# A NEW ARAB IDEOLOGY?: THE REJUVENATION OF ARAB NATIONALISM

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IN studying the Arab world, one is accustomed to it being presented as a fragmented region. The units of analysis are typically narrow and small, the cliche of the Middle East as a mosaic of sects having become a standard notion in Western and Israeli studies of the area. Shlomo Avineri, for example, believes that "never has there been a society like Arab society . . . so divided, fragmented, and polarized in reality."[1] Consequently, the Arab world as a non-*de jure* political entity is often an unacceptable unit of analysis in the West.[2] Many Western scholars assume that the Arabs are too fragmented and too provincial or particularistic in their loyalties and allegiances to respond to the modern idea of nationalism. Those who eulogized Arab nationalism in the West were applauded and appreciated, and the ideal of Arab nationalism was largely dismissed as a myth.[3]

Wars, however, can change borders and change realities or, more accurately, the perceptions of realities. The 1991 war in the Gulf elicited a dramatic collective Arab reaction on the mass level, surprising those who had always assumed that Arabs would not—or could not—act in unison. For the purpose of this brief essay,

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1. Shlomo Avineri, "Beyond Saddam: The Arab Trauma," *Dissent* 38, no. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 150–1.
2. The word *West* is intended to connote the prevailing political institutions and cultural values. It is not intended to refer to the West as a monolith.
3. The group of eulogists of Arab nationalism include most, if not all, Israeli experts on the Middle East and Fouad Ajami. For Ajami's obituaries of Arab nationalism, see his essays in Tawfic E. Farah, ed., *Pan-Arabism and Arab Nationalism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987).

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the Arab world will be used as the unit of analysis because there are indications that certain trends are appearing in various corners and cities of the Arab world.

When referring to "Arab public opinion" today, one is generalizing about millions of people who have exhibited a commonality of interests and sentiments during and after the Gulf War. Public opinion in the Arab Gulf, however, has to be differentiated from the rest of the Arab world. The unique welfare system in the Gulf and the enormous economic benefits derived from citizenship in Arab Gulf states have contributed to an identification of the citizen with the governments in power. Even some leftists expressed loyalty to the regimes during the war. In early January 1991, Su'ad al-Sabbah, a famous Kuwaiti poetess who was associated with left-wing politics before the war, and who wrote poems of glorification for Saddam Hussein during his war against Iran, admonished the United States for its lack of toughness toward Iraq.[4] This formerly ardent Arab nationalist blamed the "destruction" (tahtim) of Kuwait on "the shops that sell us unity and nationalism"[5] and criticized the epoch of "nationalist pollution" (al-talawwuth al-qawmi).[6]

The issues that confronted the Arab people in the wake of the 1967 defeat persist in their urgency today. The level of stagnation in Arab politics is best evidenced by the work of Syrian poet Nizar Qabbani, the most popular poet in the Arab world.[7] In the aftermath of the Gulf War, Qabbani wrote a poem titled "Hawamish ala daftar al-hazima" (Notes on the margins of the notebook of defeat) and published it in a booklet that included his famous 1967 poem, "Hawamish ala daftar al-naksah" (Notes on the margins of the notebook of the Setback). He said in effect that what he had written in 1967 still applied in 1991; in his new poem, he was simply recycling the themes of his earlier poem. In his 1991 poem, Qabbani describes the plight of the Arabs: "Every twenty years, a narcissistic self-absorbed man comes to us to claim that he is the Mahdi . . . the

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4. See Su'ad al-Sabbah, "Rambu yusawwiru filman fi al-Khalij" (Rambo is shooting a film in the Gulf), *al-Hayat*, January 6, 1991.

5. Su'ad al-Sabbah, "Man qatala al-Kuwayt?" (Who killed Kuwait?), *al-Hayat*, December 4, 1990.

6. Su'ad al-Sabbah, "Nuqush ala aba'at al-Kuwayt" (Embroidery on the abaya of Kuwait), *al-Hayat*, March 16, 1991.

7. Although Qabbani is the most famous poet-critic in the Arab world, there are other Arab poets who have been far more radical and harsh in their criticism of Arab reality than Qabbani. One is Mudhaffar al-Nawwab, the (underground) Iraqi Shi'i Marxist poet who has had a limited appeal because all of his writings have been banned by Arab governments. In one poem, published in the late 1970s in his underground book *Watariyyat layliyya* (Nocturnal playing on strings), he writes: "Is this which is ruled by royal thighs a *watan* or a brothel?/Is this earth an earth or is it a den of flies?/What does one call the features of this epoch and the meanings of peace efforts?/What does one call the masturbation of the Arab reality vis-à-vis the peace plans?/What does one call the absolution of the king who committed [*sic*] syphilis in the Arab history, he who only drinks from the skulls of the children of Baq'ah?/I shout at you, where is your gallantry, if you are Arabs, if you are human beings, if you are animals?"

savior . . . the pure, the pious, the strong, the sole one, the all-knowing, the saint and the Imam."[8]

Some Western writers express astonishment at what they refer to as the Arab fixation or, in the language of Bernard Lewis, Arab "fascination," with the Crusades.[9] This fixation, however, is because the ideological arsenal of the Crusades is still at the disposal of Western powers in their dealings, and in their wars, with the Arab world. Edward Rice's bestseller, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton*,[10] does not differ significantly from early Christian writings on Islam. In his biography of Burton, Rice insists that Muslims strictly follow religiously prescribed manners of defecation and urination.[11] Rice also states, "Just to urinate in public is to make a religious statement and to go to a prostitute in a Muslim land . . . meant another religious proclamation."[12] Another book that attained popularity during the Gulf War was *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs*[13] by David Pryce-Jones, whose map and treatment of the Arab world includes Turkey. Sandra Mackey's *Saudis*[14] accepts faithfully the assumptions of Raphael Patai from *The Arab Mind*[15] and includes tales of Saudi men and women making love with their clothes on[16]; of Saudi women eating and drooling[17]; of Saudi people restocking food during Ramadan "like nocturnal animals"[18]; and she asserts that "science has failed to penetrate the minds of Saudi males."[19]

The most popular paradigm in Western scholarship concerning the Middle East is what Maxime Rodinson calls "theologocentrism."[20] According to Rodinson, theologocentrism denotes the school of thought that attributes all acts and thoughts by Muslims to texts of Islamic theology. Theologocentrism is also an ideology of hostility which is comparable in its features to other ideologies of hostility such as anti-Semitism. Theologocentric analysis considers "Muslims" a monolith; it assumes that all Muslims possess unchanging characteristics—cruelty, duplicity, barbarism,

8. From "Hawamish ala daftar al-hazima" (Notes on the margins of the notebook of defeat). This author's translation is from the Arabic version published by the *Houston Arab Times*, August 1991.

9. See Bernard Lewis, "The Return of Islam," *Commentary*, January 1976, p. 49.

10. Edward Rice, *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990).

11. Ibid., pp. 181 and 106.

12. Ibid., p. 104. Rice also repeats the classical medieval cliche about Muslim urination: "Muslims like most Easterners, urinate squatting, and when finished, the man wipes his penis with a stone or clod of earth or clay, one, three, or five pieces, whatever local custom demands." *Captain Sir Richard Francis Burton*, p. 107. It should be noted that this book was favorably reviewed in US newspapers.

13. David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle: An Interpretation of the Arabs* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989).

14. Sandra Mackey, *The Saudis* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1987).

15. Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973). Patai insisted in later editions that only Palestine Liberation Organization apologists were displeased with his book. See the 1983 revised edition, p. ix.

16. Mackey, *The Saudis*, p. 154.

17. Ibid., p. 193.

18. Ibid., p. 77.

19. Ibid., p. 152.

20. Maxime Rodinson, *La fascination de l'Islam* (Paris: Maspero, 1980).

irrationality, and primitiveness; it also makes crude use of Islamic jurisprudence by insisting that Muslims split the world into *dar al-Islam* (house of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (house of war) and ignores *dar al-sulh* (house of peace, or reconciliation) which covered Muhammad's non-aggression pacts with the Christians of Najran and Nubia.[21] The Gulf War showed that theologocentric analysis is still prevalent in Western societies. Various analysts tried to explain Saddam's actions by focusing on verses in the Quran, and Americans bought copies of the Quran in large numbers to try to fathom this "weird" culture.

Another element in Western perspectives lies in the popular personalization of Arab politics. Analysis of Arab politics by the US media often focuses on the surface, ignoring the depth. The media thus reinforces and contributes to Western misconceptions of the Arab world and, in the case of the Gulf War, it gave the United States a false sense of its achievements in the region. Many analyses of the post-Gulf War Arab world began with a cliche to the effect of "Now that US credibility in the region is at an all-time high. . . . " In reality, US credibility in the region was high primarily among the princes and kings who sought US defense of their precarious thrones. Among many segments of the Arab people, however, the United States was more disliked than before.

The United States, for the first time in history, had truly engaged an Arab army—notwithstanding the clashes with "Barbary pirates" in the nineteenth century, the involvement with Syria in Lebanon in 1983–84, and the bombing of Libya in 1986. A September 1991 poll of Palestinians in the occupied territories revealed that 93.1 percent of those polled did not trust US intentions in the peace process.[22] It is not unrealistic to assume that many other Arabs share this distrust of the United States and its policies in the region. The tendency in the United States to dismiss the political salience of Arab public opinion was, and is, the result of analyses promoted by writers who repeat the age-old cliche about the so-called Arab respect for force,[23] or who refer to the "civilizational" conflict between the West and "Islam."[24]

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21. See, for example, Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East and the West* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964), p. 115; idem., "The Roots of Muslim Rage," *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1990, p. 49. See the section titled "De l'Islam" in Fouad E. Boustany, *Le Problème du Liban: Note succinte, objective, sincère et franche pour servir à comprendre la question Libanaise*, 2nd ed. (Caslik: C.R., 1978). For dar al-sulh, see its entry in H.A.R. Gibb and J.H. Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957); and Antoine Fattal, *Le statut légal des non-musulmans en Pays d'Islam* (Beirut: Recherches de l'Institut des Lettres Orientales, 1958), série 3.

22. See *al-Bayadir al-Siyasi*, September 14, 1991. The poll did not deal with Palestinian attitudes regarding the peace conference in Madrid. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the convocation of the peace conference affected Palestinian distrust of US intentions even though many Palestinians did not object to the idea of the peace conference itself.

23. See, for example, Daniel Pipes, "Why Arabs Aren't Rioting," *Wall Street Journal*, January 22, 1991.

24. See Lewis, "Roots of Muslim Rage," pp. 56–60. Lewis characterizes Muslim popular reactions as irrational. He also still refers to the vast lands inhabited by Muslims, and the slightly less than 1 billion Muslims, by the rubric of "Islam."

This surface view by the media leads analysts to associate ideas with specific persons; the death of the person, therefore, implies to Western analysts the death of the idea. Furthermore, it must be noted that the personalization of Arab politics was convenient during the Gulf War, especially the impression created that only Saddam lived in Iraq and that it was, in essence, an uninhabited land.

A reading of Arab politics, and the lively intellectual debates of the past year, suggest that eulogists of Arab nationalism have been arguing fallaciously and have been assuming that Gamal Abd al-Nasir's death killed the idea of Arab nationalism once and for all. In fact, there is evidence that a new Arab ideology is in the making. In discussing features of this new ideology, a distinction of Karl Mannheim in his *Ideology and Utopia*[25] should be kept in mind. Mannheim distinguishes between "ideology," by which he meant a value system supporting an established order, versus "utopia," which he understood to mean opposition to the status quo and support for an alternative order. Ideologies, in Mannheim's definition, have been exhausted and discredited in the Arab world. It is only the ideas that oppose the established orders and regimes that have any appeal. The new Arab ideology (or utopia, in Mannheim's terminology) will have three organically linked components: Arab nationalism,[26] Islam, and democratization.

*ARAB NATIONALISM*

During and after the Gulf War, Arab public opinion was manifested—for the first time in contemporary Arab history—in a collective reaction by the Arab masses in the Mashriq and Maghrib, both reflecting a commonality of interests, sentiments, and aspirations. Even the Algerian war of independence did not produce the massive—albeit largely underreported in the Western press—public reaction by the Arab people that was generated by the Gulf War. During the Algerian War, the response by Arabs of the Mashriq was one of support and sympathy regarding an event occurring far away. Even the Israeli invasion of Lebanon failed to generate the collective mass reaction observed during the Gulf War.

The 1991 war and its aftermath brought to the surface an emotional unity, *wihdat hal* (unity of situation), among the Arabs. This unity was expressed in various ways and in different degrees because of the varied oppressive conditions in the Arab world. The Gulf governments, for example, were—and still are—intolerant of expressions of dissent, as are the Egyptian, Syrian, and Iraqi governments. Iraqis who strongly expressed their staunch opposition to the tyranny of Saddam Hussein were later oppressed by Iraqi troops, to the

25. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936).
26. The use of the word *pan-Arabism* has been avoided in this article because Western writers have, for political reasons, often used that term to equate the idea of Arab nationalism with pan-Germanism.

indifference of the world community. What was remarkable during the war was that the same slogans were chanted in the Mashriq and in the Maghrib without any conspiratorial orchestration. This unity of action was motivated by a spontaneous reaction to a monumental event in Arab history: the confrontation between an Arab army and the US military and its allies.

The sympathy expressed by many Arabs for Saddam, and for his invasion and occupation of Kuwait, indicates that many Arabs do not take for granted the boundaries between Arab states because they do not consider the divisions of the Arab world to be permanent. In the Arab public eye, some borders are less popular than others. The borders that insulate the Gulf royal families and their fortunes are very unpopular, and the elimination of the Gulf political orders and elites is desirable in the eyes of many Arabs.

Arab nationalism now consists of two major ideas: first, the notion that the Arabs share common sentiments and a cultural and linguistic heritage, and, for some, a religious heritage; second, the idea that some of the borders between Arab states are not only artificial but also undesirable. There are various arguments that Arabs promote regarding the efficacy of Arab nationalism. For Faysal Darraj, the well-known Palestinian writer, the crises in Arab contemporary history do not underscore the divisions between the Arab people, rather they underline the schism between "the people" and "the regimes."[27] The repercussions of the Gulf War, according to Darraj, sharpened the divisions between the people and the regimes but not among the Arab people themselves.

For Darraj and many Arab nationalist writers, the division of the Arab world into separate states has only served the interests of those Western powers who feared Arab unification and power. Furthermore, some modern Arab nation-states are seen as being closely associated with the interests of both Western powers and Arab ruling families and groups and are regarded as subservient to those interests. The response of many Arab officials to the attempt by the Iraqi regime to eliminate the Kuwaiti political entity was strikingly different from the enthusiasm expressed among the Arab masses to the disaster that befell Kuwait. Arab public dissatisfaction with oppressive systems in most—if not all—Arab countries lead many Arabs to link oppressiveness with the regional (iqlimi) fragmentation of the Arab world.

The current intellectual debate about Arab nationalism entails no illusions: Arabs seem to appreciate the enormity of the difficulties and obstacles in the path of Arab—partial or full—unification. The opposition by Western powers and Israel to the goal of Arab unity appears to increase, not decrease, the popularity of the idea. In an unusual communique circulated in Syria in January 1991, noted Arab intellectuals expressed their opposition to the Gulf War and affirmed their

27. See Faysal Darraj, "Al-Qawmi al-Arabi fi zaman al-qutriyya al-tabi'a" (The Arab nationalist in the era of subservient regionalism), al-Hadaf, January 20, 1991, pp. 12–13.

faith in collective Arab action and in the necessity of "Arab power."[28] To many Arabs, the United States' fixation with Iraqi military capabilities is indicative of Western fears of Arab military and political power. In other words, the sympathy that many Arabs expressed for Saddam was not so much directed toward his person but toward his military apparatus, of which many Arabs in the epoch of defeats and despair were proud.

The Arab nationalism of today is different from the "dreamy" (*halim*) Arab nationalism of Michel Aflaq. Aflaq was never able to define Arab nationalism concretely, and his poetic language about "practical idealism" and "nationalism-as-love"[29] obfuscated rather than clarified the meanings of Arab nationalism. Moreover, Aflaq's writings legitimated the undemocratic overthrow of governments because he equated coup d'états with revolutions,[30] and he lacked concern for human rights and democratic institutions. In present-day politics, the Arabs have become far more realistic and more demanding about their expectations regarding Arab unity. The failure of the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait and the rise of Kuwaiti *wataniyya* (nationalism within the boundaries of an individual Arab state) did not dash Arab nationalist hopes. Events in Eastern Europe remind many Arabs that unity-through-coercion will not last.

Ironically, the appeal of Arab nationalism can be seen in the intellectual debates in Kuwaiti newspapers. Following the restoration of Sabah rule, the press reflected virulent anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian sentiments.[31] The Kuwaiti press today carries articles about Arab unity,[32] and the Kuwaiti government—which a few months ago was bragging about its "special ties" to the US government—now seems sensitive to the need to balance its connections to the United States with statements stressing its pan-Arab ties. The heir apparent and prime minister, Shaykh Saad al-Abdallah al-Sabah, for example, stated in October 1991 that "Kuwait's signing of defense cooperation agreements with friendly countries can only stress the fact that Kuwait was and will remain part of the Arab homeland, and shows that these agreements do not detract from pan-Arab membership but are aimed at the preservation of the country."[33]

Another stimulant of Arab nationalism is the impact of the Iraqi defeat. Many Arabs are united by the concept of *wihdat al-masa'ib* (unity of disasters). Many Arabs—including some of the Arabs of the Gulf, about 6 percent of the total Arab

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28. "Bayan min al-muthaqqafin al-Arab fi Suriya difa'an an sha'bina al-Arabi fi al-Iraq" (A communique from Arab intellectuals in Syria in defense of our Arab people in Iraq), January 1991.

29. Michel Aflaq, *Fi sabil al-Ba'th* (In the path of Baath) (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'ah, 1959), p. 35 and p. 29.

30. Ibid, p. 145.

31. See, for examples, articles in *Sawt al-Kuwayt* in the March and April 1991 issues.

32. See, for example, the series of articles on Arab nationalism and democracy in *Sawt al-Kuwayt,* July 15, 17, 19, 21, and 23, 1991.

33. See the Kuwait News Agency dispatch of October 13, 1991, reprinted in Foreign Broadcast Information Service, *Daily Report*—Near East and South Asia (FBIS-NES), October 17, 1991, p. 15.

population[34]—are complaining about the same problems: despair, disillusionment, humiliation,[35] inequality in the distribution of the national wealth, oppressiveness and torture,[36] exploitation of religion by political leaders, military impotence vis-à-vis Israel,[37] arbitrary rule by the military-intelligence apparatus, absence of minimum freedoms of expression, association, and political organization, and resentment of the current Arab situation. The films of Syrian comedian Durayd Lahham—which deal with the artificiality and impracticality of borders between Arab states and with the abuse of human rights in the Arab world—are now becoming popular in Egypt and North Africa, where he was unknown only a decade ago.

Unlike the nostalgic Arab nationalism harking back to the Baghdad of Harun al-Rashid, Arab nationalism today does not aspire to achieve *glory* and *greatness*, two words that appeared frequently in the Arab nationalist literature of the first part of this century. Many Arabs simply look for greater ease of population movement within the Arab world without worrying about the watchful cruel eyes of the *mukhabarat*s (intelligence networks). The appeal of the idea of Arab nationalism does not mean that a magic formula for "an Arab nationalist ideology" has been devised. The reality is, in fact, far from it. The task for Arab intellectuals and many among the masses is to link the goal of Arab unity with the crucial issues of democratization and Islam.

## DEMOCRATIZATION

As previously stated, today's Arab nationalism is not the same vague concept that Nasir or Aflaq espoused. In the new wave of post-Gulf War intellectual discourse, Arab nationalism and the revived movement of self-criticism are now viewed in conjunction with democracy. For many Arabs, faith in democracy is now based upon the realization that any unified governing entity that is not

34. The estimate of the Arab Gulf population is from Walid Khalidi, *The Middle East Postwar Environment* (Washington, DC: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1991), p. 4.

35. The feelings of humiliation are evident in many parts of the Arab world. Complaints about the lack of pride and dignity in the lives of people and nations appear in the literature of various opposition groups. The Arab Revolutionary Factions, the organization that claimed responsibility for the bombing of the US embassy in Beirut to protest the peace talks in Madrid in late October 1991, stated that "we will not allow [the United States] to humiliate our Arab people from now on." See the text of the statement in *al-Diyar*, October 30, 1991.

36. These are well portrayed in Abd al-Rahman al-Munif, *Sharq al-Mutawassit* (East of the Mediterranean) (Beirut: Al-Mu'assasa al-Arabiyya li al-Dirasat wa al-Nashr, 1985). The translator into English of Munif's *Cities of Salt* (*mudun al-milh*) [New York: Random House, 1987] reports that *Sharq al-Mutawassit* and other novels by Munif—who was stripped of his Saudi citizenship—were circulated in secret in Saudi Arabia itself. See Peter Theroux, *Sandstorms: Days and Nights in Arabia* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), pp. 194–5 and p. 207.

37. For the most recent assessment of Israeli military power, see Seymour M. Hersh, *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1991). The book, which received far more attention and publicity in the United Kingdom than in the United States, and which is being serialized in the Arabic press, deals with Israeli nuclear power but contains useful information and insights about the making of US Middle East policy.

controlled democratically cannot last. Kuwait, "unified" with Iraq, and the Soviet Union are two examples of artificial political entities unified by force against the will of the people. Democratization is thus seen not only as a lofty ideal but as a practical requirement for the effective consolidation of a viable political entity.

In the past, democratization had a different meaning in the Arab world than it does today. In the West, the term referred—and refers—to the extent to which a political system adopts fully or partially the democratic institutions of Western democracies. In the past, many Arabs opposed political changes that smacked of surrender to Western dictates, and some Arab regimes have exploited this public political antipathy—not cultural or religious antipathy as Bernard Lewis contends—toward Western powers by equating democratization with subservience to Western political and economic interests. After World War II, Arabs were too defensive to accept being seen as copying Western models, particularly when Nasir was demonized in the West and when he glorified his own (albeit, clearly undemocratic) model of government. Arabs today are more decisive about their political expectations. In Arab writings on the subject,[38] it is clear that democratization means modern Western-style institutions, parliamentary representation, a one-person-one-vote system, freedom of expression and of political organization, accountability of the elected, an independent judiciary, and individual rights.[39]

Democratization—as an aspiration not as a political actuality—is now sweeping various parts of the Arab world, yet it is not receiving—and will not receive—sympathetic attention in the United States and elsewhere in the West. Democratization in Eastern Europe has been ardently supported by the United States because it is considered synonymous with pro-Americanism. Democratization in the Arab world, however, will not produce pro-American voices and movements. Rather, democratization has produced—and will continue to produce—forces that, for political reasons, are intensely hostile to the United States and its interests. In countries undergoing democratic change in the Arab world, movements have come to the surface that are antipathetic to the the United States because of its role in the Arab-Israeli conflict and because of its support of some of the most anti-democratic regimes in the region, especially in the Gulf.

The fact that oppressive governments in the Arab world, from Muammar Qadhafi's government to Saddam Hussein's, are all talking in various ways about

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38. The best writings on the subject have appeared in the publications of the Beirut-based Center for Arab Unity Studies, particularly in the monthly journal *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*. Specifically, see the contributions on democracy and unity in *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, February 1984. For the origins of the notion of democracy in modern Arab thought, see Ahmad Sudqi al-Dajani, "Tatawwur mafahim al-dimuqratiyya fi al-fikr al-Arabi al-Hadith" (The evolution of the concepts of democracy in modern Arab thought), *al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi*, April 1984. Also see Ghassan Tuwayni, *Qira'ah thaniya fi al-qawmiyya al-Arabiyya* (A second reading of Arab nationalism) (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar li al-Nashr, 1991).

39. See the conclusions of Yunan Labib Rizq, *Qissat al-barlaman al-Misri* (The story of the Egyptian parliament) (Cairo: Kitab al-Hilal, 1991). The author stresses that the perfection of the political system requires more and more democratization.

democracy and are invoking—misleadingly of course—slogans of freedom and pluralism attests to the appeal of the idea at the popular level. Qadhafi spends hours in his public speeches discrediting the idea of the multiplicity of political parties, which signals the popularity of the idea among Libyans.[40] Even King Fahd of Saudi Arabia feels the need every few years to promise the Saudis the creation of a "consultative council."

It is doubtful whether many Arab regimes are serious about their democratic promises; it is less doubtful whether their people are thirsty for more open systems. In the past year and a half alone, laws have been either promulgated or drafted pertaining to the legalization of political parties in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Mauritania, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Many of the regimes of these countries do not really want openness, but they are responding to mounting popular demands.

Even Islamic groups, transcending their attachment to the classical Quranic notion of *shura* (consultation), are insisting on institutional democratization. The *ulama* in Saudi Arabia, for example, under the guidance of the ultra-conservative Shaykh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, submitted a confidential memorandum to King Fahd insisting that he define more specifically the role of the proposed shura council that the king has been promising since he was the heir apparent. A second memorandum, which was signed in July 1991 by more than 400 ulama, judges, jurists, and university professors emphasized that "the council . . . should not be a mere rubber-stamp formality, as is the case in some countries."[41]

One piece of evidence of Arab public support for democratization was revealed in May 1991 in an unprecedented public opinion poll of Egyptians and a number of other Arabs. The Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* mailed questionnaires to Arabs worldwide and received more than 5,500 responses. Most of the respondents were Egyptians, with only a 6 percent response rate from non-Egyptians. The poll revealed that 56 percent of all respondents agreed that "truly democratic governments are needed in each country." The percentage of those who supported democratization was more than double the 27.6 percent who wanted an immediate application of *sharia.*[42]

Another measure of the appeal of democracy lies in the moves toward democratization in Arab countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen.[43] Democratization in these countries did not come about because of the democratic commitments of their regimes. Instead, it arose as a direct result of the struggles

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40. See for example Qadhafi's televised speech delivered to Libyan youth on August 1, 1991, in FBIS-NES, August 6, 1991, pp. 25–8.

41. *Al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), August 1, 1991.

42. See the results of the poll in *al-Ahram al-Duwali,* May 24, 1991. Although 5,500 questionnaires were received, about 500 were considered unacceptable. The sample of non-Egyptian Arab nationals was too small to be used as an indicator of public opinion in other Arab countries.

43. For reviews of democratization in the Arab world, see Michael C. Hudson, "After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World," *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991); and John Esposito and James Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam," *Middle East Journal* 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991).

of men and women in support of democratization and economic equality. Moreover, it is clear that some Arab regimes—like Algeria and Jordan—allowed some degrees of democratization to occur as a safety valve for popular anger and resentment. In the absence of economic solutions, democratization—thus far limited because the rulers themselves still cannot be voted out of office—has proved to be tolerable from the governments' points of view. At the same time, the regimes in these governments are not reluctant to crack down against their opponents whenever they feel threatened, as evidenced by the curbs imposed on outspoken Islamic groups.

One Arab writer commented in March 1991 that "whenever a disaster befalls the Arab nation, voices rise here and there to declare that the causes of the disaster are the absence of the democratic method, or the absence of shura, as Islamic currents say."[44] It is true that the 1967 defeat (naksah, or Setback, in Nasirist official terminology) generated some soul-searching among Arabs and led to the rise of the self-critical school of thought among some Arab intellectuals.[45] The Arab world more than 20 years after 1967, however, still suffers from many of the problems of the past and Arabs feel worse off today, economically and politically. More importantly, the 1967 defeat did not dash the popular hopes in the ability of Nasir to resurrect the nation. There is no single leader—or leaders—that Arabs believe in today, and the military regimes of the Arab world have long been discredited. The faith in democratic transformation stems from the failure and perceived bankruptcy of the post-independence regimes.

## ISLAM

Islam—as a political ideology rather than as a body of theology—remains the single most popular movement in the Arab world, despite crackdowns against Islamic groups in democratizing countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia. Within the movement of Islam-as-an-ideology, however, there are both obscurantist trends and some enlightened tendencies. There seems to be considerable debate within Islamic groups about issues of reform. The conservative Egyptian Islamic thinker, Muhammad al-Ghazali, for example, has been supporting more rights for women, including promoting a more liberal interpretation of sharia as it relates to the status of women in Islamic societies. He thus rejects

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44. See Mahmud Muhammad al-Naku', "Hal li al-dimuqratiyya mustaqbal inda al-Arab? (Does democracy have a future among the Arabs?" al-Quds (London), March 13, 1991.

45. There is already a beginning of self-criticism after the Gulf War. See Irfan Nidham al-Din, Harb al-Khalij wa judhur al-mihna al-Arabiyya (The Gulf War and the roots of the Arab inquisition) (London: Dar al-Saqi, 1991). The writer lists what he believes are faults in Arab politics, society, and culture: selfishness (fardiyya), private interest, hypocrisy, submissiveness, absence of self-reliance, escape from confrontation, inaction, alienation, personal loyalty, attachment to superficial appearances, consumerism, extravagance, corruption, duplicity, fanaticism and extremism, factionalism, disintegration, control of the press by governments, human rights violations, absence of dialogue, romanticism, and the exploitation of the Palestinian question. It should be noted that Nidham al-Din is a journalist who works for pro-Saudi publications.

many of the dominant sexist views that prevail among Islamic thinkers about women.[46]

Nevertheless, the reformist movement within Islam is not new. There have been a number of earlier attempts to introduce reformist tendencies into the interpretation of sharia. In the twentieth century, the movement for renewal was put on the defensive with the recent rise of conservative Islamic movements in the Arab world, although some "liberal" Islamic thinkers are still widely read and discussed within Islamic circles. One of the most radical attempts to reinterpret the sharia was made by Shaykh Abdallah al-Alayli, the foremost Arab linguist and Lebanese Sunni cleric whose book on the reform of Islamic laws was banned in most, if not all, Arab countries. In this book, *Ayna al-khata'?* (Where is the error?),[47] al-Alayli states that sharia should be continuously renewed because if it stops renewing itself it dies. He also gives a new interpretation to penal measures in Islam,[48] and declares the impermissibility of *al-kanz* (literally, "treasure," but here referring to the accumulation of fortunes by individuals). Al-Alayli also calls for the unification of Islamic legislation between Shi'as and Sunnis and finds no contradiction between Islam and secularism, although he rejects the common Arabic word for secularism (*almaniyya,* mistakenly written and pronounced in Arabic as *ilmaniyya*) and suggests instead *al-hillaniyya* as a better word in Arabic for secularism.[49] Al-Alayli's socialist economic views and his secular writings, however, have alienated him from religious establishments and Arab regimes.

Muhammad al-Ghazali, with past connections to the Muslim Brotherhood, has a general conservative political outlook that makes him more acceptable to Islamic masses. Ghazali's *Al-Sunnah al-nabawiyya*[50] has been widely read and discussed in the Arabic press and mosques. He stands for reforming Islam by eliminating some innovations that he believes are un-Islamic in their origins. His most controversial opinions deal with women's issues. He believes that the oppression of women in the Arab world is not based upon Islamic principles but is based upon misinterpretation of sharia. He also opposes the exclusion of women from politics and sees no violations of Islamic tenets if women occupy political positions, although he does not reject the inequality of the sexes stipulated in the Quran. Ghazali's views are not liberal or feminist, but his positions challenge the views of the religious establishments in the Arab world and encourage debate about what has been taboo for a long time. It appears that the

46. See Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Qadaya al-mar'ah: Bayna al-taqalid al-rakida wa al-wafida* (Women's issues: Between stagnant and incoming traditions) (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1990).
47. Abdallah al-Alayli, *Ayna al-khata'? Tashih mafahim wa nadhrat tajdid* (Where is the error? The correction of concepts and a view of renewal) (Beirut: Dar al-Ilm li al-Malayin, 1978).
48. Al-Alayli asserts that *al-rajm* (stoning) is un-Islamic. See *Ayna al-khata',* pp. 86–8.
49. Al-Alayli, *Ayna al-khata',* pp. 127–36.
50. Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyya: Bayna ahl al-fiqh wa ahl al-Hadith* (The Prophet's Sunna: Between the community of fiqh and the community of Hadith) (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989).

more defeats the Arabs suffer, the more willing they become to reject taboos and
to express support for openness.

The goal of democracy and the exclusivist, undemocratic implications of the
strict application of sharia will inevitably clash. It will not be possible to reconcile
the ideas of democracy and equality with the intolerance that stems from the
desire to impose religious laws on members of society regardless of whether they
adhere to orthodox Islam and regardless of whether they wish to be governed by
non-secular personal status laws. Furthermore, the application of Islamic laws
will compound rather than resolve the critical problem of minorities in the Arab
world. The clash between Islamic ideology and democratization is likely to occur
after—not before—an Islamic movement reaches power in one or more Arab
countries.

## CONCLUSIONS

The 1990–91 confrontation in the Gulf will produce a legacy that is likely to
haunt future US presidents. Those who assure US officials of Arab respect for
power and force are not only guilty of prejudicial attitudes toward Arabs and
Muslims but are also guilty of being ignorant of Arab culture, history, and the
innate qualities of pride and dignity that are found in all human beings. It should
be remembered that reaction to the 1948 Arab defeat by Israeli forces did not
occur overnight, but it eventually changed the political landscape of the region. It
was several years after the 1948 defeat of Arab armies that Middle Eastern
regimes began to fall. The wide range of misconceptions prevalent in the West
about the Arabs are based upon a long tradition of disregard of Arab public
opinion. It is often assumed that Arab public opinion does not exist—an
assumption that could lead to major surprises and crises in US-Arab relations.

While moves toward democratization captured the public imagination of
many Arabs, the Gulf War also reinforced the oppressive rule of the Arab Gulf
regimes, and it eventually—wittingly or unwittingly—obstructed the cause of
democratization in Iraq itself. The entrenchment of the Arab Gulf regimes is
highly resented by many Arabs because they see in these regimes—rightly or
wrongly—the injustices of the "Arab economy."[51] The regimes are disliked
because they symbolize the disparities in per capita incomes. For example, while

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51. Even King Hasan II of Morocco, the first Arab leader to dispatch troops to Saudi Arabia
in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, felt it necessary to identify with his population's strong
dislike of Gulf regimes. He told one interviewer that "the greed of our Kuwaiti friends is proverbial.
Morocco can attest to that greed more than any other country." See the text of the interview in *Le
Monde*, August 16, 1990. On the issue of the maldistribution of Arab wealth and its political impact,
see Mohamed Heikal, "Out with the Americans, In with a New Arab Order," *Times* (London),
September 12, 1990. Some Arabs were also upset with Saudi aid to US-supported causes, such as the
contras in Nicaragua and the *mujahidin* in Afghanistan. In one interview, Palestine Liberation
Organization chairman Yasir Arafat stated that Gulf regimes gave $19.5 billion in donations in a
seven-year period to the mujahidin. See the interview with Arafat in *al-Jumhuriyya*, August 28, 1991.

TABLE 1
*Foreign Aid of Select Arab Gulf Countries*
(Net Disbursements as Percentages of Gross National Product)

| States | 1975 | 1985 |
|---|---|---|
| Kuwait | 7.40 | 3.16 |
| Qatar | 15.59 | −0.03* |
| Saudi Arabia | 7.76 | 2.88 |
| UAE | 11.69 | 0.24 |

*Indicates net inflow of funds.
*Source:* Table 1 is based on figures supplied by the World Bank and published in Michael P. Todaro, *Economic Development in the Third World,* 4th ed. (New York and London: Longman, 1989), p. 494.

the United Arab Emirates in 1985 enjoyed a per capita income of more than $19,000 and Kuwait a per capita income of more than $14,000, Yemen had a per capita income of about $500 and Sudan an income of about $300 per capita. Also, Arab Gulf regimes—contrary to claims made in their official publications—have been giving less foreign aid over the years. (See Table 1.)

Although there are reasons to believe democratization is spreading in the Arab world, not because of but despite the efforts of the ruling regimes, there are several indicators that lead one to appreciate the tremendous forces that are at play against democratization. There are various groups and minorities still being oppressed in the Arab world: women and homosexuals[52] everywhere in the region; Kurds in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon[53]; Blacks in Mauritania and Sudan[54]; Berbers in North Africa; Palestinians in the Gulf, Lebanon, and in the occupied territories; Christians,[55] particularly Copts in Egypt,[56] and Jews[57] still living in

52. In the Arab press today, the word *sexual deviance* (*al-shudhudh al-jinsi*) is used to denote homosexuality.

53. The Western world rightly condemns the persecution of Kurds by the Iraqi regime, but it has been silent about the summer and fall 1991 brutal Turkish raids against Kurdish sites in Iraq and Turkey. The identity of the oppressor often matters a great deal to the West.

54. Prejudicial attitudes prevail even in places where there are no Blacks in the Arab World. The word *slave* (male, *abd*; and female, *abda*) is still commonly used in various forms of colloquial Arabic throughout the Arab world to refer to people who are Black, including Arabs who are dark. Even dark-skinned Arabs, however—such as those in Sudan and Somalia—exhibit prejudicial attitudes toward Africans.

55. Islamic apologists still take pride in historical "Islamic tolerance" of minorities, but they do not concede that minorities in Islamic history have been tolerated only as inferior groups in society. Furthermore, the exploitation of this issue in Israeli and Western propaganda has discouraged Arabs from engaging in honest and open discussions of this issue.

56. No Coptic churches can be built and no structural changes within existing churches can be made without the specific authorization of the president. For example, Husni Mubarak signed a presidential decree in May 1991 to allow the Orthodox Coptic Church in Mit Barrah (in Manufiyya) to renovate its bathroom. See Presidential Decree No. 157 published in *al-Jaridah al-Rasmiyya,* May 2, 1991.

57. Even some Arab leftists do not refrain from making anti-Jewish statements. Thus the ardent Stalinist Syrian communist leader Khalid Bakdash, the oldest living Arab communist, in one recent interview blames the fall of communism on an "international Jewish conspiracy," and he also asserts

Arab lands; and all the citizens of the oppressive Arab regimes. It is also noteworthy that some Arab regimes are employing colonial arguments to obstruct democratization. Thus, when King Hasan II of Morocco asserted in an interview on French television in July 1991 that democracy cannot be fully applied now in the Arab world, he insisted that democratic measures could only be introduced in a "homeopathic" fashion.[58]

The prognosis in this essay regarding the crystallization of a new Arab ideology does not mean that change in the Arab world will proceed in a smooth, peaceful manner. It is likely that the depth of Arab anger and frustration will express itself forcefully and—possibly—violently.
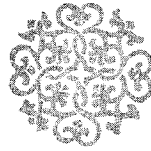
that "a Jew's worldly god is money." For the full text of the interview, see *al-Kifah al-Arabi* (Beirut), July 29, 1991.

58. See the text of the interview in FBIS-NES, July 23, 1991, pp. 20–6.