



FOREIGN AFFAIRS

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Source: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Winter, 1978), pp. 355-373

Published by: [Council on Foreign Relations](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20040119>

Accessed: 16/06/2014 10:36

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THE END OF PAN-ARABISM

Political ideas make their own realities. Often in defiance of logic, they hold men and are in turn held by them, creating a world in their own image, only to play themselves out in the end, shackled by routine problems not foreseen by those who spun the myth, or living past their prime and ceasing to move people sufficiently. Or, political ideas turn to ashes and leave behind them a trail of errors, suffering and devastation.

An idea that has dominated the political consciousness of modern Arabs is nearing its end, if it is not already a thing of the past. It is the myth of pan-Arabism, of the *Umma Arabiyya Wahida Dhat Risala Khalida*, "the one Arab nation with an immortal mission." At the height of its power, pan-Arabism could make regimes look small and petty: disembodied structures headed by selfish rulers who resisted the sweeping mission of Arabism and were sustained by outside powers that supposedly feared the one idea that could resurrect the classical golden age of the Arabs. As historian Bernard Lewis summed it up little more than a decade ago, allegiance to the state was "tacit, even surreptitious," while Arab unity was "the sole publicly acceptable objective of statesmen and ideologues alike."¹ What this meant was that states were without sufficient legitimacy. Those among them that resisted the claims of pan-Arabism were at a disadvantage—their populations a fair target for pan-Arabist appeals, their leaders to be overthrown and replaced by others more committed to the transcendent goal. Now, however, *raison d'état*, once an alien and illegitimate doctrine, is gaining ground. Slowly and grimly, with a great deal of anguish and of outright violence, a "normal" state system is becoming a fact of life.

No great idea passes from the scene without screams of anguish, protests of true believers, and assertions by serious analysts that the idea still stands—battered, transformed but standing nonetheless—and debate about the vitality of pan-Arabism continues, for it is still far from accepted that the idea has been eclipsed. Writing in the July 1978 *Foreign Affairs*, Walid Khalidi reaffirmed the

¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West*, New York: Harper and Row, 1964, p. 94.

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vitality of the pan-Arabist idea. He observed that the Arab system is "first and foremost a 'Pan' system. It postulates the existence of a single Arab Nation behind the facade of a multiplicity of sovereign states. . . . From this perspective, the individual Arab states are *deviant* and *transient* entities; their frontiers illusory; their rulers interim caretakers or obstacles to be removed." Before the "super-legitimacy" of pan-Arabism, the legitimacy of the Arab states "shrinks into irrelevance." In such a system, "explicit or transparent *raison d'état* is heresy."² What is normal for others is abnormal in the Arab world. Since Arab states are really deviant entities, which in time will pass from the scene, they are to be constrained in what they do for statehood. Nothing less than a pan-Arab superstate will do.

A second view is that of Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, once the propagator of Nasserist ideology and today one of the bearers of the myths—in President Sadat's pejorative description, one of the high priests of the Nasserist temple. Heikal, who once made the distinction between Egypt as a state and Egypt as a revolution, and who defended the right of the "Arab revolution" to interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries, now grudgingly concedes that the state has triumphed over the aspirations of pan-Arabism. He has recounted a conversation he had with Secretary of State Kissinger during the latter's shuttle diplomacy in the Middle East in which he told Mr. Kissinger that Egypt was not merely a state on the banks of the Nile, but the embodiment of "an idea, a tide, a historical movement." To this Mr. Kissinger is reported to have said that he himself could not deal with latent intangible forces, or negotiate with an idea.

The Sadat diplomacy—of which Mr. Heikal is a critic—seemed to sustain the Kissingerian view. The idea that Heikal once brandished in the face of Nasser's rivals has lost its lure and power. Everyone, laments Heikal, recognizes that "the idea, the tide, the historical movement" is absent and that the party sitting across the negotiating table is the Egyptian state with its limited frontiers, resources and calculable interests.³

Heikal has reiterated this view that the Arab system is on the defensive, that "it has been forced to retreat in disarray," in this journal. Egypt, "for so long the mainstay of the Arab system," has opted out of it; the opportunity afforded by the October War of 1973 to put the system on solid foundations was lost, with the fault presumably in the decision-maker's judgment. Faith intrudes,

² Walid Khalidi, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1978, pp. 695–96 (emphasis added).

³ Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, in *Al Anwar* (Beirut), April 15, 1978.

however, for Heikal ends on an upbeat note. The Arab system may suffer a temporary setback, but it could bounce back (presumably when the Egyptian decision-maker sees the error of his ways), because the Arab world possesses a vitality that makes "the real constituency of any Arab leader the Arab world as a whole."⁴ Once again, the leader's constituency does not end with the boundaries of his state: even when the idea is violated, it still possesses sanctity and recuperative power.

The story of pan-Arabism's retreat goes deeper than Sadat's policy. And, to be sure, it has nothing to do with Mr. Kissinger's diplomacy, for, whatever the carrots and sticks in his bag, Mr. Kissinger could not remake Arab history or defeat a compelling idea. The willingness of the Egyptian state to be more like other states—to negotiate for itself—had nothing to do with Mr. Kissinger's diplomatic tactics, but was rather the result of changes and transformations within Arab politics itself. Reason of state had already begun to prevail in inter-Arab affairs, and pan-Arabism had lost its hold over the popular imagination several years before Kissinger appeared on the scene with a distinct preference for an "Egyptian solution" and an aversion to dealing with "historical movements."

II

Pan-Arabism's retreat began in 1967 after the Six Day War, which marked the Waterloo of pan-Arabism. In the immediate aftermath of the war there was no competing system of legitimacy—in fact, very little if any legitimacy remained in Arab politics as a whole. The regimes had survived, but the defeat had dishonored practically all of them and had devastated, in particular, the pan-Arabists in Cairo and Damascus. No regime could have gone its separate way then. The "radical" regime in Cairo would capitulate to the will of the oil states led by Saudi Arabia, but the oil states would not press their victory too far or too hard. The military defeat was sustained directly by the armies of Egypt, Syria and Jordan—for all practical purposes and in terms of inter-Arab politics, by Egypt—but the defeat had underlined the vulnerability of the Arab system of states, the bankruptcy of the Arab order and its guardians, whether radical or conservative. The champions of pan-Arabism were defeated in the Arab system; the idea had lost its magic. Yet particular states were still captives of a status quo erected by the defeat, which they could neither undo nor indefinitely live with.

⁴ Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, "Egyptian Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1978, p. 727.

Opportunity to break out of that situation and to assert reason of state would arise with the October War. The irony is that the war which Mr. Heikal and others looked at as an opportunity to revive the Arab system, was precisely the event that would enable reason of state to challenge the then feeble but still venerated pretensions of pan-Arabism. The logic that triumphed in October 1973 was not the pan-Arabist one held up by Nasser and the Baath, it was the more limited notion of solidarity preferred by those states that had long opposed pan-Arabism. What President Sadat was to do subsequently was read the results of October 1973—more accurately perhaps, to use the results—and to stake out a large territory of independent prerogative for Egypt and himself. What might have been an Egyptian temptation between 1967 and 1973, particularly under President Sadat in the second half of that period, could be done in the aftermath of the October War because it was only after that war that the man at the helm of the Egyptian state was in command. The “honor” of the state had been redeemed. Egypt’s sacrifices and what Mr. Sadat called “the size of the victory” on the Egyptian-Israeli front—presumably larger than it was on the Syrian-Israeli front, as it had been nonexistent on the Jordanian and Palestinian front—would be used to legitimate a break with the Arab system.

Times had changed; so had the leader in charge. Whatever his frustrations with the Arab system—and they were plentiful—Nasser was too much a captive of that system to break with it in the same manner and to the same degree as Sadat. Given his personal makeup, his history, the constituency he had acquired, and the images he had manipulated, the best Nasser could do was moderate his policies and set the stage for someone less tied to the policies of the past. Even in defeat Nasser was still a pan-Arab hero: his victories lay in the Arab system, for after 1967 there was very little left in Egypt to point to with much pride.

Whatever his dreams were prior to 1967, Nasser was a changed man after the Six Day War. He was willing and able—or almost able—to strike a bargain with none other than King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and for the last three years of his life he managed to forge an alliance with the Jordanian monarch, who had long been one of his political rivals. Finally, he would accept the Rogers Peace Plan and implicitly renounce much of what he had stood for in the past. His pan-Arab constituency (that part of it which did not defect, that is) was of course willing to extend to him the benefit of the doubt. His reconciliation with Saudi Arabia was stormy and problematic enough to exonerate him in the eyes of his followers. His alliance with King Hussein provided rather more material for

disillusionment, for his ally was the enemy of the Palestinians. But here again, as Malcolm Kerr so aptly put it, Nasser's "incredible luck stayed with him into the grave," for, to most of his followers, he "died as a martyr to the cause of Arab brotherhood" as a result of the strain of the Jordanian civil war negotiations and his concern for the plight of the Palestinians.⁵ As for his acceptance of the Rogers Peace Plan, that could easily be brushed aside. To this very day his followers maintain that it was a tactical decision, buying time to prepare for another military round. The burden of the past was far too heavy to have allowed Nasser the same margin for maneuver even if he had wanted to abandon the pan-Arab cause.

Anwar Sadat had never excited a pan-Arab audience and had never been a hero. But if he lacked the hero's stature, he also lacked the hero's reputation, and was free of the chains that tie heroes to their great deeds. If anything, Sadat would find it a bit gratifying—and this is only human—to slay the myth of his predecessor, a man he had once known as an equal and who had managed to rise above Sadat and other colleagues to heroic proportions in no small part through the love and devotion of people in distant Arab capitals. Sadat could hope to compete with his predecessor in Egypt proper, but in the Arab world his predecessor was larger than life. Perhaps in Sadat's "Egyptianness" there is a desire of sorts to move from Nasser's shadow into a smaller arena where his predecessor is more subject to errors and to a normal, more tangible audit.

With the pan-Arab hero out of the way, the conservative Arab states would find it easier to deal with his successor, a less ambitious man, more accepting of boundaries and ideological differences. That is why Sadat could enlist those states in a joint endeavor like the October War, a feat which Nasser might never have been able to accomplish. That Sadat would eventually go further down the road of autonomy than the limits preferred by the oil states is one of the supreme ironies of recent Arab politics. Where the oil states once feared Egypt's meddlesome politics, they lived to experience the fear of her disengagement from pan-Arab responsibilities. The threat that once emanated from her radicalism and pan-Arabism receded; a new threat came from her separate and independent nationalism. Of all the Arab states, Egypt is the largest, the most politically stable, the most legitimate within her boundaries. This enabled Egypt to give pan-Arabism concrete power, and then, when she tired of it, to turn inward. The oil states had wanted from Egypt an abandonment of the pan-Arabist ideology and

⁵ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 155.

acceptance of the logic of the state system, and they got that. What Sadat's diplomacy was to show was that states—or, more precisely and aptly, the leaders of states—could read their interests differently and independently.

III

Sadat's diplomacy was the most dramatic illustration of the weakness of pan-Arabism and objectively the most important, if only because Egypt had been, as Mr. Heikal rightly states, "the mainstay of the Arab system." But throughout the preceding decade there had been other "revolts," other "separatist" attacks against the monolithic pan-Arab doctrine. It is only within the context of those other attacks that the Sadat diplomacy can be correctly situated in Arab politics.

The Palestinians launched the first post-1967 attack against pan-Arabism. Given their predicament, their economic and political dependence upon the Arab states and their lack of a territorial base, theirs had to be a different kind of attack. But there was no doubt that those who rallied around Yassir Arafat and George Habash in the aftermath of the Six Day War had given up on pan-Arabism—the first group in the name of Palestinian nationalism, the second in the name of social revolution. The duel that raged between the Palestinians and the Nasserites from early 1968 until Nasser's death in 1970 was in essence a fight about the independent rights of Palestinian nationalism. If the Arab states could not protect themselves against Israel, let alone do something for the Palestinians, then the latter were to construct their own independent politics. In the final analysis, it was Arafat's brand of nationalism, with its pledge of nonintervention in the internal affairs of Arab countries, that found its way into the organized Arab state system, rather than George Habash's revolution. Arafat's narrow focus on Palestinian nationalism and his avoidance of social and ideological issues were in keeping with the new tenor of Arab politics, and that is why Arafat's course found a reasonable measure of support in Riyadh: in his strict Palestinian nationalism there was an acceptance of reason of state. That acceptance was not applicable to the two "sanctuaries," Jordan and Lebanon, hence the two civil wars in which the Palestinians came to be involved.

Another crack in the pan-Arab edifice was the virtual end of the Baath Party, the pan-Arab party that took seriously its mission of bringing about the one Arab nation. A shell called the Baath remains, and it claims power in both Iraq and Syria, home to the Baath in the post-World War II years, but President Hafez al-

Assad is cut of different cloth. A cautious member of a minority sect, he harbors no illusions about Arab unity and is probably the first leader in modern Syrian history to make peace with Syria's national situation and to accept the limitations of geography and resources. Since his rise to power in 1970, he has managed to rid Syria of a great deal of its romanticism and extremism, and to move it to the center of Arab politics. To do so, he put an entire tradition behind him by accepting a reconciliation with King Hussein, and abandoning the infantile Baathist notion of bringing Egypt into the pan-Arab fold and making her do their bidding for them. He has also tried, as his cumulative record in Lebanon would demonstrate, to tip the scales against those with a penchant for extreme solutions. Thus, in June 1976, he intervened against his former allies—the leftist Palestinian/Muslim alliance—and then in February 1978 against the Maronite Christian militias when it became clear to him that their aim was nothing short of partition.

The threat of a partitioned Lebanon is yet another serious challenge to pan-Arabism in a decade of setbacks. This challenge comes from an area that never accepted the idea of Arabism but made a peculiar kind of peace with it, namely, Christian Lebanon. As long as the Arabists accepted Lebanon's unique identity and situation, Lebanon could find its role and place in the "Arab family" as a link between the Arabs and the West: as a place for those who played and lost in the game of politics and needed a place to write their memoirs or plot their return to power; as a playground for Saudis and Kuwaitis who wished to escape the climate and puritanism of their own countries; as a banking haven for Syrians who wanted to flee from the politics and intrigues of the military and the economic irresponsibility of would-be socialists. Lebanon, so it was believed, could have it both ways: live off the Arab world yet think of itself as a piece of the Occident. Arabism was far away; one could pay homage to it and go about the business of trading, publishing, smuggling, banking.

This worked as long as the Arab-Israeli conflict was removed from Lebanon's soil—a situation that changed after 1970, when the Palestinians, expelled from Jordan, made their political home in Lebanon. Then the glib, superficial Arabism of Lebanon met a test it was destined to fail. The leaders in the Christian community who had known the Arab system and made their peace with it lost to those for whom Arabism and Islam were synonymous, and who believed in their own cultural supremacy and the backwardness of the Arabs. Convinced that they were being abandoned by the West (they too had heard of the "decline of the West"), resentful of the post-October 1973 wealth and prominence of the Muslim Arab

states, losing control over a country that had gotten too "Palestinianized" and radicalized for their taste, aware that the demographic facts were shattering the myth of Christian majority, the Maronites would do what would have been unthinkable yesterday: after a brief reliance on a Syrian connection, they opted for a break with the Arab system—an alliance with Israel and a full commitment to partition.

Through it all, the advocates of partition would be helped by the obvious culpability of the Arab states, which had exported the "sacred Arab cause"—the Palestinian issue—onto Lebanese soil. In other words, the least Arab of countries, as well as the weakest militarily, was to bear the brunt of full Israeli retaliation and to accept a parallel and competing system of authority. Sincere or not, the Palestinian slogan of nonintervention in the internal affairs of Arab countries was harder to practice than to preach. With Israel more than willing and able to retaliate for raids into her territory, the Lebanese formula would unravel. The gift of an enlarged Lebanon bequeathed by the French turned into a nightmare, and the Maronite militias took up arms, first to defeat the leftist Palestinian/Muslim alliance and then, a little later, to try to carve out their own state, bidding farewell to the pleasantries of "Arab brotherhood." They were now willing to state what had been their conviction for quite some time: that they think of themselves as a different breed; that they are apart from the Arab world, not geographically but culturally of a different world. The Syrian army may win a confrontation or two, but what must be honestly and candidly dealt with is a bid for partition and creation of a sovereign Maronite state. If anything, Syrian assaults steel the will of the militias and silence those in the Christian community who still believe that things could be managed with a slightly reformed version of the old status quo.

IV

In an otherwise across-the-board break with the universalism of pan-Arabism, it was only the young group of officers who came to power in Libya in September 1969 who would raise the old banner in the decade that followed the 1967 defeat. Qaddafi and his fellow officers were more royalist than the king, more true to Abdul Nasser than Nasser himself, nostalgic for the young Nasser and bent upon reenacting his drama with all its noisy color and vitality. Libya, insulated from the Arab world, was thus to go through the same stage that Nasserites and Baathists had gone through in the preceding decade. The principal difference between Qaddafi's group and yesterday's unionists was that the former combined,

perhaps for the first time, two forces that had generally been at odds in recent Arab history: oil and pan-Arabism. From Egypt and Syria the unionist movement had been a claim by poor states for the "collective" wealth of the Arab world. The Libyan case was to provide just the opposite: an affluent society wanting to unite with its poorer neighbors.

Determined to realize the old dream, Qaddafi would seek unity with as odd a candidate as Bourguiba's Tunisia, but Egypt was the real focus of his aspirations. For four years he would urge unity upon both Nasser and Sadat, although one suspects that the offers were made in a different spirit to each: he would "offer" Libya to Nasser, while he wanted to "steal" Egypt from Sadat.

In both the Tunisian and latter-day Egyptian cases, Qaddafi was urging unity on two older men for whom he had little if any regard, whom he thought he could eventually push aside. To a Muslim Arab soldier like Qaddafi, Bourguiba can only seem like a compromised Francophile, symbol of a by-gone age in which Arabs accepted the supremacy of the West and aped its ways. As for the pre-October 1973 Sadat, Qaddafi could hardly be blamed for the low opinion he held of him—after all, that was a more or less universal judgment. During that transitional and difficult period when Sadat lacked his own source of legitimacy, many of Nasser's followers in and outside of Egypt came to think of Qaddafi—*"al walad al majnun,"* Sadat called him, "the crazy boy"—as the spiritual son and true heir of Nasser. As it turned out, the source of Qaddafi's appeal lay more in Sadat's seeming ineptitude than in anything that Qaddafi himself had done. Thus, when Sadat finally made good on his promise to break the military stalemate, the Qaddafi appeal came to an end. The October War might not have been the glorious achievement that Sadat made it out to be, but it was an achievement nonetheless. Egypt was once again a country with a leader, and Qaddafi's bid for unity could be pushed aside. Reenacting the past had had its day.

Neither the fire and passion of the Libyan revolution nor its money could turn history around and revive an exhausted idea. Since their seizure of power in 1969, Qaddafi and his fellow officers have gradually come to see the differences among Arabs that had previously eluded them. The contrived boundaries had a reality after all. (They ought to know that, for their own rather strict immigration policies contradict all their talk of pan-Arabism.) Here and there a few writers and publicists—not to mention some troublemakers—prospered on Libyan money repeating Qaddafi's slogans about his Third Theory, or carrying out his wishes in Beirut and Cairo. But this was not to be Qaddafi's era, for he was

already an anachronism. With its wealth and small population and its relative isolation from the traumas and wounds of Arab history, Libya may go on a little longer with more sound and fury about pan-Arabism, but its experiment and ideas are irrelevant to the needs and situations of other Arab states.

A social scientist at Kuwait University has supplied us with important evidence substantiating the demise of pan-Arabism and suggesting the shape of things to come. Taking a sample of students from practically all Arab countries, he administered a questionnaire to nearly 500 undergraduates at Kuwait University with the aim of ascertaining their views on pan-Arabism, family, state and religion. What he found was a remarkable assertion of Islamic sentiment and of patriotism associated with particular Arab states—in other words, the vacuum left behind as a result of the demise of pan-Arabism is being filled by religious belief on one level and by loyalty to the state on another. His data led him to conclude that the discussions of “one Arab nation” and “Arab brotherhood” are myths and exhausted slogans.⁶

This shift in belief corresponds to concrete changes in the distribution of power in the Arab system. Power has shifted to the state (Saudi Arabia) that has long been a foe of pan-Arabism and has traditionally seen itself as a guardian of the *turath*, the heritage, or Islam, to be more precise. Muslim universalism is a safer doctrine than the geographically more limited but politically more troublesome idea of pan-Arabism; the “48 Muslim countries and 700 million Muslims” is a safe and distant symbol, giving a semblance of “super-legitimacy” without posing a threat to reason of state. Summit conferences like the one held in Lahore in 1974 and institutions like the Islamic Economic Conference appeal to those who wish to speak of the resurrection of Islam without shackling the power of the state. No one wants to unite Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh, Indonesia and the United Arab Emirates. The only challenge that Islamic sentiment might pose would come from far below the world of state elites, where a militant, popular kind of Islam may reject—as it does in Iran, and to a lesser extent in Egypt—the world view and preferences of state elites. But that, at least in the Arab context, is a different problem from the disruptive doctrine of pan-Arabism, for it is a challenge contained within the boundaries of the state.

⁶ Tawfic Farah, “Group Affiliations of University Students in the Arab Middle East (Kuwait),” Reports and Research Studies, Department of Political Science, Kuwait University, 1977. I am deeply grateful to Professor Farah for sharing with me his findings and for a helpful discussion of the issues discussed here.

The boundaries of Arab states have been around now for nearly six decades. It is not their existence which is novel, but their power and legitimacy—the power (as much as that power exists in the modern state system) to keep pan-Arab claims at bay and effectively to claim the loyalty of those within. They are no longer as “illusory and permeable” as they used to be. The states that lie within them are less “shy” about asserting their rights, more normal in the claims that they make.

The Arabs who had once seemed whole—both to themselves and to others—suddenly look as diverse as they had been all along. The differences, smothered over by ideology and by a universalistic designation, can in no way be ignored or suppressed. Indeed, the more they are blanketed over by a thin veneer of superficial universalism, the more dangerous they become, if only because they create resentment on the part of those who do not feel the designation and who judge that Arabism places them at a disadvantage—that is, it used to ask some of them to fight and die while others did not, or to use their territory as sanctuary for guerrilla raids while others were safely insulated by ceasefire lines and U.N. troops, or to pay for the economic inefficiency and large populations of sister states.

The Arab system of states will have to search for a new equilibrium, for a more limited and perhaps more workable system, because concrete and irreversible changes have already taken place to make interstate boundaries harder and more legitimate. Six factors that enabled pan-Arabism to slight boundaries and to play havoc with sovereignty are either things of the past, or are undergoing fundamental metamorphosis:

1. The universalism of pan-Arabism derived to a considerable extent from the universalism of the Ottoman Empire of which the Arab states had been a part for four centuries. In other words, scholars, officials and officers slipped from one universalist system into another. It was an understandable response to the nationalism of the Young Turks: if the Turks were a nation, so too were the Arabs. But whatever unity was lent to the Arab society by the universalism of the Ottoman system now belongs to the past. The Ottoman experience has been committed to history, and six decades after its collapse it is becoming a fading memory.

2. Arab nationalism rested on the power and popularity of the pamphlet and the book; it was conceived and spread by intellectuals, mostly those in exile. From Europe, where publicists like Neguib Azoury, Shakib Arslan, and later Michel Aflaq of the Baath

Party conceived their ideas, the distinctions among Arabs seemed negligible, almost nonexistent. It was theory written from afar by theorists concerned with and consumed by large-scale distinctions between rival and whole civilizations.

Now the power of intellectuals is waning, with a definite backlash in the Arab world against the written word and intellectuals. The beneficiaries are either men of affairs schooled in the hard knocks of politics—a Hafez Assad rather than Michel Aflaq—or development-oriented elites. In contrast to the literary intellectuals who dominated the early stage of Arab nationalism, the new elite is a more sober, less grandiose group—less likely to emphasize the abstractions of Arab unity, more sensitive to the realities on the ground or more committed to specific tasks. A nationalism that fails to create a political order cannot withstand the dissolution of its creed, and the intellectuals were temperamentally unfit to create such a concrete order. It is one thing to polemicize about the “one nation” and its metaphysical base, but quite another to erect it on the ground.

3. The anticolonialism of the mandate years lent a great deal of unity to the Arab system, as an entire generation was traumatized by what they saw as the Arabs’ betrayal by the West. The Balfour Declaration and the Sykes/Picot agreement made their imprint on a large number of Arab nationalists, wherever they were, and forged a strong bond of unity among officials, publicists and officers who thought in terms of the Arab and the West.

However, what we observed of the Ottoman Empire pretty much applies as well to the anti-Westernism of the mandate years. Britain and France, the two powers whose deeds and diplomacy haunted and traumatized a generation of nationalists, have been cut down to size; they made their last stand in the Suez affair and since then their diplomacy has, on the whole, been sympathetic to the Arab states. London is no longer a hostile capital where diplomatic schemes are hatched against the Arabs; in fact, it has become familiar and accessible, with whole sections that have been “Arabized.” The British, once resented and admired masters, now covet Arab investments and worry about the penetration of their society by Arab capital. France has become synonymous with Charles de Gaulle: an admired symbol of nationalism and, from 1962 onward, a “friend” of the Arab states. Beyond this, there has been a subtle and steady “growing up,” a realization by Arabs that they have no monopoly on trauma, so to speak, that they are not the only ones whose ambitions have been thwarted and to whom history has dealt a raw deal or two. Worldly success in the aftermath of October 1973 is to a great extent responsible for this shift.

4. There was a mobile, trans-state elite that moved from one Arab state to another; they knew and understood one another and their horizons transcended the boundaries of a single state. They “believed implicitly in the existence of an Arab nation: in schools, in barracks, in the Ottoman parliament, in exile in Cairo, and in the Sharifian forces they had come to know each other and acquired the ease of discourse which possession of a common language and a common education gives.”⁷ Some of these men formed the nucleus of the group that rallied around the Hashemite Prince Faisal as he came out of the Arabian Peninsula to be crowned in Syria and later (having been driven out of Damascus by the French) to rule over Iraq.

That mobile structure of dynasts, officers, officials and scholars has by now been replaced by more “parochial” elites as the usual complex of bureaucratic interests has developed in each of the Arab states. The change may be best captured by comparing the leading Arab dynasty in the early and middle parts of this century to the leading dynasty today. The Hashemites thought of the Arab world as their domain. They ruled in the Peninsula and, with the help of the British, established monarchies in Damascus (Prince Faisal’s short-lived Arab kingdom), Transjordan and Iraq. Of all that, a modest throne remains in Jordan where a skilled but hemmed-in monarch tries his best to survive and to reconcile conflicting claims and pressures. Today’s leading royal house, the Saudi family, is committed to its own sovereignty in the blessed (materially and spiritually) piece of land it has. The victory of the more “local” Ibn Saud over the “pan-Arab” Shariff Hussein half a century ago may have been the first victory (albeit of a dynastic/tribal kind) for reasons of state over the more grandiose ambitions of pan-Arabism. Below the dynastic level, the same shift in favor of parochial elites is equally evident in the usual occupations that states generate. To be sure, technocrats, teachers and skilled workers migrate in large numbers from the populated Arab states to the richer oil states, but these are people who migrate for a living and are content to leave power to the host governments.

5. The Palestine defeat in 1948 was seen as an injury to the pride and integrity of the entire Arab world – not strictly as a Palestinian defeat, but as a pan-Arab one. The creation of Israel was a deeply wounding and traumatizing experience, a symbol of Arab weakness and backwardness, a reminder that whatever the Arabs were in the past, whatever their old glories and achievements, they were now in decline, at the mercy of others, no longer sovereign in their

⁷ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1962, p. 292.

own region. Having vowed to undo the "shame" of the defeat, it became difficult for any state to take itself out of the conflict.

The unity forced onto the Arab world by the Arab-Israeli conflict has eroded—perhaps less dramatically than in other areas, but eroded nonetheless. Whatever the future shape of the conflict between the Arab states and Israel, the Sadat diplomacy has dragged the Arabs—with great numbers of them shouting, objecting, feeling violated and betrayed—into the modern game of states. The conflict is no longer about Israel's existence, but about its boundaries; and in inter-Arab affairs, the leading military state has for all appearances rejected the inter-Arab division of labor that assigned it the principal obligation for a pan-Arab cause.

6. Finally, from 1956 (after Suez) until Nasser's death in 1970, or until the 1967 defeat, the power of pan-Arabism derived from the power of charismatic leadership. Prior to the emergence of Nasser as a pan-Arab savior, the idea had been an elite endeavor of publicists, intellectuals and a few officers. Nasser would take the theories and the emotions to the masses, give pan-Arabism its moment in the sun, and then its tragic end in 1967.

The politics of charisma, however, have passed from the scene. T. E. Lawrence once expressed a stereotype about the Arabs that has managed to stick: "Arabs," he said, "could be swung on an idea as on a cord. . . . Without a creed they could be taken to the four corners of the world (but not to heaven) by being shown the riches of the earth and the pleasures of it, but if on the road, led in this fashion, they met the prophet of an idea, who had nowhere to lay his head and who depended for his food on charity and birds, then they would all leave their wealth for his inspiration."⁸ Today the idea and the prophet are gone: the man who could in a speech excite youth in West Beirut, Amman and Baghdad against their governments is no longer there, and this has contributed to the normalization of the Arab state system.

The circumstances that produced the ebb of Nasserist charisma may be *sui generis*, but the end of Nasserism is a piece of a bigger puzzle. It is the end of that stage of Third World history represented by men like Nasser, Nehru, Sukarno, Nkrumah—dreamers who sought what one of them, Nkrumah, described as the "kingdom of politics." In that kingdom they sought answers to questions of identity and self-worth, dabbled in dreams and intangibles, but their politics were bound to come to an end, for the sort of nationalist fervor they embodied triumphs for a moment but cannot last forever.

⁸ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Harmondsworth (England) and Baltimore: Penguin, 1962, p. 41.

The exhaustion of the nationalist fervor generally signals a coming to the fore of economic issues and demands, of problems that do not lend themselves to solo performances, to the magic touch of charisma. Less colorful leaders, whose links to the nationalist struggle are often tenuous, are the ones who have to satisfy the new needs. With defeat in 1967, charisma turned to ashes and the conservative oil states made their financial help contingent upon a new style and kind of politics. The romantic phase of nationalism is over, then, as it falls upon the second generation to accomplish the technical and often grim tasks of governance. Anwar el-Sadat's recent autobiography, *In Search of Identity*, is really the last of its kind.⁹ The next time an Egyptian head of state writes an autobiography, I suspect that identity will not be the principal thread; he may have to name it "In Search of Productivity" or something similarly routine. Whoever he turns out to be, he may well be envious that one of his predecessors "philosophized" about revolution, while the other talked of identity.

VI

Whether the Arabs like it or not, what they are left with and what they increasingly must acknowledge is a profound fragmentation of the Arab existential and political crisis. We know the themes and memories that lent unity to their consciousness and history: one language, the classical golden age of Islam, the decline of the Muslim order, the universalism of the Ottoman Empire, the yearning for independence, the traumas of being initiated into an international system in which they were not full participants, the Palestine defeat, the Six Day War, and finally October 1973. Particular regimes and leaders aside, Arab states are stuck with one another, and the shared themes and concerns could conceivably provide a basis for a working regional order—or, if pushed too far, for disaster and continuous discord.

The shared themes and concerns must not obscure the fragmentation. There is no longer a collective Arab crisis and there is no use pretending that it exists. To illustrate, let me briefly sketch the separate and quite different dilemmas of several populations in the Arab world.

In Egypt, the serious life-and-death issue is economic, and the main struggle is for human worth and dignity in a crowded, economically pressed society. For a young educated Saudi, Kuwaiti or Libyan, the sky is the limit: huge projects to run, European

⁹ Anwar el-Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977.

vacations, investments, offers from foreign businessmen and people with all kinds of schemes, dreams and gadgets.¹⁰ For a young and equally skilled and educated Egyptian, the overwhelming reality he has to deal with is unemployment or a dead-end job in a sluggish bureaucracy and the impossible dream of making ends meet, the nightmare of finding and affording an apartment in Cairo, where rentals have gone sky-high thanks in part to the abundance of petrodollars. Is there a mystery to the frustration of the young Egyptian, his suspicion that he must go to Sinai and face Israeli arms while others talk of pan-Arabism in London and Paris? Is this not the reality that President Sadat so masterfully evoked when he spoke of "nightclub revolutionaries"? The wealthy Arab states have been somewhat helpful to Egypt, but Egypt's economic needs are staggering, and it is these needs and grievances that enabled the Egyptian President to do what he did on the foreign policy front.

Whether Sadat's diplomacy stands or falls, it will do so on its own merit, judged in terms of what it will or will not do for Egypt; charges of treason, or tribunals against Sadat by Iraq or Libya will be to no avail. But foreign policy can be a ruler's escape, and victories and virtuoso performances are easier to pull off in distant places than at home. The noted Egyptian analyst Lewis Awad has recently argued that much of what Nasser did in foreign policy was sheer escapism.¹¹ The same temptation may again present itself, this time by irrelevant talk about threats in the Horn of Africa, challenging the Soviet Union, and the like. For Egypt, the real threat is at home: a huge population that must be fed and educated; a decaying capital; an overcrowded society that must seek an economic role in the surrounding region, and must therefore avoid too sharp a break with its neighbors.

The Fertile Crescent offers a striking contrast to the Egyptian case. There, the crisis is political; it is a crisis of political legitimacy, of taming political passions, of finding a framework that satisfies the aspirations for self-determination. Lebanon and the Palestinian question are the two outstanding political problems and, barring some unforeseen solutions to both, that area is destined to suffer more of the bloodshed and violence that have become its lot.

Without a territorial base of their own, the Palestinians would still have it within their power to disrupt the Arab system of states. This power derives not only from their presence in Lebanon and

¹⁰ Malcolm Kerr, "The Dilemmas of the Rich," Near Eastern Studies Center, University of California at Los Angeles, 1977.

¹¹ Lewis Awad, *The Seven Masks of Nasserism*, Beirut: Dar al Qadaya, 1977 (in Arabic).

Jordan, and their influence in Kuwait, but also from their appeal to an overwhelming body of opinion throughout the Arab world that wants what it thinks an appropriate resolution to the Palestinian question: self-determination for the Palestinians. Both historical-emotional factors and the cold logic of reason of state overlap here, for it is believed that the best way of taming Palestinian radicalism is to contain the Palestinians within their own state, either autonomous or linked to Jordan, and that only then will the Arab system of states be effectively normalized.

The Palestinians, too, have come to see it this way. Whereas it was once heresy to speak of an independent Palestinian state—after all, Palestine was supposed to be part of a larger Arab entity—the Palestinians have come to realize that they too require the normalcy of statehood. Their view has come to converge with the recognition of most Arab states that their own reason of state vis-à-vis Palestinian claims is best served by the Palestinians acquiring their own territory with all the responsibilities such a process usually entails. This explains President Sadat's insistence during the Camp David negotiations on a linkage between an Egyptian settlement and a framework for the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and explains as well Saudi Arabia's cautious response to the summit.

All of the crucial or affected Arab states see in the resolution of the Palestinian question an enhancement of their own sovereignty: the Lebanese could then begin to put together a shattered country whose economic role is perhaps irretrievably lost; the Saudis and the Kuwaitis would feel more secure about their own wealth, less susceptible to disruption; the Egyptians—and even the Syrians—would be freed from a military confrontation that they could neither win nor disengage from without damage to their interests and legitimacy. The Jordanian position is admittedly the most thorny and troublesome, for it is clear that there are, in inter-Arab politics, two claims to the West Bank: Jordanian and Palestinian. King Hussein's claim rests on Jordan's sovereignty prior to 1967; the Palestinian claim is the more standard nationalist claim of a people to their territory, and it is that claim which the Arab states honored during the Rabat summit of 1974.

Since then, there has been an undeniable erosion in the power of the Rabat resolution that declared the Palestine Liberation Organization "the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." President Sadat's call upon the Jordanian monarch to "shoulder his responsibility" indicated where the Egyptian President stood. King Hussein's reluctance to get off the fence displays

the caution of a man deeply pessimistic about the intentions of the state that currently holds the West Bank. And, in the absence of some firm signs that Israel is eventually willing to relinquish the West Bank, King Hussein is likely to continue to do what he has been doing for the last decade, namely, staying within the limits of an overall Arab consensus, and urging restraint and caution on the part of other Arab actors. But should signs of an Israeli change of heart materialize, the inter-Arab struggle for the West Bank, now somewhat subdued and repressed, would come to the fore. Hard choices would then have to be made by the Jordanian monarch, by the Palestinians themselves, by the Syrians, who claim both sides of the fight as their friends, and by the Saudis, who help to subsidize and sustain both the PLO and Jordan.

In the oil states, there are the problems of managing great wealth and then of setting that wealth and what it builds next to the violence and instability of the Fertile Crescent and the poverty of Egypt. Saudi Arabia, the leading oil state, understands what John C. Campbell calls the "political fragility" that lies beneath its prosperity.¹² Having helped exorcise the area of Nasserism, the Saudis were willing to deploy the oil weapon in the October War, to subsidize the two Arab combatants and, when the war was over, to try to keep them together. Their distinct preference is for a "moderate" Arab system of states based on a reasonable measure of consensus. The preferred Saudi design is what I have described elsewhere with no claim to originality as a "trilateral" design, a triangular system of power bringing together Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria.¹³ The Saudi predilection for this arrangement explains most of Saudi Arabia's inter-Arab politics as of late: try to bring Sadat back into the Arab fold without squeezing him too hard; bail out Hafez Assad, subsidize his incursion into Lebanon, and make sure that he does not tilt toward the rejectionists.

Above and beyond particular foreign policy decisions, the oil states will continue to experience the difficulties of living in a militarized, impoverished part of the world, as well as the dreams and possibilities spawned by great wealth. They can help their neighbors and try to buy a reasonable measure of stability, but they cannot remake or keep the entire region afloat, tame all its passions, deal with all its grievances. They can influence other Arab states but cannot dictate their policies because they have difficulty "converting" the medium of power they have — money — into other assets. This was most poignantly demonstrated by

¹² John C. Campbell, "Oil Power in the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, October 1977, pp. 89–110.

¹³ Fouad Ajami, "Stress in the Arab Triangle," *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1977–78, pp. 90–108.

President Sadat's margin for maneuverability in his dealings with Saudi Arabia. "Petro-power" has more sway in Arab life than it did a decade or two ago, but it is a vulnerable kind of power; with the logic of numbers and demography so heavily stacked against it, it needs allies, protection and a great deal of subtlety and caution.

For quite some time -- if only because of pan-Arabism's noise and refusal to play by the rules of the game of states -- a view prevailed in the West and among some of the Arabs that, if pan-Arabism were to subside, all would be well. States would be left to undertake what states undertake within their boundaries; the conflict with Israel would be resolved, or at least transformed and made more like other conflicts, less lethal, less resistant to resolution. There is a great deal of merit to that view, but the politics of states can also kill, can dislocate, destabilize and erupt into turmoil and violence. With economic development approximating a new *raison d'état*, states can lose their legitimacy because they fail to deliver the goods -- not intangibles such as identity, but tangibles such as jobs, education and food.

In a world of states we cannot be sanguine about saying that a state system has been normalized. The state next door may move in, not in the name of something lofty and metaphysical like pan-Arabism, but, again, for something more tangible -- to preempt the dangers of an unstable state next door (Syria and Lebanon), or to avert the troubles of an erratic leader and to annex a wealthy neighbor at the same time (Egypt and Libya). Counter-elites and young officers may rebel, not in the name of pan-Arabism, but because they have a better cure for the ailment of the state. And in a situation of that kind, "betrayal" of obligations to other states could be a convenient justification for a political game that remains dangerous and deadly.

There are plenty of things to work out and fight over in the Arab system of states: the "responsibility" of the rich states; the "rights" of the poor states; the usual struggle for primacy and advantage among the resourceful and skilled states; the quest for self-determination on the part of the Palestinians; the restoration of civil order and legitimacy in Lebanon; the struggle of the most economically pressed, yet preeminent Arab state for economic solvency and viability. The passing of pan-Arabism means just that: the end of one set of troubles. Normalization of the Arab system, on the whole positive and overdue, brings in its train its own troubles, inflicts its own wounds, commits its own errors.