

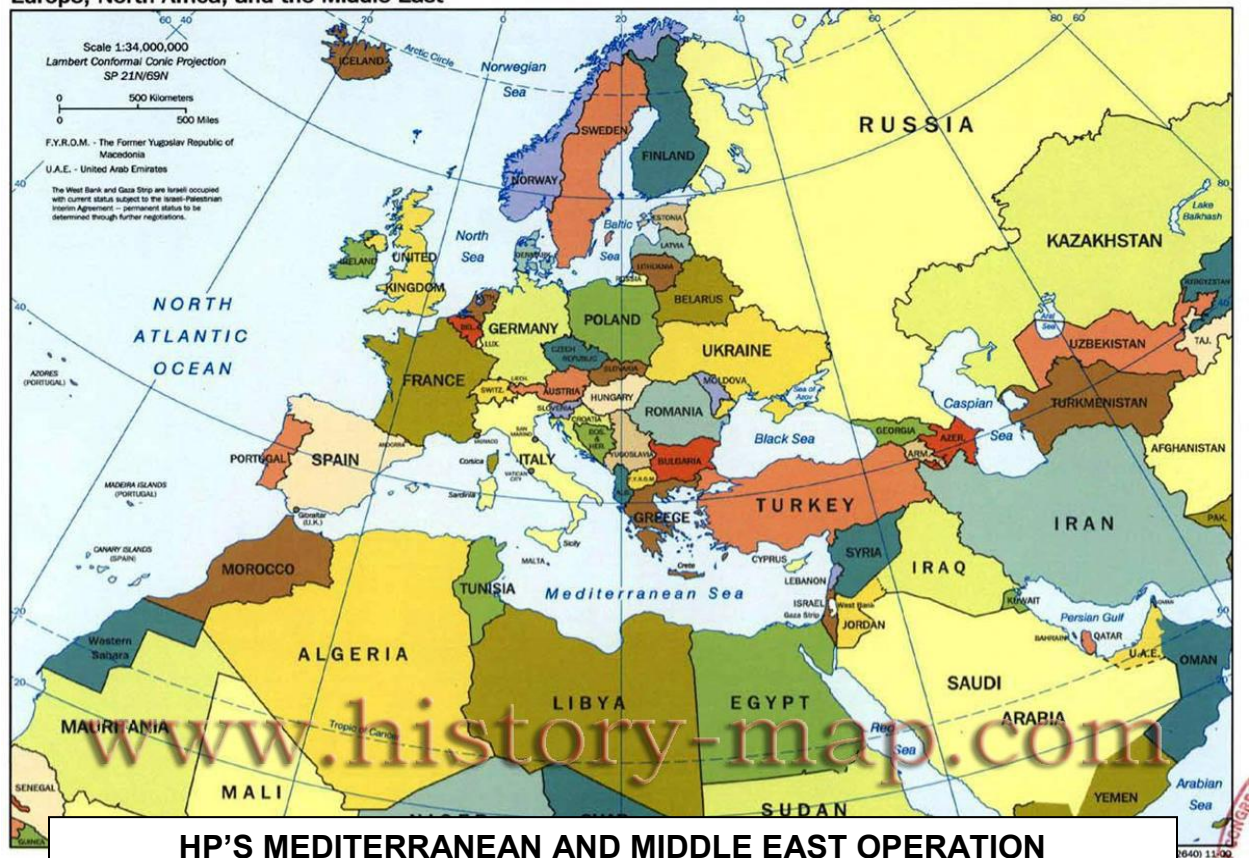
CHAPTER 4: A DIFFICULT TERRITORY

The Obstacles To Our Success

THE WORST CASE SCENARIO FOR AN HP STARTUP

HP's new Mediterranean and Middle East Operation had responsibility for the North African countries bordering on the Mediterranean Sea as well as the countries in the Middle East and on the Arabian Peninsula. So, west to east we had Morocco through Iran and north to south we had everything from Greece to Oman, on the Indian Ocean. Twenty countries in all. If we had overlaid a map of our territory on a map of the old Ottoman Empire, which came to an end at the close of World War I, there would not have been much difference. Of course, for political reasons Israel was not part of our territory and was handled separately by HPSA.

Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East



HP'S MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST OPERATION

Algeria, Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Greece, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Yemen

The size of our new territory was not the only obstacle to our success. The degree of difficulty we experienced was substantial due to the various types of political systems, business practices, religious differences & influences, multiple languages, and the many lingering historical prejudices and conflicts that existed throughout the area.

THE POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT.....The Ultimate Mixed Bag

The political systems that the new HP Athens operation had to deal with covered the entire spectrum: Monarchy's (Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Tunisia), unstable democracies (Turkey, Lebanon and Cyprus), socialist dictatorships (Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Iraq, and Libya), and fascist dictatorships (Greece). Regardless of whether countries were named "The Arab Republic of....." or "The Kingdom of" or "The People's Democratic Republic of.....", they were all dictatorships. Some democratic processes, such as elections, may have been in place, but there was no way that anything short of an armed insurrection (like we are seeing in Syria today) was going to force changes at the top of the power structure. Whether or not a country leaned to the left or to right, whether or not it was secular or a theocracy, there was either a single person or a small group of people in charge. Elections that could possibly change the status quo were simply not allowed. Until recently most of the U.S.'s "friends" in the region were dictators who maintained stability through repression, but thanks to recent popular uprisings ("The Arab Spring") in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt, the political landscape is beginning to change. With many radical elements now free to pursue their political agendas, whether or not the region will remain stable is still an open question. (A military coup has already toppled the democratically elected Morsi Islamist regime in Egypt).

In some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, a theocracy, the government's legal system functioned within the strict boundaries of Islamic law (Shariah law), as dictated by the Koran.....for all practical purposes the Koran is Saudi Arabia's constitution. In addition to Shariah law the Saudis had many inconvenient regulations in place during my time in the Middle East. For example, if we wanted to obtain an entry visa we had to provide a baptismal certificate. Not only would this prove that we were not Jewish, but it would also confirm that we believed in God. Jews and atheists were not allowed in Saudi Arabia. The law was simple.....no baptismal certificate, no visa. I had never been baptized and had no plans to do so just to satisfy the Saudis. However, this law was easy to circumvent. To help the many business travelers who were facing this dilemma (and to make a little extra money) the St. Andrews Anglican Church in Athens provided baptismal certificates (without baptism) for \$5. This charade made everyone happy.

At the time I was in the Middle East the Socialist countries either were, or had recently been, aligned with the Soviet Union, which over the years had become their main trading partner. When the United States refused to help Egypt's "President" Nasser build the Aswan Dam the Soviets gladly stepped in to build it. U.S. and European backing for Israel during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war pushed the Socialist countries that supported the concept of "Arab Nationalism".....Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Algeria..... further into the Soviet camp. As a result they began buying their military hardware and most consumer goods from the Soviet Union and "East-Bloc" countries. Although the Socialist Arab countries were (are) officially secular, religion was (and is still) a very big factor in their politics. For example, the current conflict in Syria is between the dictatorial Shiite minority government and the repressed Sunni majority population.

During my years in Athens disagreements between the secular and theocratic states, and between (and within) the many religious factions, would often (and still today) result in extreme violence. There were numerous assassinations in Lebanon as the Muslims began to challenge the power of the Christian minority, which contributed heavily to the 1975 civil war. There was a long running feud between Greece and Turkey due to the four hundred year Turkish (Islamic) occupation of Greece (Christian). The lingering hostility led to open conflict in 1974 when Greece tried to take control of Cyprus. Of course, there were several on-going turf battles such as the feud between Iraq and Syria over control of the Euphrates River as well as the centuries old conflicts between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam and, of course, there was the never-ending battle between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, while I was in Athens there were no region-wide conflicts on the scale of the 1967 and 1973 wars. So, comparatively speaking, it was peaceful.

Greece, the new home of HP's Mediterranean and Middle East headquarters operation, had some unique problems of its own. Even though Greece was a beautiful place to reside there were strong political undercurrents, both foreign and domestic, that would surface on a regular basis. Whether the system of government in Greece was a right wing military dictatorship (1967-1974) or a democracy (1974 onward),

and regardless of whether Athens was a better alternative, from a business perspective, than Rome to locate HP's Middle East Headquarters, Greece was a far more dangerous place to live.

Immediately following World War II, when Russia was busy overpowering as many Eastern European countries as possible, it had set its sights on Greece in an effort to control the entire Balkan Peninsula. The Greek monarchy resisted and with the help of the United States and Great Britain put down a communist inspired revolution and ensuing civil war. Although the Truman Doctrine, backed by U.S. and British military power, prevented a communist takeover of the country in 1948 a substantial portion of the population remained hardcore socialists. The probability of a socialist / communist victory in the 1968 elections resulted in a military coup that replaced the British-style constitutional monarchy with a right-wing dictatorship. This ultra-conservative military dictatorship ("the junta") was in power when we arrived.

Even with marshal law in place Greece had very lax security and the situation became worse after the fall of the dictatorship in 1974. From 1967 to 1974 the "leftists" who had not gone into hiding were either exiled, jailed, assassinated on the street by government controlled hit squads or just disappeared without a trace. Now free to express themselves following the removal of the military junta, members of the left-wing movement, which had remained alive and underground in spite of the military's efforts to stamp it out, made it their mission to remove the numerous NATO (U.S.) military bases from Greece. There was "OXI BASES" (no bases) graffiti everywhere. The existence of the bases was a constant reminder that the U.S. had supported the junta's strong stand against what was viewed at the time as a communist threat. The anti-U.S. sentiments were also present in the general population due to the high number of innocent citizens who had become victims or collateral damage in the junta's witchhunts. Although most anti-U.S. protests were fairly peaceful there were still a handful of far-left radical underground groups that embraced violence as a means to fight their own private war against the "imperialists". Their attacks were often directed at U.S. embassy personnel, usually CIA operatives. One of their targets was Richard Welch, the CIA "station chief" who was masquerading as a commercial attaché. He was assassinated in front of his home in December of 1975 by a domestic terrorist group known as the "17N". This event made our personnel manager, Robert Welch, extremely nervous thinking that he might somehow be mistaken for one of Richard Welch's siblings.

17N's first attack, on 23 December 1975, was against the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency's station chief in Athens, Richard Welch. Welch was gunned down outside his residence by four assailants, in front of his wife and driver. 17N's repeated claims of responsibility were ignored until December 1976, when it murdered the former intelligence chief of the Greek security police, Evangelos Mallios and left its proclamation at the scene. In January 1980 17N murdered the deputy director of the riot police (MAT) and his driver. It also intervened with two long proclamations offering theoretical guidance to the Greek armed struggle and criticizing a non-deadly rival group, Revolutionary Popular Struggle (ELA) for poor target selection and operational incompetence.

After the return of democracy the above-ground left leaning elements were able to openly demonstrate their unhappiness. These demonstrations were usually in the form of student marches (no surprise there) from the University of Athens to the U.S. Embassy. There were so many demonstrations in front of the embassy and so many broken windows that the ambassador had to install a twelve foot iron fence around the embassy to keep the building out of stone throwing range. It was interesting that most of the student demonstrations had nothing at all to do with Greece but were in response to some action that the U.S. had taken elsewhere in the world.....when it comes to politics the Greeks seem to be more passionate than any other nationality. Although there was a great deal of anti-U.S. government sentiment in the country there was, fortunately for us, very little animosity directed toward foreign residents and tourists. However, the fact that David Packard had recently been the Deputy Secretary of Defence in the Nixon Administration made us all a little uncomfortable. Would someone try to bomb the office?

Greek politics aside, Greece was unwillingly front and center in the on-going Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which had morphed from simple street demonstrations into elaborately planned terrorist attacks following the formation of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine), and the more radical group Abu Nidal. In 1969 (ethnic) Palestinian terrorists from Jordan attacked Israel's El-Al Airline office in Athens, killing and wounding several people.

Terrorists Plead Not Guilty to Murder Charge in Athens El Al Attack

ATHENS, Dec. 4 (JTA) –

Two Arab terrorists who attacked the El Al ticket office with a hand grenade last Thursday pleaded not guilty yesterday to a series of charges that included premeditated murder. A two-year-old child was killed and 14 other persons were injured in the blast.

The accused, Eli Karanetian and Mansur Seifeddin, both Jordanians, underwent a pre-trial examination before a magistrate yesterday. The hearing was held in private under a heavy security guard.

On Tuesday an Athens magistrate ordered the exhumation of the body of George Nastos, the child fatally injured in the grenade attack. The order was issued after defense counsel for the two terrorists contended that the child's death did not result from the explosion but was due to other causes.

Also, the absence of adequate security made the Athens Helenikon Airport a very attractive spot for bombers and skyjackers. Due to its location Athens was the ideal connecting point for many flights from the Middle East to Europe and the U.S. and this resulted in it becoming the favorite point of origin for numerous skyjackings and attacks between 1968 and 1985. As we all had heavy travel schedules the Palestinian's fondness for the Athens airport concerned us greatly. By some miracle none of the terrorist's activities touched us, but this was not the case for two HP employees working out of the Athens office who were killed in 1985 while on a flight to Cairo.

El Al Flight 253, was a Boeing 707 en route from Tel Aviv, Israel, to New York when it was attacked by two Arab terrorists as it was about to depart from a layover in Athens Greece on December 26, 1968. One passenger was killed and one female crew member was seriously injured in the attack. The two terrorists, a 19-year-old Libyan and a 25-year-old, members of the Lebanese-based militant organization Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine^[1] fired a submachine gun and threw grenades at the plane as it sat on the runway warming up prior to take off. They were taken into custody by Greek authorities.^[2]

HP NEWSMAKERS

December 2, 1985

HIJACKING. Two HP employees were among those killed in the hijacking and subsequent burning of an Egyptian Air Lines aircraft on Sunday, November 24.

Philippe De Laet and Paul Aslanidis, both of whom were working for HP Athens, died in the tragic incident in Malta, where the flight was diverted after leaving Athens bound for Cairo. They were en route to Dubai to take part in a computer trade show.

THE BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT.....Difficult At Best

As previously mentioned, there was not much business coming out of the Middle East until the oil money began to flow. With the exception of Multi-Corp International (MCI) in Iran and the Modern Electronics Establishment (MEE), which was a new and undeveloped distributor, HP had no representation in the oil exporting countries. However, HP did have several small low volume "legacy" distributors in Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Syria and Lebanon, countries that were not wealthy oil producers.

Note: I should point out here that during my time in Athens we began signing up third party sales organizations as "distributors" rather than as "representatives". There were legal reasons for this change that I will not go into here. The third parties who handled the sale of consumer products were signed up as "dealers".

With the possible exception of Lebanon, which was a major commercial center, we did not expect our legacy distributors to contribute much more to our order volume than they had in the past. Our focus would be primarily on the oil exporters. The oil crisis had made these countries rich and they were eager to spend their new wealth on healthcare, education, infrastructure, and industrialization (to offset the expected gradual decline of revenue as oil reserves became depleted). Of course, I don't want to paint these governments as altruistic. The amount of money flowing into Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Libya was huge and so was the level of corruption. As the world's wealth flowed into the Middle East it was obvious that anyone with a finger in the pie would become phenomenally rich.

Although HP's business prospects in the Middle East and North Africa were excellent there was a high degree of difficulty associated with accessing these untapped emerging markets. Many of the oil producers were located in countries that were difficult to get to and to get into. Each trip required extensive advanced preparation, especially for the service engineers, due the distances involved, the need to satisfy entry visa requirements, and the transportability of the necessary service materials.

Visas: Like all dictatorships, the governments of the countries in our territory tended to be paranoid and there were often many hoops to jump through before they would issue an entry visa. We couldn't just go down to the airport and hop on a plane.....and we couldn't just show up at an embassy and pick up a visa. The countries we traveled to often requested (required) personal information about the person applying for a visa, the exact purpose for the visit, who the engineer was going to visit, for how long, etc. Other hoops a potential visitor had to jump through, such as a having a customer or the ministry of foreign affairs send an invitation letter, providing a baptismal certificate as proof of religion, waiting for a visa to be approved, etc., often resulted in long delays. Some countries did not have embassies in Athens, which could cause additional delays. On one occasion I flew to London to obtain a visa for Algeria.

Complicating matters further, once in awhile something totally unexpected would happen. On one occasion I made arrangements for two HP service engineers from Germany to assist us with a system installation in Saudi Arabia. When they arrived in Athens they took a taxi to the Saudi embassy and began filling out visa application forms. When they got to the question that asked them to enter their religion they weren't quite sure what to do. They knew that they couldn't be Jewish, but was there some other religion that the Saudi's didn't like? To be on the safe side they put down "none". When their applications were reviewed they were promptly advised that atheists were not welcome in Saudi Arabia. Even the invitation letter and producing their baptismal certificates didn't change the outcome. Back to square one and more delays while I located two different engineers.

Distances: Due to the long distances and high travel costs the sales and service engineers always leveraged their trips by calling on as many customers as possible and, more often than not, this meant visiting several countries. By necessity the trips were long, often three weeks in duration and traveling throughout the mainly uncivilized and yet-to-be-developed area was a hardship experience for everyone.

Delivering Service: To use an old computer expression, the Middle East service organization did not operate on a "priority interrupt" basis. Due to the need for advanced planning the time that elapsed between receiving a service request from a customer in Saudi Arabia or Iraq, for example, and actually having an engineer on site could be several weeks. For our customers and for my service operation, there were no guaranteed response times. A 4-hour response time guarantee in the U.S. became a 4-week un-guaranteed response time in our territory. This fact was not well received by some U.S. customers with installation in Saudi Arabia.

Although my service engineers had to deal with the same travel related inconveniences as the sales force, their jobs were more difficult because they had to carry service materials (test equipment, service kits, replacement parts, documentation, etc.).....having an engineer on site was of little value if he did not have the means to complete the required work. One of our greatest challenges was finding ways to quickly transport service materials to customers' sites. Moving materials around the Middle East could be very difficult and the degree of difficulty varied greatly by country. The temporary importation / exportation of service materials was usually possible when they were hand carried by the service engineer and presented in person (as personal property) to the customs authorities upon arrival. If

shipped separately as freight the process was much more difficult and could delay the repair work by days, or even weeks. While there was a "carnet" system in Europe that would allow HP to quickly move (via temporary importation) materials between countries, no such system existed in the Middle East. In the more difficult cases we had to rely on our customers, many of whom were either government organizations or had connections within the government, to arrange for temporary importation. In countries where we had a large enough installed base we could justify the permanent importation of service materials and place them with our distributor (if we had one) or with one of our trusted customers. Our ability to deliver service improved significantly after we developed a process for each country. Of course, the ultimate solution was to have official status either through the establishment of HP subsidiaries or a network of distributors, which was our ultimate goal.

Returning defective assemblies to the HP parts centers was another problem. The assembly exchange program would only work if our subsidiaries, distributors or customers had the ability to export the defective assemblies. Having to arrange for an export license and deal with a lot of restrictions (usually related to a government bureaucrat's view that we were exporting "country assets".....even defective material) often made the exchange program unworkable.

Processing Sales Orders: Although the commercial service group had the luxury of being office-bound they had their own crosses to bear. It was often more difficult to process an order than it was for the sales force to get an order.....dealing with letters of credit, correspondent banks, multiple currencies, lost shipments, inability to re-export incorrect shipments, incorrect pricing, customers who could always find a reason / way not to pay, etc.

Corruption: Corruption was also endemic in the region. What we call bribery and kickbacks in the western world were, for the most part, not viewed as corruption by business people in the Middle East. They were viewed as the return of a favor or a show of respect or good will.

Payoffs Are Way of Life, Business

U.S. Firms Justify Bribery Abroad as a Common Practice

This was usually not illegal and was the customary way of doing business in many of the countries we covered. Of course, by U.S. law (the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act) it was illegal for U.S. companies to accommodate this custom. This is one of the reasons we had a network of distributors. What they did with their own money was their business. This was a topic that HP managers avoided because we didn't want to know. Of course, there was an occasional attempt at outright extortion. Once in awhile a phone call would come from someone with connections who claimed that he was in a position to fix the outcome of a bidding process. If we paid him he could make it happen for HP. If we didn't pay him he would do his best to make sure the order went to a different supplier. We always refused these helpful offers.

In summary, the best short answer to the business environment question is that it was time consuming, difficult, and very expensive to do business in the Middle East, especially for the customer service organization.

THE CULTURE.....A Practical (On The Job) Learning Experience

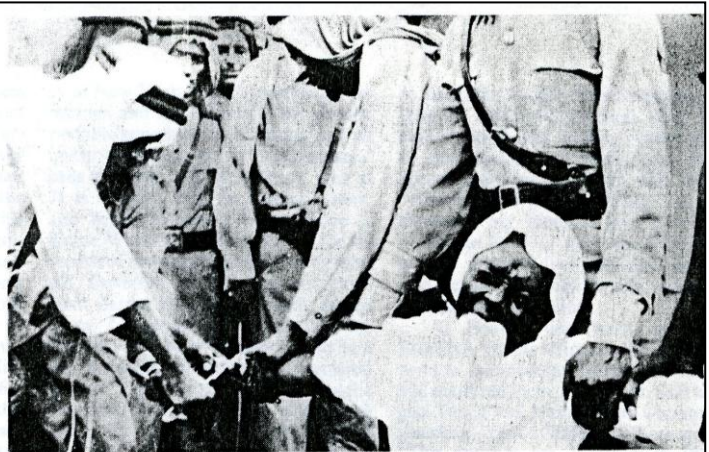
With a few exceptions, the initial employees of HP in Athens were neither Arab nor Muslim. They were European and American Christians. Consequently most of us were very naïve about the customs that existed in the various countries that we would be visiting. This was especially true of the Americans who, having been isolated in the western hemisphere their entire lives, had a very narrow view of the world. None of us wished to appear to be ignorant of and insensitive to the history, traditions and the unique cultures that we would be encountering in our new territory. So, we made an effort to learn as much as possible about the business and religious customs and practices of the region as well as the languages spoken. Although we did our best to learn the basics, a lot was gained through practical experiences, some of them not so good. In today's patois these are known as "teachable moments".

Becoming familiar with the customs and practices of Islam was an absolute necessity and understanding how these were applied in each country, which varied greatly, was equally important. For example, it was just fine to consume and alcoholic beverage in Egypt or Iraq, but doing so in Saudi Arabia would land you in jail. Furthermore, in Saudi Arabia Shariah law applied not only to criminal behavior but also to moral behaviorand the Saudi's had a very tight definition of what constituted good and bad moral behavior. Doing things that were acceptable in the west, such as having a drink after work, reading a Playboy Magazine in the barber shop, watching an "R" rated movie in the evening, or even taking a photo of a woman passerby in a public place, could result in arrest, deportation, or worse. The penalty for adultery was execution by stoning. It was nice to know these rules (which still exist today) before one of us attempted to speak with a woman wearing a veil.

Coincidentally, as I was preparing this story I ran across an article (next page) in the editorial section of the Wall Street Journal that provides an excellent real world example of the application of fundamental Islamic law. Although the article is about present day Iran, Shariah law, which has remained unchanged for 1300 years, was applied exactly the same way in Saudi Arabia when I was there in the 1970's.

If the Islamic fundamentalists have their way we will soon see Islamic law applied in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And, since so many political changes have occurred in the region since I began writing this document two years ago, Tunisia, Egypt and Libya could be headed down the same path. Let us hope that there are enough educated people in these countries to resist any attempt by the ultra conservative Islamic fundamentalists to impose their will on a largely illiterate and gullible population.

Even with a good understanding of how to behave and what to expect in the



A CONVICTED SAUDI ARABIAN THIEF WRITHES IN PAIN AS HIS HAND IS AMPUTATED

ISLAM

Crime or Punishment?

As for the thief, both male and female, cut off their hands. It is the reward of their own deeds, an exemplary punishment from Allah. Allah is mighty, wise.

—The Koran

This stern injunction was enunciated by the Prophet Muhammad some 1,300 years ago to his followers in a primitive desert society. Now, after centuries of being superseded by Western law, the exacting code of the Koran is once more gaining strength and support in a number of countries.

Five Arab states in the Middle East—Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Libya, North Yemen—base their laws on the Koran. In Egypt, which prides itself on its Western-style sophistication, a parliamentary commission is at work on a new code, based on Islamic law, that would make apostasy, among other crimes, punishable by death. A rider to the proposed bill provides that if a Muslim becomes a Communist he would be considered apostate and therefore subject to beheading.

Last week the new military regime in Pakistan announced that it was imposing Koranic law in that country. Whipping, amputation and death, along with prison terms, were prescribed for a long list of crimes, ranging from theft, armed robbery and insulting the modesty of a woman to political activities, labor organizing and striking. General Zia ul-Haq, the new chief administrator of martial law, decreed that there would be no amputations without his approval and that anesthesia would be used. Nonetheless, the threat was apparently sufficient to cause a sharp drop in crime.

Islamic law is based on the Koran and Muhammad's teachings as well as on clarifications made by later scholars. The law differs from country to country, depending on which of the four major schools of interpretation (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafei and Hanbali) is followed. Islamic justice can be harsh

in an eye-for-an-eye manner. Judges tend to opt for severity rather than leniency if there is any doubt. An American couple in Saudi Arabia caught their Pakistani houseboy stealing one day and ordered him to report to the police. They were astonished when he returned home minus one hand. It had been chopped off and the stub of his arm plunged into boiling tallow to disinfect it.

Victims Pay. This spring four men were convicted of rape in Saudi Arabia's Al-Hasa province and sentenced to death. One, a bachelor, was beheaded. The other three were married and guilty of adultery as well as rape. They were buried up to their waists in sand and stoned to death by a mob that used small rocks instead of boulders to prolong their agony. Sometimes the victims pay too. When a German girl was raped by two men a couple of months ago, the judge ordered her flogged "as an accomplice to immorality."

In North Yemen, a convicted thief is required to pick up his chopped-off hand and raise it to his forehead in a salute to the presiding judge. That sort of thing is not done in more liberalized Muslim societies like Libya. Although Strongman Muammar Gaddafi imposed Koranic law in 1973, thieves are usually jailed instead of having their hands amputated. "We want these people to work," says a Libyan police official. "How can they work if we cut off their hands?"

Is Islamic law a deterrent? The Saudis think so, and point to their crime rate, one of the lowest in the world. But recently an influx of low-income foreign workers—most of them Muslim—has caused an upsurge in crime, suggesting that knowing the laws of the Koran and that they are enforced is not necessarily a deterrent. When a Jeddah merchant left a crate of gold unguarded on the airport tarmac for two weeks, a Somali airport employee found the temptation too much. He began filching gold bars and selling them in the bazaar. Police caught him in the act and he was sent back to Somalia—minus one hand.

Middle East I ran into problems during my first visit to Saudi Arabia in August of 1974. I would have my own up close and personal experience with a member of the “religious police” (aka, representatives of “The Committee for the Elimination of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue”). More on this later.

Except for Greece and Turkey, there was not much of a middle class in the countries that we covered. Many (or most) of our customers were well educated (usually abroad) and open minded business owners from wealthy families who had government connections (Cherif Rifaat’s family is a good example). However, the majority of the population was at the low end of the economic spectrum. Poor.

In most Arab countries the poor were bedouins who had come into the cities to find work. Typically, they were ignorant, illiterate and had a belief system all their own, much of it based on superstition or on the certainty that bad things happen because Allah (God) has willed it (inshallah). Over time, many of these people had managed to find their way into positions of some authority. Again, Saudi Arabia provides a prime example. An HP employee visiting Riyadh was arrested on his way to the airport. The taxi in which he was riding ran over someone. The logic used by the police officer at the scene was that if the passenger had not asked for a ride to the airport than no one would have been hurt. Therefore, the accident was the fault of the passenger and not the driver. After a few days in jail another local official, one who had some common sense, straightened everything out.

In another example of how ignorant, backward and out of touch with the modern world the majority of the population in the region was at this time, in August of 1980 religious pilgrims enroute to Mecca aboard a Saudi Arabian Airlines L-1011 decided to make some tea by lighting a gas stove. The plane caught fire killing everyone on board. Here is a summary of the S.F. Examiner news article:

“Mecca bound Moslem pilgrims using gas stoves to brew tea on a crowded Saudi Arabian jetliner may have started the fire that engulfed the plane at Riyadh airport killing all 301 people. The in-flight blaze, which spread through the cabin to the cockpit, forced the plane to turn back to the Saudi capital. It landed successfully but all aboard were burned to death as rescue workers watched helplessly, unable to open the emergency doors. Regrettably, some pilgrims carry with them – secretly – such flammable equipment. As the green and white airliner touched down, flames erupted along the length of the fuselage. Among the dead were at least one American, four British businessmen and a British stewardess”.

Even in the mid 1970’s the Riyadh to Jeddah leg of this trip was a routine flight for HP business people. This could have happened to any of us.

Stoned in Iran

If an Iranian prosecutor has his way, a 43-year-old mother of two will soon be taken from her cell in Tabriz prison, wrapped in a white shroud, buried up to her chest in a dirt pit, and stoned to death. In accordance with Iran’s penal code, the rocks pelted at her head will be big enough to inflict pain, but not large enough to kill her immediately. It will take time—maybe half an hour—for her to die.

Welcome to Iranian justice, where the testimony of a woman is worth half that of a man, and gays are hanged in the public square.

The Islamic Republic insists that the crimes of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani are manifold. A poor Azeri who speaks little Persian, Ms. Ashtiani was first found guilty by an East Azerbaijan court in May 2006 of having “illicit relationships” with two men. For this, she was lashed 99 times.

In another trial several months later, she was sentenced to stoning for alleged adultery with the man accused of murdering her husband. Last Sunday the head of the East Azerbaijan Judiciary told the Islamic Republic News Agency that, in addition to these sexual crimes, Ms. Ashtiani was also convicted of the murder itself.

Following a campaign by her two children,

the Western press and various politicians and celebrities, the Iranian embassy in London issued a statement last week saying the stoning was suspended. Yet Ms. Ashtiani’s fate remains unclear. Her lawyer, Mohammad Mostafai, says that the stay is ambiguous and that there’s a “very serious chance” of execution by other means, like hanging.

The chief of the judiciary in her province confirmed that “whenever the respectable head of the judiciary [Sadeq Larijani] finds it expedient, the execution of Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani will be carried out.” Tehran has banned newspapers and TV stations from reporting accurately on Ms. Ashtiani’s case. Most Iranians don’t even know her name. Meanwhile, we hear that her 22-year-old son Sajad has been summoned by the Tabriz intelligence ministry. Our calls to him went unanswered.

Ten other Iranians accused of adultery (seven women and three men) currently await the same medieval punishment for their “crime against God,” according to Amnesty International. The silver lining in all of this is that the public outcry is making a difference. If only the Obama Administration understood this lesson.

Saudia Flight 163

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



A Saudia L-1011.

Saudia Flight 163 was a scheduled passenger flight of Saudia that caught fire after takeoff from Riyadh International Airport (now

the Riyadh Air Base) on a flight to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia^[1] on 19 August 1980. All 287 passengers and 14 crew on board the Lockheed L-1011-200 TriStar registered HZ-AHK, died after the aircraft made an emergency landing back at the Riyadh airport.

LANGUAGES.....Manageable Thanks To Our Customers' Backgrounds

As far as language capabilities were concerned, all of the Europeans in the Athens operation spoke multiple languages while the Americans spoke only English with perhaps a little high school Spanish, which would be of little value in the Middle East, except perhaps in Morocco. Fortunately for us, the bulk of our customers were professionals who came from families with the resources necessary to send them to school in Europe or the U.S. As a result, in addition to Arabic most of our customers spoke French or English and, in many cases, both. The only country where I encountered a language barrier was Algeria (because after 150 years of occupation Algeria's first language was French).

OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS TO SUCCESS.....The Long And Short Of It

From day-one it was obvious (common sense) that establishing country level service operations staffed by locals, either via HP subsidiaries or distributors, would be the only way to successfully meet the customer service challenges (the need for cost effective and quick service delivery) that HP would encounter in the Mediterranean and Middle East. But, in the beginning we would have to provide service as best we could from Athens with a startup team of experienced expatriate service engineers. I was very lucky to find them. ■

