, and a constitutional court. Two entities—the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska—make up the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina. International bodies were given special powers to implement and enforce the agreement. The Office of the High Representative—a civilian entity created by the Dayton Accords—was held by a European with a US official as the deputy—has far-ranging powers, including the right to remove public officials who

violate the intent of Dayton. The International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) set up in 1993 also proved successful in prosecuting more than seventy men for war crimes. The majority of the war criminals were Serbs, but the court also tried Croats and Bosniaks.

Success of Failure?

The Dayton Accord ended the military confrontation, but it did not eliminate ethnic tensions. There are fewer intermarriages⁷ across ethnic lines than before the conflict. The immediate solution of separating the ethnic groups into separate political entities with weak institutions at the center has turned into an obstacle for nation-building and economic integration of the two halves. Twenty years after the conflict, outside powers are reluctant to disband the Office of High Representative for fear tensions will arise again. The political parties in the two halves are dug in and, even with the prospect of EU membership, feel little incentive to cooperate.

Economically, Bosnia-Herzegovina has not fully recovered. There was development assistance after the end of the war that spurred the recovery, but GDP per capita has yet to surpass the prewar level. The birth rate has plummeted and a significant portion of the refugees stayed abroad with some of the population still having to emigrate to find economic opportunities. Bosnia-Herzegovina is losing population.

Key Lessons

Historians and commentators blame the United States and Europe for not intervening sooner to stop the bloodshed. Ironically, stopping the war—despite involving huge resources—has proved to be easier than political, economic, and social reconstruction. The high unemployment rate—as much as 41 percent⁸—is blamed for radicalization of young Bosniak Muslims, some of whom went to Syria and are now returning.

7 “Before the Bosnian war around 13 % of marriages were inter-ethnic, today that figure has dwindled to just 4 per cent and children of these mixed unions face hurdles later in life due to the country's rigid constitution” AFP Report, April 3, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn0_x0tQJEs.

8 Aleksandar Todorovic, “Why is the unemployment rate so high in Bosnia and Herzegovina?” *Quora*, October 10, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yn0_x0tQJEs; Trading Economics, “Bosnia and Herzegovina Unemployment Rate, 2007-2016,” <http://www.trading-economics.com/bosnia-and-herzegovina/unemployment-rate>.



President William J. Clinton talking with Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic at the Ambassador's residence in Paris on December 14, 1995. *Photo credit:* William J. Clinton Presidential Library.

Using Past Precedents to Shape a Way Forward

What key lessons from the past settlements provide ideas for how to bring an end to the current Middle East conflicts?

- **Inclusivity is necessary but not sufficient.** A defeated France was brought into the inner core at the Congress of Vienna, while Germany and the Soviet Union were excluded in post-World War talks in Paris, laying the ground for Nazi and Soviet revisionism. Madrid shows that even in failing to yield the hoped-for peace settlement, its inclusivity laid the groundwork for later peace talks. The biggest success of the Madrid conference was to push Israel into talking with Arabs, including the PLO, and vice versa.
- **Universal exhaustion or military defeat of one of the parties has been the usual prelude to most peace conferences, but not all.** The 1975 Helsinki conference was achieved in the midst of the Cold

War. Originally, the United States was not especially interested in participating, and the Soviets were overconfident in their ability to manage the third basket on human rights. Establishing a societal dimension meant there was an ongoing process even when state-to-state action was stalled. In the case of Westphalia, talks were begun before the fighting ended. Luckily, the absence of any knockout blows from either side boosted resolution efforts at Westphalia.

- **Successful peace conferences have established new principles or frameworks that get at root causes of the conflict, not just redrawn borders.** Westphalia is known for establishing the principle of sovereignty and ending religious wars, but not territorial disputes. Vienna reestablished a balance of power among Europe's great powers that proved largely successful for almost a century. Helsinki stipulated that the treatment of citizens by governments within their borders is a matter of legitimate international concern.

- **Outside big powers have played essential roles in bringing about peace and also making sure the peace holds.** For Ta'if, Dayton, and Madrid, the United States played a key role in making those conferences happen. In the case of Ta'if, Saudi Arabia's role was also critical in terms of hosting the conference and bringing all sides together. Syria enforced the initial settlement, even though it later proved a huge hindrance. Outside organizations—NATO, OSCE, and the High Representative—have all played important and continuing roles in Dayton.
- **Peace settlements usually entail a multifaceted process.** We are used to seeing oversized paintings, or more recently, photographs, of hundreds of delegates posing before a giant table, which lead us to imagine that they were all sitting down together to work out a treaty. The reality is much more complicated. From the Congress of Vienna's core five to Paris' Big Four, the real action took place in smaller settings behind closed doors. Plenaries were important, however, in ensuring all the participants felt ownership of the final settlement.
- **Many well-known peace settlements were set up by previous attempts.** With the 1814 Treaty of Paris, Napoleon gave back most of the territorial gains France had made during the previous decade and a half of war. In the case of the Peace of Westphalia, there had been earlier attempts in Cologne, Hamburg, and Lubeck to negotiate a peace agreement among various actors. Moreover, the Peace of Westphalia's stipulations on the right of each of the German princelings to determine the religion in his state had actually been agreed in the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which had been violated, leading to the Thirty Years' War. Dayton had been preceded by other US and European peace efforts.
- **Peace isn't always a long-term solution.** What didn't happen after Ta'if and Dayton illuminate the problems of economic reconstruction and nation-building, where the ethnic and religious differences become very ingrained in the system.
- **Ta'if, Bosnia, and Westphalia highlight the importance of power-sharing and autonomy,** which would be important elements in resolving the Syrian civil war. Absent a total military defeat of Assad or of the opposition forces, no lasting peace is possible without constructing an inclusive peace settlement. However, the rigid power-sharing formulae used in the Ta'if and Bosnian settlements have impeded nation-building over the longer term, including economic development. Ta'if and Bosnia also point to the need for outside involvement if peace is going to stick.
- **The Congress of Vienna's success in reintegrating France, as well as the post-WWI Paris Peace's failures on reconciling Germany point to the desirability of including Iran in any regional arrangement.** Stability is always difficult to achieve in eras of rapid power shifts. An Iran that is isolated now may have little incentive to abide by agreements reached by others.
- **Helsinki/OSCE is perhaps the most intriguing model** for bringing long-term peace and organizing open-ended regional processes. Among all the precedents, it is unique in that it operated despite the continuing US-Soviet rivalry of the Cold War. One could envisage a Middle East OSCE helping to build Sunni-Shia trust even before there was resolution of all the conflicts. The OSCE/CSCE's multiple baskets also allowed for progress at different rates in the various political, economic, and human rights areas. To be effective, the regional participants would need to believe that there were benefits to be had from participation. Outside sponsorship—US, Russian, and European—would be critical for persuading them of the advantages.

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Conclusion: Triumph of Hope and Experience

As with today's Middle East, it would be easy to be cynical about complex conflict situations and not try to resolve them. The ultimate lesson from examining these seven examples should be that it's worth trying. While some failed, many others succeeded, sometimes far more than anticipated. All had unintended consequences, which we should prepare for. Too much is at stake, if we don't try. Given the prior positive

Which of the historical models is most apt for resolving today's Middle East conflicts?

outcomes in many cases, there is no excuse not to try, taking on board the lessons learned from these historical examples.

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PEACE TREATY OR CONFERENCE	NATURE OF PROBLEM	TRIGGER FOR NEGOTIATIONS
Peace of Westphalia ending Thirty Years' War	Mix of Confessional, Civil, and Interstate wars—increasingly destructive. German states lost between 25 and 40 percent of their populations.	Antagonists realized there would be no victors. Westphalia was called “Peace of Exhaustion.”
1814-15 Congress of Vienna ending twenty-five years of near continuous Napoleonic Wars.	The goal was not simply to restore old boundaries abolished by Napoleon's invasions but to resize main players to achieve a lasting balance of power.	Napoleonic France's defeat and surrender in May 1814.
Paris Peace Conferences ending First World War	Ended world war, which caused the death of twenty million, resulting in collapse of Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires.	1918 Armistice following collapse of German military effort and fear of Allied invasion
Helsinki Final Act/CSCE reducing Cold War tensions	Easing tensions in Cold War.	Strong European interest in détente, and a Soviet Union eager to legitimize control over Eastern Europe.
Ta'if Agreement ending Lebanese Civil War	Ended a fifteen-year conflict among Shias, Sunnis, Maronite Christians, Druze, and Alawites.	Exhaustion on the part of many internal forces combined with external forces having fewer resources or interest in pushing forward their proxy groups.
Madrid Conference on Middle East Peace	The goal was to achieve a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors.	A large coalition of countries led by the United States had just driven Iraq out of Kuwait.
Dayton Accord ending Bosnian War	Ending 1992-95 war between Serbs, Croats, and Muslim Bosniaks, establishing highly decentralized state with two entities: Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Republika Srpska.	War brought to end after Bosniak and Croatian forces allied against Serbs and NATO intervened to defeat Serbian forces.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

APPLICABILITY TO MIDDLE EAST CONFLICTS

Thirty Years' War was the last great religious conflict, but Westphalia did not end Europe's great power rivalries and territorial wars.

Dealt with root causes of religious conflict by establishing basis for state sovereignty and non-interference in others' domestic affairs. Greater autonomy for various ethnic and religious groups may be only way to institute peace in Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

Nothing approaching a total war in Europe occurred for a century. A Concert of Europe served as precedent for League of Nations and UN. Goal of stifling liberalism and nationalism proved unsuccessful in longer run.

Institutionalizing peace by establishing a vehicle (Concert of Europe) for dealing with subsequent challenges to stability has potential relevance. Even if a peace settlement is achieved in Syria, there are likely to be future destabilizing developments.

Laid basis for renewed conflict due to Versailles Pact's lack of legitimacy in eyes of defeated and lack of Allied unity on enforcing peace settlement. Creating new territorial states ethnically and linguistically homogeneous led to expulsion or extermination of minorities.

The 1916 Franco-British agreement negotiated by Mark Sykes and Francois Georges-Picot led to the partition of the Ottoman Empire and later imposition of a nation-state order in the Mideast, which outlasted the post-WWI European settlement. The partition of the Ottoman Empire ran up against the same issues of ethnic and religious divisions undermining national unity. Paris/Versailles failures point up need for inclusiveness, post-settlement unity among signatories, and sustainable balance of power.

Agreement was reached because it offered benefits to all sides. In the end, Soviets underestimated its impact in mobilizing civil society in Eastern bloc, accelerating the end of communist regimes. OSCE has been less successful in forging collective security in the post-Cold War era.

OSCE provides a potential model for an inclusive regional security umbrella that can yield long-term results. Helsinki gave a boost to building East-West trust across multiple political, economic, and societal dimensions, but the progress was slow and halting. To be successful, a Middle East OSCE would need US, Russia, and Europe to champion it, encouraging all Middle East players to embrace it.

Ta'if ended major violence, but it has been a fragile peace. The power-sharing arrangements have acted as a bar to needed large-scale political and economic reform.

Striking parallels with war-torn Syria, including important role played by outside forces, first participating in the civil war and then enforcing the peace. The power-sharing aspects provide a model for achieving an end to hostilities, but also a warning about the long-term problems created by too rigid an arrangement.

Madrid set a precedent for direct talks between Muslim states and Israel, setting the stage for secret Israeli-PLO talks leading to Oslo. Ultimately, that peace process failed, but Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994.

Despite its significant achievements, Madrid shows the limits of any single event, and the need for a sustained effort if longstanding and thorny issues are to be resolved. The old maxim "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink" comes to mind in relation to Madrid. Any conference on today's even thornier issues would need to be coupled with a follow-on process for ensuring onward momentum.

Ended the military conflict, but ethnic tensions remain entrenched twenty years after the agreement. As with Ta'if, the power-sharing arrangements have proved a hindrance moving ahead on political and economic reforms.

Dayton shows the limits of power-sharing arrangements for economic reconstruction and national reconciliation. The extensive oversight powers of the Office of High Representative have prevented massive backsliding to renewed fighting but haven't be able to spur more cohesion.

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