

## The Post-War Middle East

By Rami G. Khouri

The war in the Middle East should prompt all concerned to reassess the confrontational dynamics that characterize the region today. To be successful, and to complement the emergence of a "new world order" in Europe and between the superpowers, such a reassessment must come to grips with the underlying causes of the conflict in the Gulf. It must recognize that the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, and the global military confrontation it spawned, was not a freak, isolated consequence of the megalomaniacal personality or imperial aspirations of the Iraqi leadership. This crisis did not suddenly spring from a historical vacuum.

It was the consequence of nearly a century of political, social and economic developments throughout the Arab world. As such, the bilateral dispute between Iraq and Kuwait, and Iraq's occupation and annexation of Kuwait, should be seen as symptoms and consequences of a deeper malaise that has afflicted the Arab order ever since the emergence of the modern Arab political order in the postcolonial period after World War One.

This is not to defend or acquiesce in the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, which was clearly unacceptable by moral and legal standards and which

has to be redressed in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions and international legitimacy. However, if the Kuwait crisis reflected deeper problems which have

as Israel and relations with the superpowers. Understanding this fundamental underlying dynamic is crucial to a complete understanding of what is happening in the region today. It is equally vital if, post-crisis, we are to move ahead coherently towards a more rational, equitable and stable Arab order which will prevent this sort of crisis from re-occurring—and if the Arabs are to participate in and share the fruits of a new world order which we all seek.

During the hours and days immediately after the outbreak of the crisis on August 2, 1990, several Arab leaders, notably King Hussein of Jordan and the leaders of Yemen and Egypt, were feverishly engaged in trying to secure an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. For reasons which historians will clarify in due course, Arab leaders were not given sufficient time to achieve this aim. Despite the belief by some Arab leaders that an Iraqi pledge to withdraw had been secured within three days of the occupation, the Arab foreign ministers' meeting and the Arab summit in Cairo in early August issued strongly worded declarations to which the Iraqis reacted by remaining in Kuwait and, ultimately, annexing it. Within days, American and British troops were on their way to Saudi Arabia, and the possibility of an "Arab solution" was killed for

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On the shoulder patch: "New World Order."

afflicted the Arab world for decades, its resolution can only be achieved in a meaningful and lasting manner if the root causes of the region's problems are simultaneously recognized and treated.

The perception of many Arabs today is that the modern Arab political order has failed virtually all Arab individuals, states, or the broader Arab world of some 200 million people. The failure has been almost total in scope, covering domestic politics, human rights, social and economic development, regional integration, and pan-Arab national challenges such

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## About This Issue...

Four weeks after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour featured an extensive interview with Rami Khouri, a Jordanian journalist. The interview generated so many calls the NewsHour had to engage additional operators. Subsequently, the interview led to a book contract with Lawrence Hill Books [an imprint of Chicago Review Press], an Op. Ed. piece in *The New York Times* [December 15, 1990], and to our current issue of *The Link*.

Rami Khouri comes with first-hand knowledge of Arabs and Americans and of how we perceive one another. In addition to hosting his interview program on Jordanian TV, he is a publisher as well as a former editor of the English language daily, *Jordan Times*. When I phoned him in Amman last September to ask him to spell out for us the problems that will confront a postcrisis Middle East, his first question was, "How are the Mets doing?" Rami, it turns out, was born and educated in the United States, where his father worked at the United Nations, not far from Shea Stadium.

"Better luck next year," I replied, a hope perennially nurtured by those of us born not far from Fenway Park.

May it be a better year for us all, we concluded.

Several weeks later, on the day we sent his *Link* manuscript to the typesetter, January 16, 1991, the first bombs fell on Baghdad. Suddenly, all of us lived not far from the Gulf.

Our Special Book Selection is **Islam the Straight Path**, the expanded edition, by John L. Esposito. It is reviewed on page 12 by Dale F. Eickelman of Dartmouth College. This and other new publications are offered on pages 13-16 at substantial discount prices.

We are also pleased to bring to the attention of our readers a new study guide for teachers, **Focus on Iraq: Resources on the Present Crisis in the Persian Gulf**. This looseleaf binder, prepared by the Moorhead Kennedy Institute, contains 300 pages of material, including background information of Gulf countries, their culture and religions, plus a bibliography and suggestions on how to teach the Middle East. To order, send \$39.95, plus \$5.00 for postage, to The American Forum for Global Education, Moorhead Kennedy Institute, 45 John Street, Suite 1200, New York, NY 10038; Tel. 212-732-8606.

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the moment. Events deteriorated badly thereafter, with the added factors of the foreign hostages in Iraq and Kuwait and Iraq's demand that foreign embassies in Kuwait close down.

The important political element during the early days of the crisis was the attempt by the entire Arab world to secure an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait. While the Arabs recognized that there were substantial and legitimate bilateral grievances between Iraq and Kuwait, they could not be resolved through a unilateral occupation of one Arab country by another. But the massive injection of foreign troops into the region and the cumulative political pressures on Iraq, in the form of 11 Security Council resolutions, drastically redrew the terms of reference of the problem. Rather than being a bilateral issue which could have been resolved by inter-Arab efforts on the basis of principles of national sovereignty to which all the Arab states subscribed, the crisis expanded into a much larger and more dangerous regional and global confrontation, one that pitted the national aspirations of the Arabs as a whole against a despised

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tradition of western designs to divide and control the Arab world. In the eyes of many Arabs, the initial wrong of Iraq's violation of the sovereignty and dignity of 700,000 Kuwaitis was dramatically overshadowed by the perceived wrong of the western world's long violation of the sovereignty and dignity of 200 million Arabs.

Suddenly, tens of millions of Arabs relived visions of western imperial forces and political interests dictating the terms of an Arab political order that has brought the

Arabs failure, frustration and near despair for most of this century. The arrival of a new Western armada at the end of the 20th century rekindled our collective national memories of the damage that has been done repeatedly to the Arabs by other Western armadas in other periods of history. More particularly, we were brutally reminded that the existing Arab political order has largely reflected the former imperial and colonial interests of Western powers who devised this order during the first half of this century. We were thrust once again into a national nightmare that has haunted us since the 1920s, and that has seen our lives characterized recently by political failure, socio-economic regression, pan-Arab frustration, and collective, sustained humiliation.

Western nationals and decision-makers who seek to make sense of the present situation must understand the causes and extent of this feeling of deep, widespread frustration with the existing political order throughout the Arab world. The widespread anti-Western feeling stems from this socio-political legacy, which, in turn, comprises a complex series of issues involving domestic politics, regional development and international relations.

These sentiments and cumulative frustrations all came together during the Kuwait crisis, and were given dramatic anti-Western expression when the 1990 Western armada converged on us with such speed, vehemence and stridency.

It would be a human catastrophe and a historical tragedy if, as a result of this crisis, the West once again were to miss the signals coming out of the Arab world. Properly understood, this crisis could be a turning point in the historical evolution and human aspirations of the 200 million

people of the Arab world. It could also lay the groundwork for a genuine expansion of the new world order to encompass all people, so that it truly becomes a world order, rather than only a peripheral extension of democratic liberalism along the eastern flank of NATO.

For this to happen, however, our analyses and actions today have to go far beyond the status of Kuwait and the conduct of Iraq. We have to ask ourselves: what have the peoples of the Middle East been trying to say to themselves and to the rest of the world for the last decade?

The military confrontation in the Gulf was not the solution, only a temporary postponement of the historical change that must come to an Arab world groping for justice, stability and dignity. Like the Chinese government's violence in Tiananmen Square, the tanks of Ferdinand Marcos, the police dogs of the white South African apartheid regime, the secret police of Nicolai Ceausescu, the Soviet tanks in Afghanistan, the American army in Vietnam, or the Israeli occupation forces in Palestine, the application of American-led superior military force in the Gulf may have won some time, but it can never resolve the underlying causes of the conflict at hand. And those causes, still festering, will rebound again in the future in an ever more violent and intractable manner, widening the circle of suffering and destruction until it engulfs not only the people of the region, but, through the region's energy reserves and weapons of mass destruction, the welfare of the entire world.

So, once again, the underlying issues of a failed Arab order and of massive pan-Arab discontent force themselves into the heart of the debate about what happens after the crisis. These issues can only be ignored at the peril of perpetual instability and repeated bloodshed and suffering. To respond rationally to this fact, we should try to unravel the many individual historical and political strains that have been woven together to generate the mindset of Arab frustration and dis-

content which drove this crisis. These strains can be classified into several categories.

## The Lack of Democracy and Human Rights

Ever since the decolonization era after World War One, with only a few, fleeting exceptions, every Arab country developed an autocratic system of government. Lebanon once had a functioning democracy which was based on ethnic and religious power-sharing, but it broke down in the mid-1970s when the Maronite Christians, who wielded disproportionate power, refused to reappropriate power based on the changing demographics of the country. Syria, Jordan and others had nascent democracies in the 1940s and 1950s, but by the 1960s all Arab states were ruled by power elites who were not elected and were not held accountable to their people by any process of elections or checks and balances. A series of military coups in the 1950s and 60s cemented a brand of tightly controlled personal, family or military rule in almost all Arab states.

While many Arab leaders pushed ahead with nation-building and socio-economic development, the gap between material development and individual political rights started to widen quickly in the 1960s and 70s. The quest for indigenous democracies was universally thwarted by powerful and ubiquitous internal security systems, while public discussion and debate were tightly directed by government control of the media, the universities and internal political structures. Unlike Western and some Third World democracies, Arab political power flowed from the top down, from the rulers to the people. The bureaucratic, military and economic structures of individual countries became deeply intertwined with the personal rule of incumbent elites, whether royal families, individual strongmen with their sole national political par-

ties, or military-based ruling cliques. The concentration of overwhelming economic and political power in the hands of an unelected, non-accountable elite gradually led to inefficiency, corruption and petty humiliations which have characterized the Arab world since the 1950s.

In the early decades of statehood during the middle of this century, the need for economic development and the provision of basic services in education, health and infrastructure maintained demands for political power-sharing as a low priority. The immediate threat of Israel after 1948 also focused public attention on this major external issue. However, after the humiliating defeat of the Arabs by Israel in 1967, and as economic standards of living rose, the Arab grassroots started clamouring for democracy. It had become increasingly obvious that one of the reasons why Israel was able to defeat the combined Arab armies in 1967 was that the full power of Arab material, military and human resources was never harnessed — and the main reason for this was the lack of democratic decision-making.

The oil-fuelled economic boom in the decade after 1974 once again distracted people's attention away from demands for democratic transformation. For a full decade (1974-1983), the Arab mind was focused heavily on personal financial betterment. The tremendous volume of oil revenues that flowed to the oil-producers filtered to other Arab states in the form of official aid, private sector contracts, remittances of Arab workers in the oil-producing states and regional trade. During this decade, the power of the state increased rapidly, as the control of more substantial financial resources brought with it increased political power concentrated in the hands of a small elite. In most Arab countries, the patronage and expenditures in the hands of the ruling elite mushroomed in line with the rising absolute amount of money available in the region, and corruption and inefficiency increased correspondingly. By 1980 and 1981, total Arab oil income av-

eraged \$208 billion a year. As an aggregate for all Arab countries, government expenditures as a percentage of total gross domestic product was a very high 45% in 1981. By 1987, it had reached 52%. In the oil-producing states, the ratio had remained relatively steady at around 47%. In the non-oil-producing Arab states, however, it deteriorated badly, from 43.3% in 1981 to 56.7% in 1987 — with this high rate of government spending usually financed by domestic and foreign debt.

By 1983, however, as the drop in oil revenues and national surpluses disappeared, the economic boom waned. The average oil income of \$208 billion a year in the early 1980s had declined to an average of \$62 billion a year in the period 1986-87. As per capita income, job opportunities and standards of living started to decline throughout the Arab world, the domestic focus of political activism once again sought transformation to more equitable and responsive political orders.

## Economic Inequity and Regression

As the oil boom waned after 1983, governments resorted to massive international borrowing in an ultimately unsustainable effort to continue the growth of the previous decade. Denied the camouflage of massive financial revenues, the weaknesses of Arab economies came to the fore in a dramatic way. In the oil-producing states of the Gulf, small populations and still substantial annual income and financial reserves maintained a semblance of economic normalcy. In the rest of the Arab world, though, comprising over 90% of the population, deep economic disequilibrium became glaringly obvious. Unemployment increased, per capita income declined, foreign debt and debt service burdens rose sharply, foreign exchange and balance of payments deficits sprung up everywhere, and by the late 1980s almost every single

Arab state had to introduce severe economic adjustment programs, often with International Monetary Fund and World Bank assistance. Even the oil-producing states had to institute their own brand of adjustment, by drawing down their reserves, borrowing internally, cutting back national budgets, and implementing deficit financing policies.

A few telling statistics show the trend of Arab economies in the 1980s. The average annual growth rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in all the Arab countries declined from a high of 35% in 1980 to a low of minus 16.2% in 1986, as indicated in Table 1.

GDP annual growth rate (all Arab countries)	
1976 .....	24%
1980 .....	35%
1983 .....	-1.8%
1985 .....	-1.2%
1986 .....	-16.2%

(Source: National Accounts of Arab Countries 1986-1976, Arab Monetary Fund, No. 8, June 1988.)

Table 1

In the period 1980-1988, the average annual growth rate of Gross National Product (GNP) per capita was either zero-to-less than one percent or negative in all but three Arab countries (Egypt, Oman and Yemen), as indicated by the U.N. statistics in Table 2.

As the regional recession bit deeper, most governments tried to maintain economic stability by borrowing abroad. Consequently, total Arab foreign debt increased from around \$40 billion in 1979 to over \$175 billion in 1988, according to published U.N. statistics. In fact, the real value of Arab debt is considerably higher, given that: a) reported figures are often lower than real debt because of military and other obligations (for example, Jordan's foreign debt in 1988 was reported by the U.N. and the World Bank at between \$4.5 billion and \$5.5 billion, while the actual figure, according to the Jordanian government itself, is slightly over \$8 billion), and b) some

foreign debt is unreported because it is disguised as internal borrowing from domestic financial institutions, who in turn arrange private international credits. It would be safe to assume that actual Arab foreign debt is over \$200 billion.

By the end of the 1980s, virtually the entire Arab world was in the midst of severe economic retrenchment. As national budgets and government spending were adjusted downward and foreign exchange and imports controls were imposed, unemployment and inflation increased and real purchasing power declined. The impact was felt quickly

Average annual growth rate of GNP per capita (1980-88)	
Somalia .....	-2.2%
Mauritania .....	-1.3%
Yemen .....	2.0%
Sudan .....	-4.2%
Libya .....	-9.9%
Morocco .....	0.8%
Algeria .....	0.0%
Saudi Arabia .....	-5.9%
Egypt .....	2.8%
Iraq* .....	0.0%
Tunisia .....	0.6%
Syria .....	-3.1%
Lebanon* .....	0.0%
Jordan .....	-1.4%
Oman .....	6.9%
UAE .....	-9.0%
Kuwait .....	-2.5%
Bahrain* .....	0.0%
Qatar* .....	0.0%

\* Figures for these countries were unavailable; though they have been given zero growth rates by the author, all four countries almost certainly had negative average growth rates during this period, given the wars in Lebanon and Iraq and the impact of the regional recession in the Gulf.  
(Source: 1991 State of the World's Children report, UNICEF, New York, December 1990.)

Table 2

and sharply in almost every household throughout the Arab world. Particularly hard hit were young university and secondary school graduates whose job prospects were looking increasingly dismal, and the

tens of millions of fixed-income (usually low-income) government employees who faced increasing hardship in providing their families with their essential needs.

The political repercussions were predictable. After several decades of conditioning their people to look to the government for jobs, contracts, subsidized food, education, health and essential infrastructural services, Arab governments suddenly found themselves in the situation of having to tell their people that the government could no longer provide for all their needs. The slogans of the late 1980s throughout the Arab world became belt-tightening, self-reliance and an increased role for the private sector in economic growth. The grassroots sentiment throughout the Arab world was to demand that such sacrifices could only be made if the people themselves were given an opportunity to participate in decision-making, and to help formulate the policies of retrenchment and sacrifice that were required to get through the next difficult phase of nation-building.

## The Lack of a Viable, Integrated Pan-Arab Political and Economic Model

The sudden economic regression of the mid-1980s highlighted the deep economic disequilibrium and inequities that characterized the Arab world. Most people instinctively realized that one of the main reasons for the economic difficulties of individual Arab states was the lack of regional integration. While the oil wealth was being directly or indirectly circulated throughout the Arab world through aid, employment and commercial trade in the decade after 1974, most people felt sufficiently satisfied with their prospects for self-betterment and a manageable future for their children. The post-1983 regional recession changed all that and highlighted the tremendous imbalances in the area.

By 1986, individual income (per capita GDP) in the Arab world ranged from \$9,600 among the 15 million people of the oil-producing states, to \$2,000 among the 60 million people of the middle-income Arab countries, to just \$500 among the 113 million people of the low-income states. The oil-producers could sustain themselves by drawing down

trade (imports and exports) was with other Arab countries; it increased to 7.9% in 1981, but by 1986 it had declined to 4.2%.

Furthermore, while the Arabs were spending an average of over \$30 billion a year on foreign arms purchases between 1975 and 1985, they were increasingly less able to feed themselves. For example, the

funds been used more rationally for intra-Arab development and the attainment of Arab national goals — such as a just peace with Israel to provide for Palestinian rights — many of the root causes of the Gulf crisis (notably severe economic imbalances and accompanying political frustration) would not have existed. Also, the Gulf states would not have had to spend tens of billions of additional dollars to finance the political, military and economic aspects of the crisis.

These facts and figures accentuate the deep frustration that ordinary people have long felt with inter-Arab relations, particularly as the Arab world enjoyed the financial and human resources to assure stable, long-term growth and development for all its people. Ordinary Arabs, when they thought about such matters, were bewildered by the gross disparities in Arab wealth. How was it that the 15 million Gulf Arabs had foreign investments and financial reserves of around \$600 billion, while the other 185 million Arabs had foreign debts of some 200 billion? Why was the Gulf importing billions of dollars of food from North America and Europe when parts of the Arab world, notably Sudan, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq, had the potential to feed the 15 million Gulf nationals many times over?

At the heart of this disquieting situation was the obvious inability of the Arabs to give political expression to the very real sense of pan-Arab identity which lives in the mind and heart of all Arabs. During the period from the 1950s to the early 1980s, the Arab League and its institutions failed in transforming pan-Arab political sentiment into meaningful regional institutions. As the decade of the 1980s revealed the weaknesses of individual Arab states, the trend in the region shifted to sub-regional groupings, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Maghreb Union and the Arab Cooperation Council. These groupings had a combination of security, political and economic aims, but all

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their reserves and postponing some unessential prestige projects, but for the majority of ordinary Arabs, the present became very difficult and the future looked menacing.

While the deep economic disparities can be explained in part by short-term economic fluctuations related to regional and international economic trends, the much deeper causes of Arab economic failure are to be found elsewhere. During the previous several decades, the Arab world missed the opportunity to develop a coherent regional economy based on the integration of Arab resources, notably human resources, arable land, water, financial resources, oil, other minerals, industry and military capabilities. While Arab unity was a political sentiment and a reflection of social/national identity that still seemed far away, economic integration should have been more attainable — but it never happened. Certainly, attempts were made to promote a more integrated regional Arab economic base, such as the Arab Common Market and the Arab Economic Unity Council, but these were never given the political support required to help them achieve their full promise.

A cursory glance at inter-Arab trade flows indicates precisely to what extent the individual Arab states had neglected one another in favour of trade with foreign countries: in 1976, only 6.6% of total Arab

Arab states were 78% self-sufficient in cereals in 1970-72, but grew only 41% of their cereals by 1986. The corresponding drops in self-sufficiency in other food categories were 96% to 68% for meat, 84% to 55% for milk, and 101% to 96% for vegetables.

A similar situation pertained to the investment of pan-Arab financial resources. By the late 1980s, the vast majority of Arab financial surpluses, whether private or public, were invested outside the Arab world mainly in bank deposits, government and corporate bonds and securities, and private business ventures. The reason most commonly given for this situation was that the Arab economies had neither the absorptive capacity nor the political stability to accommodate these Arab funds. The retort from the Arab man in the street was skepticism that the Arab political elites had ever really tried to develop the political commitment or the economic structures that could have channeled Arab funds into pan-Arab development.

Though precise figures are not available, it is widely estimated that total Arab surplus financial resources, held at home or abroad in the form of bank deposits, government and private securities, real estate and other investments, total around \$500-\$600 billion, most of which is held by the Gulf oil producing states. This compares to total Arab foreign debt of around \$200 billion. Had Arab surplus

remain either institutional fledglings or, in the case of the ACC, a fractured, if noble, idea.

For the last four decades, Arabs have watched their leaders alternately form unions with one another, only to break them up and re-engage in the shameful tradition of inter-Arab squabbling, personal rivalries or propaganda wars, subversive activities and armed conflicts. The number of attempts at uniting two or more Arab countries may be impressive, but ultimately it attests to the futility of trying to force artificial unity through the unilateral, sometimes whimsical, acts of individual leaders. All such attempts at unity and integration have failed, including Jordan and Iraq, Egypt and Syria, Jordan and the Palestinians, Libya and Egypt, Egypt and Sudan, Libya and Tunisia, and Syria and Libya, to mention only the most prominent attempts. The lesson from this recent history is that genuine unity and integration cannot follow the individual inclinations of leaders who are not linked to their people through democratic processes. Rather, unity can only emanate from the genuine expression of people's wishes through a democratic process — and this has never been allowed to take place in the modern Arab world. The result is the situation which pertains today: individual Arab states pay lip service to Arab unity and integration, while trying to survive as best they can through political, economic and military relationships with foreign countries.

## The Inability of the Arabs to Deal with the Challenge of Israel

The challenge of Zionism and the state of Israel is central to many of the problems which have given rise to Arab sentiments of Islamic

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fundamentalism and demands for democracy. The inability of the Arabs to make war or peace with Israel has been a consistent source of deep hurt and frustration for over four decades. The fact that a few million Israelis can conquer all of Palestine, occupy neighboring Arab lands and check the collective power of 200 million Arabs has been a source of deep humiliation, even shame, throughout the Arab world. The challenge and threat of Israel is not confined to the front-line Arab states bordering Palestine; it also reaches deep into the rest of the Arab world, for example with Israel's strike at the Iraqi nuclear facility in 1981, or the ability of the pro-Israeli lobby in the United States virtually to dictate the terms of American arms sales to Arab countries in the Gulf.

It is indicative of the true balance of political power in the region that even during the height of the crisis in the Gulf, when the United States sent hundreds of thousands of troops to defend Saudi Arabia from a perceived threat from Iraq, the pro-Israeli lobby in Washington succeeded in reducing a proposed \$20 billion American arms package to Saudi Arabia. The message to the Arabs has been very clear: Israel is the number one priority of the United States in the region, and the U.S. is committed to maintaining Israeli military superiority over the combined strength of adjacent Arab states. Even in times when Arab oil in the Gulf is seen to be threatened, whether from an Arab or non-Arab aggressor, the United States is more prepared to send in its own troops to provide security than to sell the necessary arms to the Arabs themselves. Is it so sur-

prising that such a policy should generate deep anti-American resentment and even hatred in many parts of the Arab world?

## Unsatisfactory Arab Relations with the Great Powers

The domestic and regional constraints that have characterized the Arab world for the past half a century have been compounded further by our inability to develop balanced and mutually satisfying relations with the great powers. While the United States has enjoyed a market in the Arab world worth tens of billions of dollars a year for its arms, consumer and capital goods, and food products, in return American political and security ties with the Arabs have always been hostage to the imperative of American support for Israel. The dependency relationship between the Arabs and the United States in the fields of technology, arms sales, food, financial services and — as the Gulf crisis and the American reflagging of the Kuwaiti oil tankers in 1987 showed — ultimate security, has resulted in a severe imbalance in the bilateral relationship, with the Arabs virtually helpless in the face of American demands or actions. Meanwhile, we have suffered a grotesque double standard in American views of Arab and Israeli national rights, and have had to put up with repeated examples of vehement U.S. support for Israel alongside American lassitude on the issue of the national rights or territorial integrity of Palestinians, Lebanese, Syrians or other Arabs.

Relations with the Soviet Union have not been much better. The Arabs turned to the Soviets for financial, technical and military support in the 1950s only as a counter-force to American support for Israel. Communism and Marxism never penetrated beyond the surface of some Arab societies, and the Soviet Union cultivated Arab ties largely as part of its strategic confrontation with the West. We were useful for the Soviets, at a moment and place in history. When the Soviet empire collapsed in 1989, and the Cold War tapered off, we were no longer very important. Moscow quickly allowed large-scale Jewish emigration to Israel, resulting in some 150,000 Soviet Jewish immigrants to Israel in 1990. The shallowness of Arab-Soviet ties was badly exposed, as we had to endure the triple humiliation of virtual strategic abandonment by the Soviet Union, watching the Soviet Union take on the role of junior partner in the superpower duo, and seeing Soviet Jews enter Palestine in the hundreds of thousands.

## The Overall Failure of the Modern Arab State to Respond to Individual or Collective National Aspirations

The points mentioned above were the main, though not the only, factors which saw the Arab world reach a low point of national development in the 1980s. The questions that Arabs kept asking themselves throughout this period, especially when the oil boom faded and economic regression set in, were as follows: how could 200 million Arabs be defeated by 4 million Israelis? How could the United States ignore the strategic, human and natural resources of the Arabs in favour of its support for Israel? Why did the Arab people have to endure autocratic police states, instead of enjoying de-

mocracy and full human rights? Why did the Arab leaders not give meaningful expression to the pan-Arab sentiments of the people of the region? Why did most Arab leaders turn their countries into personal fiefs, with elaborate personal security systems and intelligence networks that permeated every corner of society?

The decade of the 1980s turned out to be the culmination of a century of collective Arab failure. The modern Arab state, almost without exception, has proved unable to provide its people with the accepted attributes of a state: national security and stability, free expression of individual and national political identity, and reasonable prospects for a better future for one's children.

While domestic autocracy, regional fragmentation and superpower manipulation each played their role, probably the main reason for the failure of the Arab political order was the manner in which it was established earlier this century. The British and French colonial powers created most of the Arab states earlier this century by drawing artificial frontiers which often did not correspond to the optimum ethnic mix or human and natural resources of the region. The result has been the extraordinary disparities we witness today: states such as Kuwait, Oman, Qatar or the United Arab Emirates, with tiny populations and little industry or agriculture, but with enormous reserves totaling hundreds of billions of dollars; or states such as Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Algeria and Morocco, with large but poor populations; and states in between, such as Tunisia, Palestine, Lebanon, Jordan and Somalia, who have to export their people as labour in order to make ends meet.

Perhaps the highwater mark of Arab failure and shame came during and immediately after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 and 1983. In that period, the P.L.O. was under siege in Beirut from Israeli troops who were mercilessly shelling an Arab capital city. Months later, American marines had landed in Bei-

rut, and the U.S.S. New Jersey battleship was shelling Lebanese leftist forces in the mountains. The Arab world had reached an embarrassing low point:

a) Israeli troops were laying siege to the capital city of the only Arab country that had shown a glimmer of hope of achieving balanced development through a liberal economic and political system;

b) The P.L.O., representing the single most important pan-Arab national issue of the century, was surrounded and under attack by Israelis, but continued to fight back as best it could.

c) While the Israelis established their control over much of Lebanon on land, the United States navy was shelling Lebanon from the sea.

d) The rest of the Arab world watched, complained, and did nothing. Inter-Arab disputes continued. Domestic political elites throughout the Arab world seemed unmoved, despite the anger of their people. And we continued to buy tens of billions of dollars worth of arms and commodities from the United States, while pleading with it to take a more even-handed attitude in our region.

From this low-point of Arab ignominy in 1982-83, the only way to go was up, and it was no surprise that it should have been Lebanon which eventually pointed the way for others to follow. By the early 1980s, several years after the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, Islamic fundamentalism had gained ground throughout the Arab world. Given the lack of opportunities for political expression or participation in all Arab countries, Islamic fundamentalism had emerged as the most effective means of protest against the political order. In some countries, such as Syria, the Islamic-based challenge to the state took a violent form, and the state responded with greater violence, killing tens of thousands of people in the city of Hama. In other countries, such as Algeria, Jordan, Palestine, Tunisia and Egypt, formidable Islamic groups emerged. Their common denominator was an expression of displeasure with the ex-



isting political, economic and social order. The main issues they raised against the government and its associated power elite were economic mismanagement, corruption, favouritism, denial of human rights, arrogance and heavy-handedness by the state and its various branches, ineffective policies vis-a-vis the challenge of Israel and the position of its backers among the world powers, allowing Arab societies to be overrun by foreign cultural and commercial concepts, losing touch with the rich legacy of Arab culture and identity, and failing to achieve effective pan-Arab or inter-Arab cooperation, to mention only the most common issues.

Ordinary people and political activists who were denied opportunities to share in the decision-making system turned to Islam as the most feasible and logical means of expressing their displeasure with the state of affairs in their country and their broader Arab nation. The West was so shocked and taken by surprise by the Islamic revolution which overthrew the Shah that it could only see Islamic fundamentalism as a political force that was a mortal threat to American and Western interests. It missed the fact that Islamic fundamentalism was first and foremost an authentic expression of indigenous dissatisfaction with the established Arab political and economic order. It was also the only protest means available to Arabs, just as the Christian church emerged as a focal point of challenge to the white minority regime in South Africa, the Marcos government, the Polish Communists and other unjust tyrannies.

In south Lebanon, the combination of despair that came from Arab failures and the fortitude that came from zealous faith and nationalism drove Lebanese and Palestinians to confront the Israeli occupation with force. A series of suicide bombings and other attacks finally drove the Israelis out of most of south Lebanon, and the American warships returned home with hundreds of bodies of dead American troops. For perhaps

the first time in recent Arab history, the Arab Nation saw a glimmer of hope in individuals and groups who would sacrifice their lives for the cause of their freedom, sovereignty and dignity. Several years later, the young Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza followed suit. The *intifada*, or Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, was the second major show of courage and sacrifice in the face of overwhelming military superiority. In its three years to date, the *intifada* has resulted in around 1,000 Palestinian deaths, over 100,000 injuries, some 11,000 administrative detentions, and 1,625 demolitions or sealings of Palestinian houses. Yet it goes on unabated — while most of the rest of the Arab world stands by and watches, buying American arms and commodities, and pleading for Washington to take a more even-handed attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

By the late 1980s, all the above factors had brought the Arab world to the point where it was ready for major change — and such change could only be for the better. The rapid deterioration in economic conditions in several Arab countries was the trigger which set off short-term protests in Algeria and Jordan in 1988 and 1989 respectively, and the regimes in both countries responded by acknowledging their people's demand for participatory democracy as the means to redress the several major national challenges they faced, whether domestic or regional, political or economic, individual or collective.

The pressures for change which had been building up within the Arab world finally came to the surface in the late 1980s, and were given important expression in the young, fragile, groping democratic systems that were launched in Algeria, Jordan, Tunisia and Yemen. Other forms and levels of democratic government had been practiced, to an extent, in Lebanon, Egypt, Sudan, Kuwait, and within the P.L.O. The nascent democracies of Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan and Yemen are significant because they were established

as the consequence of intense grassroots pressures that finally exploded in anger in the late 1980s. Unlike the experience of the previous decades in the area, these democracies were not "given" to the people by benevolent rulers who allowed rubber-stamp parliaments to exist as long as they had no power. These democracies were established by the force of popular will, by tens of millions of Arabs who were fed up with being treated like children by their own rulers — and who would no longer meekly accept the cumulative failures and humiliations which had been the destiny of the last three generations of Arabs. Ironically, pressures for democracy were also being felt in Kuwait in 1990.

A new generation of Arabs — more educated, conscious of the political denial they suffered, and aware of democratic developments around the world — was making it known that the old political order had failed, and had to be replaced with a political structure that was more responsive to the needs and aspirations of the Arab people. Nearly a century of Arab failure, culminating in a catastrophic decade during the 1980s, was on the verge of being discarded in favour of a more humane, more productive, more honest and equitable national structure. There were no guarantees of assurance, but a serious effort at change was underway.

## The Gulf Crisis and Beyond

It was precisely at this moment of profound historical changes in the Arab world that the crisis in Kuwait took place. Since August 2, these changes have been reinforced and accelerated by: a) the build-up of American-led foreign troops, b) a series of U.N. Security Council resolutions, c) coercive enforcement measures such as trade embargoes and naval blockades, d) widespread Arab sentiment against Western military interference in the region, and

e) Iraqi proposals to resolve all occupations in the Middle East, whether in Kuwait, Palestine, Syria or Lebanon.

An analysis of the events since August 2, and a retrospective review of the major political sentiments in the region during the past several decades, indicates clearly that the four specific issues which were raised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait correspond precisely to the four main causes of Arab disappointment and anguish. These issues are:

1. The tremendous economic disparities within the Arab world: there has been heightened appreciation of the fact that the disproportionate wealth in the hands of the small Gulf oil producers has not been used sufficiently well for the achievement of pan-Arab political, social or economic goals. This unearned wealth also created an arrogance in some Gulf states which was manifested in the inability of Kuwait and Iraq to negotiate a solution to their bilateral disputes over borders, oil policies, and access to the Gulf.

2. The challenge of Israel: In the spring of 1990, Iraq had threatened to retaliate with binary chemical weapons should Israel ever attack Iraq. Iraq's emergence as a growing Arab military power, fresh from a stand-off against larger Iran, was seen by many Arabs, and most Palestinians, as a potential counterforce to Israel's power.

3. The double standards of the U.N. and the world in implementing Security Council resolutions: The vehemence, speed and scope of Security Council resolutions on the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, coupled with enforcement measures such as the trade embargo and the naval blockade, contrasted sharply in Arab eyes with international lassitude in implementing other, equally mandatory U.N. resolutions on the Israeli actions in occupied Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories. If the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait was to be rolled back through decisive international action through the U.N., why have the world and the U.N. not reacted

in a similar manner to the Israeli annexations of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights?

4. The tradition of Western imperial involvement in the Middle East: The speed and scale of the international military intervention in the Gulf rekindled Arab memories of Western military intervention in the Arab world throughout this century, including the establishment of many Arab states by western powers during the fading years of Western colonial enterprises in the Middle East. While the West saw its military intervention as a means to assure the emergence of a stable, just, new world order in the post-Cold War era, we saw it as a cruel attempt by the West to reinforce the unjust, unstable, old order which the West created in the early years of this century, and from which we have suffered for three generations.

From this perspective, the crisis in Kuwait can be understood in its much wider temporal and sectoral context. It is unfortunate for Kuwait that it has been the immediate shock absorber and victim of the consequences of widespread Arab disequilibrium and rage, and one hopes that the suffering of the Kuwaitis can be redressed. Yet, this can only happen in a manner which is meaningful for the Kuwaitis and for the rest of the people of the Middle East if the root causes of the crisis are acknowledged and dealt with. Otherwise, worse crises will occur in the future.

The option before the Arab people and the peoples of the rest of the world is relatively clear: either to return to the status of August 1, 1990 and continue to live with the tensions, inequities and anger which have brought the Arab world to the breaking point, or, alternatively, to return to August 1 while recognizing that a new world order and stability in the Middle East can only come from starting to deal with key problems which have been left to fester in the area for many decades.

In the postwar Middle East of 1991 and beyond the Arab world will come face-to-face with several simu-

laneous and pressing challenges, corresponding to the root causes of the problems and failures of the past half a century. The immediate tasks will include:

## Expanding the Democratic Process in the Arab World

The nascent democracies of Jordan, Yemen, Algeria, Lebanon and Tunisia will have to be strengthened and deepened, which should have a spill over effect in other Arab countries whose people aspire to democracy and human rights. Ironically, as noted earlier, Kuwait was the one high-income Gulf country where stirrings for democracy were being felt. This will intensify and find echoes in other GCC states. Oman and Saudi Arabia have already started making noises about consultative councils and more participatory political systems, while pressures for change are also being felt in Somalia and Morocco. Eventually, closely-controlled, top-heavy political systems such as those of Iraq, Syria, Libya, Saudi Arabia and most other Arab states will have to respond to demands for democratic pluralism and accountability of public officials. Only through practical and serious accountability will the waste, mismanagement and corruption of the Arabic world be redressed.

This process of political liberalism will have the advantage of making people feel part of a national entity, with laws to protect minorities, assure the rights of all individuals, and guarantee access of special interest groups and small political groupings to the broader process of political discussion and decision-making. In the long run, Arabs will have to rely less on their ethnic, religious or tribal identity for comfort, protection, and survival, while being able to get on with their lives on the basis of their national identity. That national identity will continue for many years to combine elements of state identity

(Jordan, Syria, Morocco) and national identity (the single pan-Arab nation, which is divided into separate states).

## Integration to Redress Resource Imbalances

Greater democracy will inevitably lead to manifestations of greater pan-Arab integration in fields such as labour, industry, water, transport, food, education and finance. The Arab world will have to rely less on imported Asian labour, and make more work opportunities available to Arab workers from states such as Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Palestine. Such integration will overcome the constraints of resource imbalances (land, water, population, minerals) which reflect the artificiality of borders drawn up by British, French and other imperial powers earlier this century. As pan-Arab integration progresses, state identity will gradually decline in favour of pan-Arab identity.

Integration would aim ultimately to narrow the gap between rich and poor, and to provide complementarities and opportunities that would see the range of per capita income among rich and poor Arab states more closely resemble, for example, that among the members of the European Community, or individual states within the United States. Instead of the difference in per capita income being measured in factors of 25-30, it would be measured in factors of 3 or 4.

## A More Unified Arab Response to Israel

The Arabs will have to deal more coherently with the challenge of Israel — either making peace based on the existing pan-Arab diplomatic posture which accepts coexistence of Palestinian and Israeli states, or, if

grassroots anger keeps rising, preparing to wage war once again. The war option is not a short-term likelihood, given Israel's military advantage, but — as the case of Iraq demonstrates — the Arabs can develop a very credible military option should they set their mind to long-term development. In either case, the Arab-Israeli conflict will have to be resolved in order for the integrated, comprehensive development of the Arab world to take place.

## Effective Pan-Arab Security

Finally the Arabs will have to work out mechanisms by which true national security of the Arab world can be assured by the Arabs themselves, rather than by individual Arab states, tribes or families scurrying to find temporary refuge under the military skirts of western powers. This means, ultimately, that the Arab world has to shake off the historical legacy of a psyche which sees other Arabs as potential threats to small patches of land and resources which were bequeathed to them by the artificial frontiers in which they were each installed by former imperial custodians. Rather, individual Arab groups will have to start thinking in terms of other Arabs as complementary sources of national strength and components of pan-Arab strategic depth. Once this pan-Arab identity is allowed to manifest itself through democratic grassroots expression in a pluralistic political context, regional integration should quickly reduce our exaggerated reliance on foreign imports, and spur more rational and sustainable pan-Arab economic and social development.

This more global approach to resolving the problems of the Middle East will necessarily require the Western powers to loosen their old imperial grip on the region. As democracy, pan-Arabism and Islamic fundamen-

talism run their course, the Arab world will become more politically humane, socially equitable, economically sensible, materially self-sufficient, and nationally integrated or united. In other words, the Arabs will become a more formidable national entity, more powerful, and internationally respected — and most people in the Arab world today believe this is precisely what the West seeks to avoid, just as it has been able to keep the Arab nation artificially divided, dependent, weak, obsequious and pleading for most of this century.

This is the framework of the broader historical transformation now taking place in the Arab world, and the key to how the 200 million Arabs fit into the quest for a new world order that is truly new and global. Kuwaits, Iraqs, Saddam Husseins and George Bushes come and go. The collective national identity, cultural and historical legacy, and personal dignity of 200 million people who comprise one of the world's richest and proudest civilizations is less ephemeral. It is also less up for grabs at the end of the 20th century than it was at the start of the century. Reclaiming our dignity and reasserting our national identity, we in the Arab world are telling the West: the age of imperialism is over, and we will not suffer the indignity of being the world's last colonies. Let the new world order begin.

## Corrections

The December 1990 Link misidentified Casey Kasem as a former disc jockey; it should have read one of America's foremost disc jockeys. Also, on page 2, the second sentence in the first paragraph should have read "But they're portrayed as rich in movies like *Protocol*, *Jewel of the Nile*, and *Cannonball Run II*."

# Book Views

## Islam: The Straight Path,

Expanded edition.

By John L. Esposito

New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, \$21.95 (cloth).

### Reviewed by Dale F. Eickelman

This compelling and readable introduction to Islam and contemporary Muslim thought describes how non-Muslims and Muslims think about Islamic history and society, faith and practice, religion and politics. Although intended for a non-specialist audience and written in accessible, non-technical prose, the organization and content of *Islam: The Straight Path* allow it to double as a guide to specialized academic, polemic, and devotional literature. It equals H.A.R. Bibb's *Mohammedanism* (1949, 2nd ed., 1962) and Fazlur Rahman's *Islam* (1966; 2nd ed., 1979) in representing complex historical issues and religious debates in an accurate and nonjudgmental manner without "writing down." The differences in approach between Esposito and his predecessors suggest how the audience for introductory books about Islam has altered in recent years.

Esposito introduces topics in roughly the same sequence as his predecessors but places different emphasis on them. Chapter 1 deals with Muhammad and the Qur'an and the origins of Islam in seventh-century Arabia. Subsequent chapters deal with the Muslim community in history; beliefs and rituals, laws and values; modern interpretations of Islam, with examples of the development of post-eighteenth-century religious and political authority in the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent; religion and politics in contemporary Islamic movements (the argument encompasses the entire Muslim world, but case studies are drawn only from Iran and the Arab Middle East); and an excellent concluding chapter on current debates over re-

ligious authority and interpretation.

One obvious distinction between Esposito's book and its predecessors is in the concepts "modern" and "contemporary." Gibb's treatment of the modern world stops with the early twentieth century, with occasional excursions into the habits of thought of the "oriental thinker." Rahman, a leading Muslim *engagé*, brilliantly portrays debates among modernist Muslim intellectuals through the mid-twentieth century, but deals with the challenges to religious authority offered by modern political dogmas and developments, moral and spiritual ideas, and educational reforms only in the last twenty pages. Esposito devotes much more space to contemporary religious currents and the participants in such debates. He presents the Muslim community in history clearly, but his explanation of dialogues and debates in Islam as a "lived" religion (p.x) is outstanding.

Another strength of Esposito's approach is to take seriously how Muslims and non-Muslims discuss Islam in classroom and seminar settings, an increasingly central arena for understanding Islam as a "lived" religion, and to introduce questions as they typically occur in both classroom settings and specialist seminars. Thus Chapter 1 also deals with how Muhammad's life has served as an exemplar for later generations. The revealed nature of the Qur'an as the word of God is stressed, as are the issues surrounding the collection and organization of the Qur'an after the Prophet's death (pg. 33). Esposito mentions the claims of some Muslims that this organization of Qur'anic verses was divinely inspired, but frames the issue so that interested readers can pursue how the "collection" of the Qur'an raises issues about how religious doctrine and authority are constituted.

Over thirty years ago Wilfred Cantwell Smith (*Islam in Modern*

*History*, New York, Mentor, 1961, p. vii) urged as a "new criterion" for writings on Islam "the capacity to construct religious statements that will be intelligible and cogent in at least two different traditions simultaneously." Esposito's book meets this stricture. He invokes difficult issues but never lapses into polemic on matters such as the Prophet's treatment of Jews in seventh-century Arabia, the role of women in the Muslim world, the "historical romanticism" of some contemporary religious leaders, and the constraints placed on religious reformers by their conservative constituencies. As Esposito writes, the weakness of modernist reformers is that they have been "a minority in society legislating for the more traditional society" (pg. 147).

One of Esposito's major points is that in thinking about Muslim doctrine and practice, both Muslims and non-Muslims must ask, "Whose Islam? Who is to interpret, formulate, and implement Islam?" (pg. 192). The occasional instances in which doctrines are reported with such contexts of authority—for instance, the so-called "five pillars," which are not accepted by the Alevites of Turkey, Syria, and (for over two decades) Germany—remind a reader how a concern with authority is woven into most of the book. The case study on Saudi Arabia, for example, emphasizes how claims to "Islamic" standards are used by the House of Saud to legitimize its rule and by its detractors to attack them. Other case studies—Iran, Lebanon, Egypt and Libya—illustrate issues which apply to politics throughout the Muslim world.

The main distinction between the 1991 "expanded" edition and the 1988 original is the addition of case studies. Although they illustrate the book's main themes, they do not reflect the author's breadth of experience with Muslim thought and practice outside the Middle East. Of

the nearly one billion Muslims in the world, no more than a fifth are from the Arab world and Iran. Future editions of this book should balance examples from the Middle East, where a minority of the world's Muslim population resides, and centers of Muslim population in Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the southern regions of the Soviet Union. Esposito's discussions of intellectual currents in the Indian subcontinent during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is illuminating; a discussion of current Muslim developments in the Indian subcontinent and among the Indian subcontinent immigrant communities in Europe would be equally so.

The controversy over Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, briefly invoked (p. 175), marks the first time that Western and Muslim political and intellectual discourse has converged in debate on the same topic where the "sides" are not "Western" and "Muslim" opinion, but fascinating and complex crossovers between representatives of both intellectual traditions. Muslims from the Indian subcontinent and Muslim immigrants in Europe have played a leading role in this debate. A welcome amendment for the book's next addition would be an annotated bibliography. The current listing of 150 books, most of which are not discussed in the text, can only bewilder many general readers.

As a guide to understanding complex issues and as an antidote to books on "holy terror" and "sacred rage," *Islam: The Straight Path* is currently unsurpassed. It deals with current concerns by setting them in the historical framework which informs and shapes Muslim belief and practice.

*Dale F. Eickelman is Lazarus Professor of Anthropology and Human Relations at Dartmouth College and President of The Middle East Studies Association of North America. His last book, co-edited with James Piscatori, is Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination (1990).*



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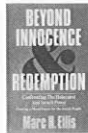


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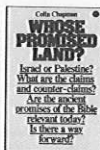
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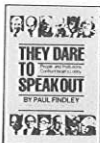
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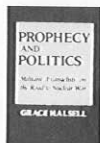
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