

NOTES:

Saturday, September 12, 2020

Discussion Topic: Black Wave

“Kim Ghattas on the Middle East’s ‘Black Wave,’” Fareed Zakaria, Facebook, February 15, 2020

- United States senate went against wishes of Donald Trump
- Resolution to try to stop the president on attacking Iran without gaining approval from Congress
- Donald Trump has had interests in dealing with Iran for decades
 - Interview in 1980: thinks that the US “sits back” and does not act when it comes to Iran compared to other countries
 - Should have invaded Iran
 - Friendly with Saudi Arabia
 - First international visit as president
- Middle East has always had issues and tension, but not to this extent
- Ghattas: “What happened to us?”

Kim Ghattas, “The Muslim World’s Question: ‘What Happened to Us?’” Atlantic, January 25, 2020

- 1979 is an important time and place to understand why the Middle East is like it is today, how to move forward
- Born in Lebanon
- The “past” seemed promising and liveable
 - Wars still existed but were “contained in time and space”
 - “The question may surprise those in the West who assume that the extremism and bloodletting of today have always been the norm.”

- Excellent point, I would like to educate myself to understand the world better and how situations and conflicts are the way they are today

- 1979: 3 historic events took place

1. Iranian Revolution

- a. Return of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to Tehran
 - i. Establishes Islamic state

2. Siege of the Holy Mosque in Mecca

- a. Siege by Saudis
- b. Saudi Arabia is home and protector of two holy sites in Islam
- c. Siege damaged Kingdom's reputation

3. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan

- a. Backed by US
- b. Battleground in Jihad during modern history

- I vs SA - leadership battle in Muslim world

- Pursuit of Raw Power

- Both sides search for support for their causes

- Ghattas interviewed people and asked how 1979 changed their lives; lives were changed in profound ways, even those who were not alive in that time

- Kim Ghattas discusses the issues, but goes further and examines the people.

The people and how they feel now about the changes that descended upon the region in 1979

- What is Islamic Law?

- Shia - Iran and Sunni - Saudi Arabia

- Apostasy - abandonment or renunciation of a religious or political belief

- Egypt signed peace treaty with Israel in 1979

- Egypt's women began wearing black niqabs, not usual in that country
- 1985 - small number of books were on religion; 10 years later, 85 percent of books were
- Chador - black cloth for wear
 - Used to be only worn by conservative women
- Black wave came from Tehran into Lebanon
- Iran exported revolution
- Black wave shuttered liquor stores, switched off music, and saw women wearing black chador and niqab
- Younger generation now questioning their elders as to why they allowed such devastation and radical change to occur
- What kind of music was outlawed - any kind?
- Someone raising their voice against the leadership in Iran or Saudi Arabia would lead them to be targeted and in danger
- Iranian human rights lawyer sentenced to 38 years in jail and 148 lashes, supported women who wanted an end to the veiling laws

Sunday, September 13, 2020

"The Ghosts Of 1979," CNN, February 3, 2020

- Saudi Arabia feels like they need Trump to help with the Iran issue
- Democrats believe that Trump's plan undermines international law and could impact allies and credibility
- Ghattas knows a lot about the issue, making her a very credible source and correspondent on the issues in the Middle East
- Iran continues to do what it has always done, but quietly
- When an oil facility was attacked in SA, no one jumped to their aid right away

- Can they rely on the US?
- Iran is thought to have carried out the attack
- Triangle: SA, Iran, United States

"'Black Wave' Looks At Iran, Saudi Arabia's Fractured Relationship," Morning Joe, MSNBC, February 17, 2020.

- Iranian foreign ministry: believes Trump was misled and his move did the opposite of what was intended “beginning of the end” as far as the US’s presence in the middle east
- Is the ‘Black Wave’ receding?
 - Seems to be
 - Younger generation
 - Ghattas’ book highlights women during the time fought back
 - “Keen to be heard”
 - “Starting to be heard more now”
- “Change is possible”
 - Divide is real, Sunnis and Shia have “probably” killed each other LESS than Catholics and protestants
 - Two major denominations, sects in Islam
 - Reading the book, discover more than just the war and death, there is culture and life wanting to be lived
- Saudi Arabia and Iran have not always been enemies
- Rivalry is part of the TRIANGLE including the United States

Michael Totten, "The Year The Sky Fell: Review Of 'Black Wave' By Kim Ghattas," Commentary (April 2020).

- Ghattas travelled to Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan

- Everywhere she went, people had feelings and things to say about the events of 1979
- Siege at Mecca
 - 300 Saudi insurgents
 - Thousands of hostages
 - Violent, deadly
- Insurrectionists demanded things from the SA kingdom
 - Stop engaging with the West
 - Stop exporting oil to imperialists
 - Banish foreigners
 - Ghattas: demands were similar as to what Osama bin Laden made years later
- Custodianship of Mecca and Medina - SA
 - “Foundation of its leadership of the Islamic world”
- Khomeini banned dancing and alcohol
 - No music
 - Stoning for executing people became a thing again
 - Universities closed for 3 years
- 9/11 hijackers - “almost all of whom were Saudi”
 - Does this fact affect how Westerners see and understand the Middle East?

Discussion Topic: Iranian Revolution at 40

"Why Events In Iran 40 Years Ago Matter," BBC News, February 1, 2019.

- Protests lasted for months
- Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi went to Egypt to escape Iran
- Opposition leader returned - Ayatollah Khomeini was in exile for 14 years

- Protests heightened and many people were killed in brutal fights and protests - angered by A.K.'s return
- Referendum: Iran --- becomes--- > Islamic republic
- Shah received medical treatment in the US - many Iranians were upset by this
- US embassy in Tehran was overtaken, 52 Americans were taken hostage
- 444 days - hostages were set free - all survived
- Hostility continues today between Iran and US
 - Reason why Ghattas examines the issue as a Triangle, including SA, Iran, and US

"Revolution At 40: Experts Reflect," Iran Primer, United States Institute Of Peace, February 5, 2019.

- Thoughts from experts on the issue
- Shah was seen as a guardian, ally for the US in the Persian Gulf
 - However, it was under Jimmy Carter's presidency that the relationship broke
- Shah lost empire because
 - Poor leadership
 - Arrogance
 - Prevaricated: act in an evasive way
 - 1978-79
- Khomeini was a stronger leader with a drive to create an Islamic Republic and humiliate the United States
 - He achieved both
 - Carter lost next election, Reagan issue "arms for hostages"
- Trump abandoned nuclear deal with Iran
- The past 40 years in Iran:

- Systematic misogyny
- Elite men, 2300 of them controlling everything
- Isolated from the world, however seeks help from Russia and China
- Inflation and unemployment
- Calls for change, enough is enough
- New generations growing up in Iran are not favouring the ideas that stemmed from the intentions of the revolution
 - Young people = 50% of population
 - Do not agree with the men in control, government
 - Is this attainable, given who is in power? Or will the gap only get wider?

"Iran Rally Marks 40th Anniversary Of Islamic Revolution," BBC News, February 11, 2019.

- Banners Khomeini on them, “death to America,” and “Death to Israel”
- The president made a speech, said the might of the army will increase, and spoke against US sanctions imposed on the nation on the 40th anniversary

Viewing:

“1979 -- The Big Bang That Created Today’s World, Part 1,” DW, November 2019

- Polish Pope elected during a tense time in Poland, Pope John Paul II
- Coldest Winter in decades for England
 - The country was in a disarray political
 - Margaret Thatcher and her Conservatives were in a good position for the election
 - Everyone, it seemed, was on strike in the country
 - Garbage was piling up on the sides of streets, not being picked up as the collectors were not working

- Clips of hospital workers standing at the entrances of hospitals, turning people away because they are unable to provide care (Unimaginable)
 - Deceased people were unable to be buried properly as well
 - Under these conditions
 - “Election of a conservative government was unstoppable”
- Women in Iran who tried to speak against the revolution were faced with anger and push back
 - As Kim Ghattas explains, analyzes when the younger generation looks back
 - Women pushed into alleyways by mob men, one instance they took out their penises and told them if they wanted freedom, to come and get it -> seemingly implying freedom comes from being a male or complying with male dominance
 - Freedom is a male attribute?

“Bitter Rivals: Iran and Saudi Arabia, Part 2,” Frontline, PBS, February 27, 2018

- Watched the documentary twice to get a full understanding.
- Valley of Peace in Iraq has been open for 1700 years, with over 5 million bodies
- Sunni extremists - Al Qaeda and ISIS
- Major devastation across Iraq, Sunnis displaced - families being accused of being a part of ISIS
 - How are they being treated?
 - Are any of them hurt, executed under suspicion of working with ISIS?
 - Khomeini’s revolution started it all 41 years ago
 - Islamic law
 - Supreme leadership
 - Hate towards the Saudi Arabian royal family

- Abolish, remove, and prevent western influence
 - “Down with the House of Saud”
- Saudi Arabia feels that Iran is the problem
 - A back and forth that does not end
 - Foreign ministers between both countries point fingers at each other and believe that each side is being aggressive, abusing power, and funding or fuelling terrorism
 - “Almost every other powerful nation supports Saudi Arabia actively ... that should tell you something.” - Iran foreign minister
 - Saudi Arabia makes the wrong choices, but Iran makes the right ones / Saudi Arabia feels the same way about them
- Iran and Syria - war in Syria has been going on since 2011
 - 5 million people have fled, many killed, others displaced
- What languages do they speak in these countries?
 - SA - Arabic / Iran - Persian / Syria - Arabic
- Schools in Syria - “a gift from the Islamic Republic of Iran”
 - Money comes from Iran - 47 schools in the province in question
 - Iran is not a “charity,” so why are they doing it? For their own benefit and view upon the world stage
- Uprising in Syria, 2011 - Deputy Foreign Minister in Syria believes it was a prepared mission
- “Everybody is giving money to different people.” Sums up the state of the world
- What is a proxy war and what is a proxy army?
 - War being started by a group being supported by a powerful state or government but does not get involved itself

- Barrel bombs - full of nails, sharp objects, shrapnel to cause damage, injury, and death
- Saudi Arabia made a show of force, large military demonstration with powerful tanks, guns, and military men. Similar to sights from North Korea.
- YEMEN: Strategic passage to the Suez Canal. Poorest country in the middle east
 - Outside media rarely allowed in Yemen, especially in the northern area bordering SA
 - “Oppressive people” did this to the communities, said a Yemen villager
 - A child recounts the sounds he has heard when an airstrike was launched near his community. Older children understand the fear and mourn people they know who have been killed by missile strikes.
 - “War was necessary” in Yemen - Saudi Prince / War in Saudi Arabia was not an option
 - “We want [Iran] to get off our case.” Adel Al-Jubeir, Foreign Minister SA
 - “We know that Yemen is important for Saudi Arabia, and we never want to stab Saudi Arabia in the back.” - Iran foreign minister
 - Back and forth. There are two narratives however they seem to be tossing the same rhetoric at each other and trying to point out every issue rather than work to find common ground or any solution
 - CONFLICT ARMAMENT RESEARCH
 - Funding from EU; tracing weapons to manufacturers and their origin
 - CBU 105 - Cluster bomb
 - In Saudi stockpiles - scary to think about weapons in any country’s hands, especially those who are angry and in conflict
- Cholera outbreak in Yemen and extreme malnutrition
 - Caused by eating or drinking contaminated water causing bad diarrhea

Monday, September 21, 2020

"For Sama," Frontline, PBS, November 19, 2019 (95 mins.)

- I feel a surge of emotion at the first tank shell explosion at the beginning of the video. How come nobody screamed? No sounds of whimpering were heard. Are they that habituated to the sound? It was mentioned that they had been experiencing them every day. Later in the video they begin to joke and engage in light-hearted banter about the regime and its tactics against them.
- It has been war ever since Sama was born
- The doctors and nurses thought the hospital would be safe and immune from bombing
 - If anything, it makes them a greater target
 - Focal point of gathering, hope, and sadness in that hospital
- Under siege from Syrian regime and its allies
 - Why are the Russians acting this way? What do they have to gain? Are they fighting for land, power, money?
 - Are the 'rebels' able to fight back? They don't seem to have access to weapons
- Children are being treated on the hospital floor
 - Blood is everywhere, various injuries to the head, crying, yelling, hopelessness
- "Russian warplanes overhead"
- Having to eat food with bugs in it, something they are not used to
 - How are Syrians able to source food?
 - Hence how excited the woman was about persimmons
 - I am surprised that they still have electricity
- Waad feels sick - she is going to have another child
 - Is she healthy enough to have a child?

- What are the emotional and psychological effects on mother and child during such unthinkable times?
- She is sad because she barely has enough healthy food to feed herself and Sama, how can she survive and thrive?
- According to Waad, the Russians have bombed 8 out of 9 hospitals in East Aleppo, leaving the one Hamza leads as the only one left
 - Water is cut off at the hospital
 - Electricity still on
 - They receive 300 patients a day, many of them on the video are children being brought in by their parents
 - A woman entered in the hospital and spotted Waad's camera:
 - “Are you filming? Why are they doing this to us?”
 - Where do they put the dead?
 - Is the hospital staffed 24 hours? Or are they only open a certain amount of time during the day?
 - 890 operations
 - 6000+ people seen in 20 days
- For me, the hardest part of watching this documentary is seeing the children hurt, crying, or dead
 - It was expressed early in the documentary that children “have nothing to do with it”
- “Even when I close my eyes, I see the colour red.” - Waad
 - Blood everywhere, and with no running water, how are they supposed to clean anything, even themselves?

- Cold winters in Syria - warmed themselves on a rocket missile that crashed through the building
- In addition to rockets, cluster bombs, shell bombs, and gunfire, the regime started using chlorine gas on the people
- “We are crying out to the world ‘help us,’” Wadd said.
 - Truly a feeling of isolation, abandonment, and hopelessness
- Regime forces took over Aleppo block by block, squeezing the remaining citizens into a small region of the region
- Hamza is in continuous communication with media, television channels, and other officials to update and tell the story of Syria that the regime censors or denies
 - The UN called Hamza on evening with a message from the Russians
 - I never knew that the UN delivered messages such as that
 - This must have been an extraordinary situation
 - Essentially, the Russians said the rebels have no choice; either they die or they have to go into exile and their lives will be spared
- Hamza and Waad stayed at the hospital and waited to be the last to leave - they wanted to send the elderly and the injured right away
 - Once the first wave went in ambulances, they arrived at the frontline and were shot at by persistent snipers, having to turn back
 - The footage was of extreme devastation with toppled buildings, piles of rubble, and scorched vehicles and the remnants of war attacks
 - In the end, Hamza, Waad, and Sama crossed safely and survived the checkpoint. Taima, Waad’s new-born child was born healthy
 - **The family now lives safely in England**

Zachary Laub, "Syria's Civil War: The Descent into Horror," Council on Foreign Relations (February 19, 2020).

“A look at the elements that have deepened Syria’s tragedy.”

- First question that came to my mind was ‘how long have the Assads been in power?’
 - 40 years
- 2011 was when things broke out in Syria.
 - Around 12 million people have been displaced - an astronomical amount
 - Thousands killed and brutalized
- Civil war
 - Jihadis want Sunni theocracy
 - Opposition want a democratic and “pluralistic” Syria
- The US had been launching air strikes on the Islamic state up until 2019
 - Then Turkey invaded northern Syria
 - I remember that on the news
- Kurdish forces are allied with the US to fight against the “Islamic State”
- Turkey wants to push them away from border areas
- RUSSIA - allied with Assad’s regime by defending them and attacking from the air while Iranians attack on the ground
- Aleppo is in northern Syria, Damascus is in the south
- Assad - will not leave and abdicate his power, but Syrians want him out, especially looking at how he has treated citizens
 - “The foreign forces on which he relies will continue to wield power.”
 - Almost seems as though Assad is hiding behind these powers
- HAFEZ al-ASSAD - gained control in 1970
 - Bashar, his son was the successor

- Succeeded in 2000, making promises to shake up the market by getting rid of old patronage networks
 - Privatized things - benefitted the top, pressured the poor and labourers
 - “Record-setting drought from 2006 to 2010” created a whole other list of problems for citizens
 - Unemployment rate went up, farmers left their unworkable farmland
- System in Syria is autocratic and kleptocratic
 - A ruler who has and uses absolute power
 - Corrupt leaders and their corrupt powers mishandle money for the benefit of themselves
- Boys spray-painted “The people want the fall of the regime” in Daraa, Syria. These boys were arrested and punished for their vandalism and foul words
- People rallied behind them behind them, causing violence and mixed messages
- Not everyone wanted a blow to the regime, some wanted to meet in the middle
- Assad generally ordered protests to be handled with force
- It refers to security services - is that referring to Syria security forces or is Assad communicating to the Russians and Iranians?
- Syrian army
 - Fired at unarmed protesters
 - Arrested many people
 - Took men and boys away
 - Torture
 - Executions
 - Showed a demonstration of might and force if there were to be demonstrations or disobedience

- Kurdish want an autonomous territory in northern Syria
- Refugee crisis for the European Union
- “Turkey is host to more than three million Syrians”

Discussion Topic: Understanding Syria

Monday, September 21, 2020

"Country Profile: Syria," BBC News.

- Made up of several religions including Kurds, Christians, Shia, and Sunnis, among others
- The landscape is made up of fertile plains for farming, mountains, and deserts
- Independence from France in 1946
- 2011 was a turning point for Syria
 - Arab Spring
- The scales were shifted in favour of the government of Syria in 2017, with the help of Iran and Russia backing them up and pressuring the protesters
- Media is complicated and used by both sides to spread their message
- What is the population of Syria?
 - Approximately 16.9 million people in 2018, a major decline from its 21.4 million in 2010

Wednesday, September 23, 2020

Mark Mackinnon, "The Graffiti Kids Who Sparked the Syrian War," Globe And Mail,

December 2, 2016

- There always seems to be a defining or a tangible moment that sparks a war or uprising
 - In the case of the Syrian war, it stemmed from a juvenile act but spread an important message across the Middle East and can be appreciated by some like

myself, and like the majority of those who come to understand the Syrian crisis

- On February 16, 2011, Naief Abazid spray-painted “It’s your turn, Dr. Bashar al-Assad” on a school’s wall with black spray paint
 - Underneath the principal's office outside
- This 14-year old was arrested and then tortured
- It was to suggest that the party and regime would fall after the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt
- “It was something silly,” Naif said
 - “I was a kid. I didn’t know what I was doing.”

Unfortunately, I could not access the rest of the article as I do not subscribe to *The Globe and Mail*.

I am quite interested in the destruction of antiquities, heritage and religious sites, and other buildings of significance in Syria. The following resources should take me on a tour of the devastation to history and memories of Syria. I anticipate I will do a journal entry that weaves my thoughts of all three of these resources together.

"Tomb Of Umayyad Caliphate Exhumed By Militias In Syria," Middle East Monitor, May 28, 2020.

- Militia members who are fighting with and for the regime destroyed this important gravesite which is located in the north-west province of Idlib
- The graves of the Caliph, his wife, and his servant (I have never known a notable figure to be interred with their servant, but he must have had great importance)
- There was fire set at the site as well
- The remains have disappeared and the grave site is severely damaged

- It is unknown (at least at the time of this article) where the remains are
- The caliph had a short reign of only 2 years and five months, but he was still a highly respected figure and Muslim
- The Assad regime has terrorized and destroyed other grave sites and exhumed remains before
 - It takes a special person/group full of hatred and anger to destroy the sanctity of human death and burial. It is a respect that should not be broken. Why would they do this? Do these sites not contribute to the history and culture of Syria?
 - Syrian Soldiers were videoed throwing around and playing with skulls of exhumed bodies at another gravesite
- Where are they taking the corpses and what are they doing to them?
- Have any of them been found since this article was published?
 - What would the implications be if a similar act took place here in Canada? What are the potential legal punishments, not to mention the amount of moral backlash this would cause?

"Historical Sites In Syria Are Being Looted 'On An Industrial Scale,'" Guardian, September 16, 2015.

- Unesco is warning that the loot is being misused by the Islamic State extremists and are funding them and their plots
 - "Satellite imagery shows that archaeological sites in Syria are dotted by thousands of illegal excavations
 - Not only is the looting extremely negative because it funds extremist actions, but it also leads to significant loss and destruction of history and cultural pieces of time immemorial

- Syria: a cradle of human civilisation
 - Home to six UNESCO world heritage sites and many notable monuments
 - According to the Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology, with ISIS in control of great areas of Syria, they have had the ability to loot, damage or destroy 900+ monuments or sites
- World heritage site - Palmyra had its tomb towers bombed
- Head of antiquities in Palmyra was murdered and then hung for everyone to see
 - I do not understand this, nor do I think that anyone could come to terms and understand such action and brutality to someone who was doing good to the world and for his country
- “This is not simply the history of Syria that they are trying to destroy today but a whole page of the history of humanity” according to Syria’s antiquities director
 - I feel the same way as this man who had direct knowledge and care over these sites and valuable pieces of history. I am someone who has little to zero knowledge of what exactly these sites are, but still believe that its desecration is awful and is a sad reality in addition to the murder and displacement of Syrian people
 - “Extremists systematically destroyed cultural heritage because it went contrary to some of their doctrines”
- Extremist members would camp at many of the historical sites as well
 - What sort of protections, such as security, armed guards, or caretakers did these sites have before this war and extremist groups became prevalent?

Jonathan Steele, "'The Saddest Museum Director In The World': Documenting Syria's Lost Antiquities," Middle East Eye, September 24, 2014.

- This story focuses on the National Museum in Damascus

- Shelves, cases, displays are empty, as part of a protection plan for the history that represents not only Syria but much of the Middle East and world history
- One of the largest protections and preservation projects in history
- Staff began hiding and storing away artifacts in 2013
 - Other museums have done the same, and the questions about where they are run wild but of course will remain unanswered
 - Who coordinated these operations? Did the regime have anything to do with it? Were the items exported out of the country?
 - National Archives of Syria have also been moved
- “We didn’t want the Iraq experience here,” the general director said
 - Iraq experienced its national museum and archives being looted and set on fire “while American soldiers passively watched”
 - A learning moment, that may just save another country’s antiques and preserve vital history
- He exclaims that the “problem of rescuing our heritage has been solved” and protected as 300,000 objects have been put into hiding from 34 large museums in Syria
- However, a national emergency and a great undertaking was made to preserve objects, how come similar efforts could not be made or aided to save human lives experiencing persecution, torture, and imminent death by its own regime and ally forces?
- Maintained constant communication with UNESCO
- Mentioned earlier: some sites have been taken over as camps for extremists, this article discusses that sites have been taken over by displaced and homeless civilians

- Thieves were stealing and digging at sites before war broke out because insufficient staffing and protection was allocated for 100,000 sites
- Museums are being reinforced with steel doors, armed guards
- The Dura-Europos synagogue, which is extremely old, from third century AD
- The museums have a database of all the items, and their status
- At the time of this article, the director was looking for a replacement so he could return to his university job

"What's Been Lost From Aleppo's 'Magical' Old City," PRI's The World, December 15, 2016.

- Aleppo - the entire town is a world heritage site
 - One of the oldest continuously inhabited area
- Being a part of Aleppo is being proud of your identity and your family tree
 - Watching the destruction is incomprehensible
- Woman interviewed - Lina Sergie Attar, a writer and architect from Aleppo
 - “Have to let go of the material loss on some level” ... “have to think about the people who have lost their lives”
 - There has been a lot lost during the past 10 years in Syria
- “The culture of Aleppo was very, very special” - Lina
- Difficult to understand that Aleppo has been split in eastern and western sections because of the fighting
 - Used to be a wholesome unit

Thursday, September 24, 2020

These are notes from yesterday’s class PowerPoint on Understanding Syria and its history. I believe we got about halfway through the presentation and the discussion.

- Assad regime is a large family, as demonstrated in a family photo from the 1990s

- This authoritarian regime has been in power since 1970
- According to a pie chart of the religious groups in Syria, the majority of them are Sunni
 - A small group of representation was the Alawites
 - A Shia sect
 - What the Assad regime is a part of
- The ancient castle *Krak des Chevaliers* is in Syria from the Crusades
- There are many heritage sites located in Syria, and many of them have been bombed or destroyed
- The French transferred power to Syria to allow it to become an independent state in 1946, however the new nation was never really ready to establish itself and a solid governing body has never been established
 - What are the legacies/tragedies of French rule?
- Syria and Egypt once united to become the United Arab Republic
 - This union was short lived, and I believe only lasted a couple of years
- Russia and the Syrian regime have close ties, which may be part of the reason why the Russian are unwavering to defend and protect the regime
- Early protests in Syria were largely peaceful
- 1400 Syrians died after having Sarin used them outside of Damascus
 - It is extremely potent and is a nerve agent commonly used as a chemical weapon
 - Developed in 1938 as a pesticide in Germany, it is human made
 - Also used in Japan
 - Most dangerous nerve agent currently available or known
 - Evaporates quickly

- <https://emergency.cdc.gov/agent/sarin/basics/facts.asp> - additional information
- World peace efforts have not been effective for the long-term in the region
- When Russia entered into the war in 2015, it shifted the war exponentially
 - Lead up to the timeline in *For Sama*

To be continued next time.

INTERNATIONAL CURRENT EVENTS NOTES:

Friday, September 11, 2020

These are notes taken from listening to *The World*:

- While I cannot pronounce it, the Thwaites Glacier is melting
- Otherwise known as the Doomsday Glacier - 6-7 stories high
- Scientists have been able to take their ship up close and study intensively, for the first time
 - Got a better understanding, heightening their fears of the melting pace and capabilities
 - Sonar is the technology they used to map the nooks and valleys underwater
 - Major valleys are deeper than first thought, warm water enters these and melts the glacial ice
 - Water temperature around 0 degrees centigrade - TOO WARM
 - Warm water is at the bottom of the ocean
 - How can this be reversed? Point of no return?
- Canadian firefighters have been sent to California to battle the raging wildfires that seem to be increasing in intensity every summer
 - Paid firefighters, not volunteers sent out
 - Some of the ones in California could have been in Australia previously
 - Working in their own bubble

- Living quarters and food halls are separate spaces and buildings from local firefighters
- How are solar and other renewable energies improving?
 - Solar tech has improved - batteries, storage, converting energy, racks
- What does “quid pro quo” mean?
 - A Latin term, meaning “a favour or advantage granted or expected in return for something.”
 - Mentioned often when referring to the current White House
 - What are the legal implications of a quid pro quo?
- Stockholm - mental health ambulance
 - Alerted by calling a different number as opposed to “911” or the European equivalent
 - Available from 2pm to 2 am, the peak time duration when people need help
 - The goal for each ambulance is to have 2 mental health nurses and 1 driver with knowledge of the area, healthcare systems, and mental health
 - Call police only when violence is an issue and they require the extra support, but the police presence is not always necessary
 - Want to get more ambulances and expand region, but finding experienced people has proven difficult
 - Could 911 eventually be “police, fire, physical health ambulance, and mental health ambulance?”

Monday, September 14, 2020

These are notes taken from listening to *BBC World Service* from September 10:

I took brief notes in an app on my phone while listening, then transferred them here to consolidate and go further in-depth. For this note-taking section, I did not get my interest

snagged by this podcast and take as many notes compared to listening to *The World*.

However, there is one story that really caught my attention and taught me something I did not know.

The Mississippi State Penitentiary or Parchman was described as a decrepit, old, nasty, and deplorable place, even though it is a maximum-security facility for hardened criminals.

“Crisis behind bars”

- 29 people of died already this year
 - Disproportionately Black males; race issue in the United States
 - BBC was not allowed in, always curious when things like this happen
 - “Deadly place to serve time”
 - Black people are 5 times more likely to be in the prison system
 - Leaky roof, moldy showers, walls
 - Water is not safe, not drinkable. Inmates try to boil the water when they can
- “The Hole” or Unit 29 which is the prison’s area for death row male inmates
 - Kitchen - rat fully cooked into cornbread, refused to eat and serve it to others
 - Got in trouble for “wasting” it
 - “Lost 30 pounds in 3 weeks” one inmate talking about the food and its poor quality
 - No other country imprisons as many people as the United States - 2.2 million people
 - Racial issue
 - 5000 people a year die in the prison system
 - Medical neglect - people not getting their proper care to keep them alive
 - Poor pay and staffing issues
 - Can you blame the employees?

- Top-down issues

- Ethical issue