

MERIA

BETWEEN STAGNATION AND RENOVATION: THE ARAB SYSTEM IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE IRAQ WAR

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This article explores the impact of the U.S. occupation of Iraq on the Arab system. It advances three arguments: First, that the system has not yet extricated itself from the political paralysis that characterized it in the pre-war period. Second, that in spite of its political fragmentation the system underwent some modest structural changes that may herald significant developments in the long run. And, finally, that the Arab world is witnessing an expansion of a reformist discourse and the introduction of certain liberal measures that may eventually bring about some political changes. Consequently, it can be fairly assessed that though the Arab world stands between stagnation and renovation, there are some modest signs indicating that renovation of the "Arab house" has already begun.

INTRODUCTION

On March 4, 2003, Muslims celebrated the beginning of year 1424, according to the *hijri* calendar. But for Arab Muslims there was no reason to celebrate. Three days earlier, the Arab summit in Cairo failed to prevent -- or delay -- the U.S.-led attack against Iraq, which began at the end of that month, and led to its occupation by the United States. By the end of 2003, an interim Iraqi council, under American supervision, was ruling Iraq. In one of his last articles in Arabic, the late Edward Said argued that what occurred in Iraq was no less than a "major catastrophe" (*karitha kabira*). The collective Arab nation, he exclaimed, powerlessly and helplessly confronted the American invasion, which he described as a *hamla*¹ -- a term used to depict Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Egypt in 1798. In the same vein, veteran journalist

Patrick Seale composed a eulogy for the Arab State system shortly after the war.²

Since the end of the war, a serious Arab dialogue concerning internal and regional reforms ensued on the governmental and societal levels. This dialogue affected the May 2004 Tunis Arab summit declaration, which included references to future reforms. These pledges were reiterated in the March 2005 Algiers manifesto, a summit celebrating the Arab League's sixtieth anniversary. For some, this dialogue and specific liberalization measures (such as the elections in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, the referendum on the change in Egyptian constitution, and the municipal elections in Saudi Arabia) were indications of a profound change in the Arab world.³ Others downplayed the importance of these changes, which, in their opinion, occurred mainly in areas under colonial rule (Iraq and Palestine). Shibley Telhami even

suggested that the war constituted a setback to Arab reforms.⁴ Arab statements in favor of reforms, therefore, were viewed by some as mere rhetoric, reminiscent of previous hollow Arab decisions, primarily emanating from Western pressure on Arab rulers to initiate reforms. Such a view, in essence, perceived the Arab reaction as a new form of *tanzimat* - the reforms taken by the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth century, mainly as a response to Western pressure to modernize the empire.

In light of these conflicting assessments, this article sets to explore the impact of the Iraq war on the Arab system.⁵ It advances three arguments: First, that the system has not yet extricated itself from the political paralysis that characterized it in the pre-war period. Second, that the system underwent some modest structural changes that may herald significant developments in the long run. And, finally, that the Arab world is witnessing an expansion of a reformist discourse and the introduction of certain liberal measures that may indicate that some winds of change are blowing.

BACKGROUND: THE ARAB SYSTEM IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

The Arab system entered the new millennium with a host of problems among which its institutional breakdown was the most serious one. During the 1990s, only one Arab summit was convened since the disastrous Cairo summit of August 1990, which revealed the extent to which Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait divided the Arab world. The 1996 Cairo summit was an unconvincing show of Arab solidarity in the face of the election of the right-wing candidate, Benjamin Netanyahu, as Israeli Prime Minister, following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995.⁶

Another four years elapsed before another summit convened, this time as a response to the outbreak of the Palestinian al-Aqsa intifada, in October 2000. Institutionally, the most important decision then was to hold regular annual summits to "enhance the joint Arab endeavor in all fields, particularly the economic."⁷ Consequently, summits were held in Amman (March 2001), Beirut (March 2002), Sharm al-Sheikh (March 2003), Tunis (May 2004) and Algiers (March 2005).

A second problem that divided and weakened the Arab system throughout the 1990s was the Iraqi question. In the aftermath of the 1991 war, Iraq was ostracized from the League. Being a major player in the Arab system, its absence not only weakened the system's overall strength, but also led to its fragmentation. Several states, such as Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, benefited economically from the sanctions and the consequent Oil for Food agreement signed between the U.N. and Iraq on May 20, 1996.⁸ Yet, this development did not lead to major changes in the Arab arena. Both Egypt and Jordan were reluctant to endanger their amicable relations with their U.S. ally. Egypt also feared that Iraq's return as a full player might threaten its leading role in the system. Iraq's pariah status also served well the interests of the Gulf countries, which remained apprehensive of its inspirations in this area.

The gradual erosion of the Western sanctions against Iraq eventually led to its re-admission into the League in October 2000 and its presence at the March 2002 Beirut summit. The formal pretext for its return was the need to display Arab solidarity with the intifada, which broke out in September 2000.⁹ This step notwithstanding, Iraq's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council

(GCC) countries remained sour. Moreover, most of the GCC states still supported the war against Saddam in 2003.

The third Arab problem in the pre-war period was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Outwardly, the Arab countries displayed solidarity with the Palestinian struggle during the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada. This solidarity was vividly demonstrated in the final statement of the Arab summit in Cairo in October.¹⁰ In reality, however, the destabilizing effect of the Palestinian uprising threatened to spill over to neighboring Arab regimes, which naturally became more concerned with their internal security. The explosive nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict brought about Egyptian and Saudi mediation attempts. The most significant was Saudi Crown Prince Abdallah's initiative, which was made public in February 2002, and eventually endorsed with modifications by the Arab summit in Beirut in March.¹¹ However, Palestinian terror attacks in Israel and the latter's hard-line retaliatory policy only served to strengthen the Israeli-Palestinian impasse. Even the inauguration in April 2003 of U.S. President Bush's Road Map -- with general Arab and Israeli blessing -- did not bring about the expected rapprochement. Thus, when U.S. forces entered Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was still festering. Much of Arab public opinion viewed Iraq, like the Palestinian issue, as a modern manifestation of Western colonialism.

In terms of regional political dynamics in the pre-war period, several features were particularly noteworthy in the Arab system. First, as explained above, Iraq was largely marginalized as a result of the sanctions imposed on it -- a development that left Egypt and Saudi Arabia as the only key Arab players. These two countries both cooperated

and competed. On the one hand, being close allies of the United States, they shared similar interests in the Arab world. At the same time, both struggled for leadership of the Arab system. This was reflected in their attempts to offer their good offices to the United States in both the Iraqi and Palestinian "files." Thus, for example, the Abdallah initiative was published in February 2002, and Saudi Arabia worked assiduously to turn it into an Arab peace plan. It was likely not a coincidence that President Mubarak did not attend the Beirut summit, which endorsed a modified Saudi initiative. Three months later, in June 2002, when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict reached another impasse, Mubarak hosted a mini-international summit in Sharm al-Sheikh.¹² Undoubtedly, the meeting should be seen as an Egyptian attempt to compensate for its failure in the Beirut summit. Since the Saudis did not want to antagonize the United States, they fully cooperated with the Egyptian move.

Another feature of the inter-Arab pre-war system was Syria's isolation and its consequent declining regional influence. At the end of the 1990s, hostility and mistrust characterized its relations with Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians. In addition, Syrian-Turkish relations were on the verge of confrontation and the Israeli-Syrian peace talks reached a deadlock. Only Iran remained a half-hearted regional ally, while Syria's economic relations with Iraq -- its formidable rival in the Fertile Crescent -- improved as a result of the sanctions imposed on the latter (see above).¹³ After almost thirty years in power, President Hafiz al-Asad's death in June 2000 further weakened Syria's regional standing. Though the process of nominating his son to presidency went rather smoothly, it was clear that the inexperienced young Bashar would have to focus on the domestic

scene to consolidate his control and legitimacy. Indeed, one of the reflections of Syria's declining role was the growing autonomy of the Hizballah organization in its operations against Israel and the repeated calls heard from Lebanon for Syrian evacuation. In addition to all these factors, the fact that Syria remained on the U.S. list of states sponsoring terrorism meant that it was also largely ostracized internationally.¹⁴

ARAB RESPONSE TO THE IRAQI CRISIS

The Iraqi crisis lingered for a long period, yet the final countdown to war began in early January 2003. However, for almost three months, the U.N., European countries, and other interested parties invested massive efforts to prevent what seemed to be an inevitable U.S. decision to launch war against Iraq in order to eliminate the "hidden" mass-destruction weapons. However, in contrast to the active reactions of outside forces, the regional players remained largely passive with regard to the Iraqi crisis. This behavior stemmed from either the perception that their ability to actually influence the final outcome was limited, or a tacit desire to see the Iraqi threat finally eliminated. Still, as war became imminent, the involvement of the Arab states in the crisis proportionally increased.

The main Arab axis that emerged during the crisis was, as expected, between Cairo and Riyadh. The two states - jointly and separately - were involved in the inter-Arab and U.S.-Arab consultations.¹⁵ A main issue in the Arab dialogue was the question of where to hold the next Arab summit. According to the formula established in 2000, it was to be held in Bahrain. Yet, the crisis in the Gulf and the stationing of U.S. forces there raised doubts as to the wisdom of

holding the summit there. Undoubtedly attempting to exploit the opportunity, Mubarak offered Egypt as a venue. At the same time, the GCC countries, more concerned with their immediate threat, decided to send military forces to Kuwait in case of an Iraqi aggression against it.¹⁶

In February 2003, when the Arab foreign ministers convened in Cairo to prepare the summit, it was not clear whether a summit would be held at all or where it would be held. Also, the Gulf countries called for a firm statement against Iraq, while Syria -- backed by Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen -- demanded an explicit statement calling for the prevention of war and the prohibition of logistical support to the U.S. forces. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan attempted to hold a middle path, calling for adherence to U.N. resolutions. Behind the scenes, the issue of Saddam's free abdication raised much controversy. It seemed at that point that the summit would not be convened at all.¹⁷

When war in Iraq seemed imminent, the efforts to convene a summit increased. Fearing that a failure to convene the summit would expose Egypt's declining role vis-à-vis the Arab world and the United States, brought Mubarak to intensify his efforts. Also, in light of attempts by international organizations to prevent the war, Arab public opinion criticized Arab elites for their impotence, particularly as the crisis revolved around an Arab country. In the words of the editor of the Egyptian daily *al-Ahram*, "the Arab nation should have one voice" with regard to the Iraqi crisis.¹⁸

The second round of deliberations by the Arab foreign ministers once more confirmed the existence of three camps: one, led by Kuwait, supported the coming war; the second, led by Syria, wanted to prevent the

war and avoid any logistical support to the United States; and in between, stood Egypt and Saudi Arabia, denouncing the war, but attaching full legitimacy to U.N. decisions-- a position that did not rule out the use of force against Iraq. The idea of calling upon Saddam to abdicate was discussed behind the scenes, but only aroused tension and anger.¹⁹ The main fear of the participants was a repetition of the fiasco in the 1990 Cairo summit, which paralyzed Arab politics for almost a decade.²⁰ Generally, however, all Arab states were apprehensive of the imminent war and its unforeseen consequences. Chaos in Iraq or a democratized Iraq according to U.S. plans might potentially affect the stability in neighboring Arab states.

After the one-day summit convened in Cairo in March 2003, participants, in spite of their disagreements, formulated a communiqué. It called for: a peaceful solution that would prevent a war, which would be seen as a threat to Arab national security; objected to any Arab involvement in a war that aimed at Iraq or any other Arab state; and denounced any foreign interference in internal Arab affairs. The last resolution was meant to express Arab opposition to Western intentions to force a regime change in Iraq.²¹ The statement reflected the lowest common denominator, responding to the mood of the "Arab Street." Clearly, the decisions stood in sharp contrast to the interests of the Gulf countries. The main dispute evolved around the initiative of the United Arab Emirates, that in return for Saddam's abdication he would receive political asylum, while the League would temporarily take over Iraqi affairs. This initiative, however, was not formally put on the agenda-- a move that created tension

between the Gulf countries and the League's chairman.²²

The summit also briefly discussed the Saudi initiative for reform of the Arab League and the conduct of Arab affairs. In January 2003, Crown Prince Abdallah proposed a new initiative called "Charter to Reform the Arab Stand," which was meant to encourage regional economic development and greater participation in politics. It calls upon the Arab states to implement an Arab free trade zone by the end of 2005. The Arab states would agree to develop unified tariffs and duties within 10 years, which would serve as a basis for the establishment of a Common Arab Market. It also encourages members to modernize local economies, privatize government-owned industries, and open economic development to outside investment. The charter calls to recognize the need for internal reform and enhanced political participation in the political process. It also forbids the use of force in intra-Arab disputes and calls for a united stand against any foreign country attacking an Arab country by stating their "total rejection of any illegitimate foreign aggression against any Arab country and their commitment to solve all Arab conflicts peacefully."²³ The Saudi initiative was preceded by three other, less detailed initiatives presented to the League by Qatar, Libya, and Sudan.²⁴ However, in light of the severe Iraqi crisis it was decided to postpone the discussion of the Saudi initiative-- or any other for that matter-- to the next summit in Tunis.

Most Arab observers perceived the summit's results as a failure-- a true reflection of the lamentable Arab situation; the struggle amongst the Arab states was seen as a modern version of the old Arabian Desert tribes.²⁵ Fawaz Gerges, for example, claimed that the summit was a "dismal failure,"

revealing deep Arab rifts and lack of foresight and vision.²⁶ In terms of the system, there were neither winners nor losers.²⁷ Yet, taking into account the diverse, and often conflicting Arab interests, as well as the problematic nature of the League's decision making, there was nothing surprising at the summit's inability to offer a viable solution to the crisis. Therefore, its results should be measured against its aims and capabilities. If the goal was to respond to Arab public opinion, which opposed any Western involvement in Arab affairs, and to produce an Arab consensus (*ijma'*), then the summit succeeded. If, however, the goal was to avert the war, or at least to produce a new diplomatic maneuver, then the summit failed. Interestingly, a similar statement was issued by the Islamic Conference Organization (ICS) in Qatar, on March 5.²⁸

Undoubtedly, the position of the Arab "Street" largely affected the results of the Arab and ICO summits. In the absence of elected democratic regimes and credible polls, this amorphous term corresponds to what public opinion is in the West. And though Arab presidents and kings have the ability to influence the Arab Street, it is equally clear that their policies are being affected by it. Thus, for example, on March 5, Cairo saw a procession of more than a million people demonstrating against the impending war in Iraq. Apparently, however, the procession was initiated by the ruling National-Democratic Party and supported by the opposition parties.²⁹ Similarly, on March 8, Syria celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Ba'ath revolution. As this holiday celebrates Syria's national liberation from foreign domination, it was clear that the celebrations were naturally linked to the Western aggression against Iraq.³⁰ The next day,

President Bashar al-Asad addressed a procession of thousands of Syrians, Lebanese, and Palestinians coming from the Ba'abda palace in Beirut to express their gratitude for his pan-Arab stance. It was claimed that this procession reflected the true "pulse of the Arab Street."³¹ Whether masterminded by the regimes or initiated from below, or as is most likely, both— these celebrations served to strengthen the regimes in a period of uncertainty and insecurity.

THE WAR AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

The Iraqi Scene

Two days after the beginning of the war, on March 23, Arab foreign ministers issued a statement that denounced the aggression, calling for an immediate withdrawal of the U.S. forces from Iraq. The fact that the war was termed "aggression" (*udwan*) reflected the general Arab attitude toward the U.S. move.³² Though annihilating Saddam's regime would serve the interests of several Arab states, their leaders preferred not to swim against the Arab public stream. Saudi and Jordanian leaders, for example, called for an end to the war, reiterating their refusal to allow the use of their territory for attacking Iraq.³³ Outspoken in particular was the Syrian leader, who expressed full support of Iraq's struggle against the invaders. In his reference to the U.S. "aggression war" (*al-harb al-'udwaniyya*), Asad made a historical analogy with the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement,³⁴ which in Arab mythology symbolized the classic example of Western imperialism. Even Mubarak, who initially put the blame of the war squarely on Saddam's shoulders, changed his tone and stated that Egypt would not take part in a war or military operations aimed at any Arab state.³⁵

The behavior of the Arab leaders was not

only a natural consummation of their policies in the pre-war period. In light of the massive demonstrations against the war that swept the Arab capitals, as well as other Muslim and Arab communities in Europe and elsewhere, any other Arab position seemed inconceivable at that time.³⁶ Syria led this anti-Western campaign, as the only Arab state which actively supported Iraq (see below). This behavior cannot be solely explained by Asad's need to strengthen his tottering legitimacy. It should be noticed that the crisis and subsequent war occurred during March and April, the two months in which Syria celebrates its national holidays. Following Revolution Day (March 8), the regime celebrates Ba'ath Founding Day (April 7), and Independence Day (April 17). All of these holidays celebrate, among other things, Syria's heroic struggle against the imperialists. Thus, the coincidence of the war in Iraq with these holidays was bound to raise all these anti-Western historical memories.³⁷

On April 9, the Saddam's regime fell. Nothing illustrated this development more than the photos of the demolished statue of Saddam in central Baghdad. Kuwait and other Gulf shaykhdoms could not conceal their jubilation.³⁸ Other states expressed a more restrained position.³⁹ First to respond, Mubarak called upon Iraqis to run their own affairs. This statement dovetailed with US hints about Arab promises to support the new Iraqi regime. In fact, Egypt began a series of diplomatic maneuvers intended to safeguard Iraq's integrity and eliminate any threat to the stability of neighboring Arab states. As expected, Mubarak coordinated his policy with Saudi Arabia and Jordan, which shared the same interests. Publicly, they demanded the evacuation of all foreign forces and the election of a free Iraqi government.⁴⁰ Yet, in contrast to the Egyptian-Jordanian-Saudi

triangle, Syria continued supporting Iraq. This was not only reflected in its media and national celebrations, but there were also signs of actual collaboration during the war that led the United States to transmit unveiled threats to Syria.⁴¹

To ensure Syria's containment and regional stability, seven countries decided to hold a meeting of the so-called "states neighboring Iraq." On April 18, the foreign ministers of Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, and Bahrain met in Riyadh. Obviously, the meeting included all the main regional actors involved in the Iraqi conflict. Soon, however, the discussion was bogged down over several thorny issues, such as the Kurdish problem, the oil fields in northern Iraq, and the nature of the future Iraqi regime. Eventually, however, the conferees called to end Iraq's occupation, to respect Iraq's sovereignty, to create a transitional government and expressed opposition to U.S. threats toward Syria. The participants discussed the possibility of sending Arab troops to Iraq but this suggestion was dropped.⁴²

However, as U.S.-Syrian relations further deteriorated due to alleged Syrian assistance to Iraq, Mubarak -- likely with U.S. encouragement-- visited Damascus on April 20. He then proceeded to Bahrain, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia to discuss the Iraqi situation, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and the U.S. threats to Syria.⁴³ It seems that Egypt and the GCC countries were alarmed by the possible ramifications of a conceivable confrontation between Syria and the United States, as well as by the prospects of an American administration in Iraq rather than an indigenous Iraqi regime.⁴⁴

Several months after the fall of the Saddam regime, the Arab system returned, more or less, to its previous balance. Egypt,

the state leading most of the maneuvers in the Arab system, strengthened its position. Syria, on the other hand, though gaining wide support in Arab public opinion, became politically and economically weaker. Saudi Arabia, which led the Arab peace plan in 2002, seemed to play a second fiddle to Egypt, yet it retained an important position within the system. No change occurred in the position of the Arab states, except for Iraq, which returned to the Arab League in mid-September 2003 on the condition that a new, free-elected government would replace the current transitional council.⁴⁵

The instability of the Iraqi domestic scene, which also included frequent terrorist acts, did not spill over to neighboring states. In a series of meetings, the United States and the regional states coordinated their policy with regard to containing the Iraqi conflict, while preserving Iraq's territorial integrity.⁴⁶ But realizing in general that their actual impact on Iraq's future was limited and that the threat of its division was receding, the Arab states confined their activity to declarations in support of its territorial integrity and the well being of its people. Indeed, the Iraqi "file" was not a major item on the agenda of the Arab summit in Tunis (May 22-23, 2004). Its final communiqué reiterated the Arab commitment to Iraq's territorial integrity, urging the U.N. to put an end to the occupation and to prepare the ground for transferring power to the Iraqi people.⁴⁷ The Algiers summit (March 22-23, 2005) omitted altogether any direct reference to this issue.⁴⁸ Thus, the Iraqi "file" has gradually disappeared from Arab rhetoric and politics. This, however, did not mean that Arab leaders became indifferent. Rather, they were concerned that the democratic process in Iraq-- whether imposed by the United States

or a reflection of popular will-- culminating in the January 2005 elections and the establishment of a representative Iraqi government,⁴⁹ would potentially undermine the stability of their own authoritarian regimes.

Syria and Libya

Though hailed by the Arab street, Asad's behavior during and after the war largely isolated Syria in the regional and international systems. In particular, the Syrian Accountability Act, issued by the United States in May 2003, allowed the president to impose certain sanctions on Syria.⁵⁰ Moreover, the presence of U.S. troops in Iraq served as a constant reminder that Asad might be the next target. He feared that the elimination of Saddam would become a precedent for the United States to get rid of what they considered to be recalcitrant leaders. In addition, the U.N. decision to terminate the Oil for Food agreement with Iraq in May 2003 meant a significant financial loss for Syria, which earned some \$500 million annually from Iraqi oil and trade transferred through its territory.⁵¹ Syria was not compensated for that loss. Jordan, in contrast, another major beneficiary of this agreement, was compensated by the Gulf States.⁵²

By the end of 2003, realizing that to ensure the regime's survival and stability he needed to improve his regional standing, Asad moved in several directions. First, he reiterated his call to resume negotiations with Israel. This time, however, he expressed willingness to start from the beginning and not from the point they were terminated. This rather moderate position was meant to alleviate U.S. pressure and improve the economic predicament, as it was clear that

Asad did not believe that peace with the Sharon government was possible. Moreover, his continued support to Damascus-based Palestinian organizations cast a shadow on his sincerity with regard to his peace overtures.⁵³ Second, he paid a visit to Turkey - the first ever by a Syrian president. In spite of Syria's perennial disputes with Turkey over the Alexandretta region and the Euphrates River waters, Asad aimed at coordinating his Iraqi policy with neighboring Turkey.⁵⁴ Third, he played a more significant role in the Arab dialogue that focused on various Arab initiatives to reform the Arab League, the reaction to the U.S. Greater Middle East plan, and the possible amendment of the Saudi peace initiative.⁵⁵

Syria's most significant step, however, was the decision to fully evacuate its forces from Lebanon in April 2005. Lebanese calls for Syrian withdrawal were initially heard in the late 1990s, but the eventual momentum that brought about this decision was generated by the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik al-Hariri on February 14, 2005. This incident ignited mass demonstrations in Lebanon and intense international pressure on Syria to pull out its forces. Thus, it complied with the U.N. Resolution 1559 of September 2004 calling for its complete withdrawal from Lebanon.⁵⁶ Syria's end of 29 years of occupation is highly significant for several reasons: First, it further diminishes, though does not eliminate, Syria's influence in Lebanon (particularly with regard to Hizballah). As a result, Syria's already weakened position in the Arab system is further deteriorating. Second, it exposes its Lebanese flank to Israeli intrusions. Third, by regaining its full sovereignty over the land, Lebanon would now be in a better position to build a viable

nationhood. Though sectarianism (*ta'ifiyya*) is still a major component of the Lebanese political system in the post-Ta'if era, in the wake of Syrian withdrawal, lingering memories of the devastating Civil War, could produce a new reality, commencing in May 2005, with the first independent parliamentary elections since 1972. Finally, since the Syrian decision was made without prior approval of the Arab League, it further eroded the importance of this institution, which in October 1976, sanctioned the entrance of Syrian forces, under the guise of Arab Deterrence Force (ADF), with the aim of ending the Civil War.

Though all these maneuvers partially succeeded in extricating Syria from its regional and international isolation, it still remained a pariah state, perceived in the West as representing the more radical and anti-Western voice in the Arab camp.

Libya, another player that had previously belonged to the radical Arab camp, underwent a major transformation. In late December 2003, President Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi announced his decision to renounce his weapons of mass destruction (WMD). This unexpected step was probably a consummation of a long process. But the fear of an American attack, the need to remove U.S. sanctions-- which badly affected Libya's economy-- and the desire to reinvigorate the long-established regime, likely all affected Qadhafi's thinking.⁵⁷ Though peripheral in the Arab system (both in terms of geography and politics), Libya acquired a unique place as a symbol of Arab radicalism along the Nasserite type, often articulating ideological hostility toward the West and Israel. The change was also reflected in the realm of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when Libya accepted the Arab peace plan in March 2002 and after that expressed a more moderate view of the

conflict. Thus, the change in the Libyan position meant that the previous radical Arab camp (known in the past as the Steadfastness and Rejection Front), consisting of Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Yemen, and the PLO, no longer existed. Israel, of course, was the main beneficiary of this change, but it was also significant for the Arab balance of power.

The Israeli-Palestinian Scene

With the fall of the Saddam regime and installation of an American governor in Iraq, the situation there subsided. This helped the relevant parties to re-focus on the Israeli-Palestinian "file." On April 30, 2003, in an attempt to capitalize on the successful military campaign, the Bush Administration published the "Road Map," a peace plan aimed at serving as a blueprint for solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The United States hoped that both the Iraqi and the Israeli-Palestinian scenes were now ripe for a peaceful solution.⁵⁸

The publication of the plan and the initial positive response of the parties involved diverted the regional attention away from the Iraqi scene. Like the Arab involvement in Iraq, here too, Egypt and Saudi Arabia became the two leading Arab players. The Saudi involvement was hardly surprising, as Crown Prince Abdallah was the initiator of a peace plan that was accepted, with certain modifications, by the Beirut summit in 2002. Having been overshadowed by the Saudi initiative, Egypt attempted to regain the driver's seat in the Arab caravan. For that purpose, Mubarak hosted a mini-summit in Sharm al-Sheikh on June 3, with the participation of President Bush, King Abdallah, Crown Prince Abdallah, the Bahraini Emir, and Palestinian Prime Minister Abu Mazen. The next day, King Abdallah hosted in Aqaba President Bush,

Israeli Prime Minister Sharon, and the Palestinian leader. These meetings were intended to accelerate the peace process, based on the U.S. planned Road Map. In terms of regional dynamics, these summits accentuated the existence of an Egyptian-Saudi axis which-- in contrast to the Beirut summit a year earlier-- was now led by Egypt.⁵⁹

The absence of any reference to Syria and Lebanon in the Road Map was meant to marginalize them in the Arab system. Such a development would have dovetailed with U.S. interests, as the United States was keen to punish Asad for his "misbehavior" during the Iraqi crisis. However, keeping his lines of communication open, Asad met with Egyptian and Saudi leaders during the summer of 2003, seeking another Road Map, which would also tackle the Syrian-Lebanese track.⁶⁰ But what hampered the U.S. plan was not the Syrian position, but rather the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which continued unabated for the rest of the year, dominated by Palestinian terror acts and Israeli targeted killings.

In light of the political stalemate and what was seen as the failure of the Road Map, Saudi Arabia led a new initiative to modify the Arab peace plan to meet U.S. and Israeli reservations. Reportedly presented to the State Department in late January 2004 following some Arab consultations, the initiative was a major item on the agenda of the Arab foreign ministers' meetings in March.⁶¹ However, the Arab states could not find a new consensus other than the modified Saudi initiative, which was endorsed at the Beirut summit in March 2002.⁶²

The political impasse in the Israeli-Palestinian scene meant that Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza and certain

settlements in Judea and Samaria was the only viable political plan. With the death of PA Chairman Yasir Arafat in November 2004, and his replacement by the more moderate Mahmud Abbas (Abu-Mazen), some major developments took place: First, Abbas and Sharon officially ended the al-Aqsa intifada by reaching a truce. The deal was struck on February 9, 2005, at the Sharm al-Sheikh summit, with the participation of President Mubarak and Jordan's King Abdallah. Shortly after, Egypt and Jordan returned their ambassadors to Tel Aviv.⁶³ Second, the Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad signed an agreement in Cairo on March 17, which extended the truce (*tahdi'a*) in military operations until the end of 2005 and promised certain reforms in the Palestinian political institutions.⁶⁴ These two developments reflected the debilitating effects of the uprising on both Palestinian and Israeli societies, as well as the growing realization of the changing reality.

Egypt has played a key role in the preparatory consultations regarding Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. In an attempt to ensure the safe transfer of land and future security, Israel even considered allowing Egypt to station a force of 750 soldiers along the border, in breach of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. Clearly, Egypt has played a key role in all these Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. The prominent Egyptian role is a result of three considerations: First, in view of the forthcoming presidential elections (September 2005), it was a partial response to local voices criticizing Mubarak for his intention to run, unopposed, for a fifth term. Second, it reflected a desire to play a leading Arab role, one that dovetails with its self-perception. And, finally, it aims at demonstrating to the United States that it is the most reliable Arab ally. On the last two

levels Saudi Arabia stands as Egypt's most significant competitor. Thus, in general, the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian track saw considerable progress since the end of the Iraq war was more connected to its own dynamics than a result of the repercussions of the war.

Arab Reforms

Voices calling for reforming the structure and charter of the Arab League as well as defining a new meaning to Arab solidarity were frequently heard in the pre-war period. In fact, ideas to reform the institutions and operating mechanisms of the League were raised since the 1950s, but various rulers and elites persistently blocked these ideas, which were considered to encroach upon their sovereignty.⁶⁵ The failure of the League to play a meaningful role in the 1990-91 Iraqi-Kuwaiti crisis highlighted its weakness and impotence. Upon being elected chairman in March 2001, Amru Musa offered some new ideas to reform the League.⁶⁶ Later, in January 2003, Crown Prince Abdallah came out with a new initiative called "Charter to Reform the Arab Stand."⁶⁷ Added to the Qatari, Libyan, and Sudanese initiatives published earlier,⁶⁸ these initiatives were to be discussed at the next summit. However, the war led to a change of venue and agenda.

It was only natural that a lively dialogue regarding the future of the Arab League and Arab politics commenced as soon as the situation in Iraq stabilized. Three schools of thought emerged: One called for dissolving the Arab League and forming an alternative institution, more equipped to deal with reality. Some even thought of replacing the League with a Middle Eastern regional organization. The second called for reforming the League and its charter. The third associated its problems with the personality of its chairman, thereby implying that his

replacement would remove a major obstacle.⁶⁹

There was correlation between the ideas raised in the initiatives presented before the war and the dialogue held in its aftermath. One theme was the idea to abolish the system of *ijma'*, in which a binding resolution is one that is accepted unanimously, replacing it with a simple majority (or two-thirds) decision. Another theme was to allow non-governmental organizations to take part in the League's activity or to allow non-Arab regional states to obtain the status of observer. Other themes were reminiscent of the European union: establishing (or rather reviving) the Arab Common Market, laying the foundations for economic integration; establishing an Arab parliament; forming an Arab deterrence force or an Arab defense council aimed at safeguarding Arab national security; and setting up an Arab court of justice.⁷⁰

At the peak of this dialogue, and in attempt to capitalize on it, Egypt came up with its own initiative. An article by the editor of *al-Ahram* and a close confidant of President Mubarak foreshadowed the Egyptian campaign. The article rejected the notion that Iraq's occupation demolished the Arab League, which was synonymous with the term "the House of the Arabs" (*bait al-'Arab*). It argued that it was necessary to revive the joint Arab action- a development dependent on the continuation of Egypt's leading role (*al-dawr al-qiadi*) in the Arab system. The first step was to clear Arab atmosphere.⁷¹ The fact that this was a preparatory article in a well-orchestrated campaign soon became evident, as two days later, on July 26, Mubarak revealed the initiative while speaking at Alexandria University during the annual celebration of

King Faruq's abdication.⁷² The next day the full text of the initiative was published.⁷³ The fact that Egypt put its prestige behind a plan for Arab reform ensured that other Arab states would consider it seriously. It was expected that all these ideas would be formally discussed during the next Arab summit in Tunis.

Yet, the idea of reforming the League was soon interwoven with other ideas circulating in the post-war period about reforming Arab regimes through democratization and the emancipation of civil society. The dialogue on the necessity to introduce domestic reforms stemmed from a realization that the weakness of the League essentially reflected the weakness of the Arab regimes and their lack of legitimacy. Therefore, it was argued, it was necessary first to tackle the roots of the problem.⁷⁴

More significant, however, was the impact of Bush's ideas to spread democratic values in the "Broader Middle East," first spelled out on February 2003, on the eve of U.S. invasion to Iraq. The U.S. plan was received with little enthusiasm in the Arab world. It was viewed as another expression of imperialism and too broad geographically while failing to recognize the particularities of the various states in the area.⁷⁵ In the post-war period, when and where Iraq actually became a testing ground for U.S. ideas about democracy, time seemed ripe for revising and re-launching the plan. Indeed, the G-8 countries prepared a draft plan, which was leaked to the Arab press in February 2004. Limiting the area to the Greater Middle East (the Arab world, Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, and Israel), and attaching an equal role to the local actors, the new "partnership" focused on three goals: promoting democracy and good governance; building a knowledge society;

and expanding economic opportunities.⁷⁶

The leaked draft was received with resentment in the Arab world, as another sign of Western imperialism. However, it did provoke a lively dialogue concerning the need for internal reforms. An indication of the new "reformist" discourse was the convening of two conferences with governmental and non-governmental agencies. The first was held in Yemen in January 2004, and another was held in Egypt in March 2004. Both dealt with democracy, civil rights, and other reforms.⁷⁷ In practice, Arab rulers adopted a "middle-of-the-road position," claiming that reforms and democratization should gradually emerge from within the system and not be imposed by outside powers.⁷⁸ This nuanced position allowed them to attack the paternalistic way in which Bush's plan was introduced, while not entirely rejecting some of its ingredients.

Intensive Arab consultations were held prior to the Tunis summit in an attempt to reach a formula responding to Western pressure, while coinciding with the various interests of the Arab states. However, the inability to find a common formula led to the postponement of the summit from March to May.⁷⁹

Eventually, to reach an Arab consensus, the Tunis declaration was formulated in a more diluted version than the views articulated during the preparatory meetings. Also, the distinction between structural reforms of the joint Arab world and of individual Arab regimes was blurred. The declaration expressed willingness to revise the League's Charter on the basis of existing Arab initiatives and commitment to the values of human rights. It also pledged to carry out domestic reforms such as expanding political participation, increasing the role of civil society, widening the role of women in

all spheres, promoting educational reforms, and enhancing research. The declaration also called for greater Arab economic cooperation.⁸⁰ Most of these points were reiterated in the Algiers Arab summit of March 2005.⁸¹

Arab politicians stressed what they saw as the positive aspects of the declaration, which heralded the beginning of a new era of changes and reforms.⁸² Observers and intellectuals tended to see the summit as yet another failure, producing much rhetoric but little substance.⁸³ Others thought the summit's success or failure would depend on the implementation of its resolutions.⁸⁴ But perhaps Shafeeq Ghabra, President of the American University in Kuwait, expressed the most sober view, arguing that "the Arab world finds itself at a potentially historic turning point confronted by confusion." In his opinion, the Arab world is living a pre-democratic moment, which "may produce the momentum needed to push the region toward change."⁸⁵ Likewise, Fareed Zakaria assessed that "the wind is behind those who advocate free-market, modern, Western-style reforms."⁸⁶

The Tunis Declaration was meant to facilitate Arab participation in the G-8 meeting, which was intended to also discuss the Greater Middle East partnership program. However, the major Arab leaders, such as Mubarak and Crown Prince Abdallah, decided not attend, though their participation was initially expected. Mubarak may have excused himself because he was expecting a more binding declaration or because he feared being exposed to further Western pressure. But according to the official version, his absence was related to Egypt's refusal to "dilute" the Arab identity within the Greater Middle East project.⁸⁷ This was reminiscent of Egypt's opposition to the

Israeli New Middle East concept, which was perceived to consolidate Israeli regional hegemony, erode Egypt's leading role, and dismantle the Arab system.⁸⁸

In spite of the disappointing Arab attendance, the G-8 countries issued an impressive document, which embraced some of the major criticism leveled against previous drafts. Thus, it was emphasized that the partnership would be based on genuine cooperation with the regions governments, as well as civil society elements and that successful reforms depended on the regional countries and should not be imposed from the outside. It was emphasized, however, that regional conflicts (referring particularly to the Israeli-Palestinian case) "must not be an obstacle for reforms." The statement also welcomed the Arab summit's declaration, "in which Arab leaders expressed their determination to firmly establish the basis for democracy."⁸⁹ In this way, the G-8 countries attempted to bind the Arab countries more strongly to their commitment to reform, a commitment that had only been vaguely expressed at the 2004 summit in Tunis.

Another manifestation of the reformist discourse prevailing in the Arab world was the convening in December 2004 of the Forum for the Future which took place in Morocco. Foreign and finance ministers from about twenty countries in the Middle East and North Africa, as well as representatives of the G-8 countries attended. Beyond the reformist rhetoric, the participants pledged to create a regional private enterprise development fund, a Democracy Assistance Dialogue, and a Micro-Finance Training Center in Jordan.⁹⁰

Changes, however, were not limited to discourse, rhetoric, and conferences; there were also changes at the institutional level. A cursory survey of the Arab political scene in

2005 shows that Saudi Arabia held municipal elections in February;⁹¹ a referendum in Egypt in May led to a change in the constitution, allowing independent candidates to run for the presidency (scheduled for September);⁹² and also in May the first free elections since Syria's withdrawal were held in Lebanon. All these developments, added to other liberal measures already taken in Morocco, Oman, Bahrain, and Jordan, led Saad Eddin Ibrahim to speculate that this trend was irreversible: "Too many people in too many places...are defying their oppressors and taking risks for freedom. Across the region the shouts of 'Kifaya!' - 'Enough!' have become a rallying cry against dictators."⁹³ And while the possibility that Arab rulers have invented a "theater of democratization" based on cosmetic reforms should not be dismissed, Amr Hamzawy was also of the opinion that "the Arab world is changing, and in a very profound way." In his view, "a crack has emerged in the authoritarian pattern of the state-society relationship, and there is no way of reversing its dynamics."⁹⁴

CONCLUSIONS

"The Arab system has often been pronounced dead and this time it may be indeed true," wrote Patrick Seale soon after the end of the Iraq war.⁹⁵ For Seale, an Arab system meant "a reasonably stable regional order, seemingly dedicated to Arab interests, managed by sovereign Arab states, accepted by many of its citizens and able to keep external enemies at bay, if not defeat them."⁹⁶ The theoretical literature on regional subsystems, however, suggests other definitions. Louis Cantori and Steven Spiegel, for example, defined it as "proximate and interacting states which have some

common ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, and historical bonds, and whose sense of identity is sometimes increased by the actions and attitudes of states external to the system." W. R. Thompson added two distinctive attributes: that the actors' pattern of interactions exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity to the extent that a change at one point in the subsystem affects other points; and that internal and external actors recognize the subsystem as a distinctive "theater of operations."⁹⁷

On the basis of these characteristics it can be fairly assessed that an Arab system-- though fragmented and divided-- is still operating. In the pre- and post-war periods, the Arab system was under a facade of solidarity, largely paralyzed as a result of divisions among its members. Though it has not recuperated as yet from the Iraqi ordeal, the system remained intact, achieving certain regularity in its interactions through summits and other traditional channels of communication. The fact that the Arab system did not initially reach a consensus concerning the war, and that this consensus, when reached, concealed deep divisions, does not *ipso facto* mean the destruction of the system. It still may be recognized as such during periods of conflicts, and not only during periods of cooperation.

In light of this political fragmentation, Arab identity has been reflected mainly in the cultural domain. This phenomenon became even more salient with the expansion of the use of Arab communications-- TV satellite channels (such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-'Arabiyya*), press (such as *al-Hayat* and *al-Shraq al-Awsat*), and Internet-- among growing numbers of literate Arabs. Though this communication revolution has not yet brought about political changes, it has contributed to the emergence of an undefined

feeling of Arab togetherness.⁹⁸ The Iraqi occupation, just like the 1990-91 crisis, invigorated-- if temporarily-- the political Arab identity as well, deepening the existing gulf between "we" (the Arabs) and "them" (the West).⁹⁹ The U.S. expedition to Mesopotamia, as Fouad Ajami called it,¹⁰⁰ resulted in conquering Iraq, demolishing its regime, and instituting another-- acts reminiscent of twentieth century Western imperialism. Unable to stand to this challenge, Arab leaders and societies once more felt humiliated by their subjugation. Though most detested Saddam Hussein, Arabs sympathized in general with the Iraqi people (as well as with the Palestinians), thus creating a common ground based on a shared Arab identity. Moreover, the growing regional role of Turkey and Iran, as reflected during the war and its aftermath, and the strengthening of the Israeli-Turkish alliance, posed additional threats to the separate Arab identity. Once more, acts of external powers increased the self-awareness of the system's members. In such a way, the political repercussions of the war coincided with the cultural developments of the 1990s.

The Iraq war accelerated certain processes and initiated some changes in the Arab system. Though far from transformation at present, the war may, in the long run, prove to be a turning point in the annals of the Arab system should these processes and changes deepen. The first issue concerns the unclear fate of Iraq. For almost two decades Iraq has played a marginal role in Arab politics, as a result of the Iran-Iraq war and the sanctions imposed on it since 1991. The current U.S. attempts at building a new Iraq ensure its continued marginality in the near future. Moreover, it is possible that a new Shi'i-controlled Iraq may be less motivated in playing a pivotal role in the Arab system than

the previous Sunni regime, which was keen to compensate for its narrow domestic base by defining itself as leader of a largely Sunni Arab region. In any case, a disarmed Iraq-- which had been involved in several wars in the Gulf and the Arab-Israeli arena-- would be a different player in the Arab system. In the long run, however, taking into account its geographical, economic, and demographic capabilities, Iraq may return to play a powerful role in the Arab system, challenging both Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Its large oil supplies, for example, could be used to challenge Saudi Arabia's domination of the market. A democratic regime in Iraq may also lead to domestic pressures on other Arab states to adopt more liberal measures. On the other hand, continuation of instability-- and even the prospects of anarchy-- may spill over to neighboring states and adversely affect the whole region.¹⁰¹

In terms of Arab political dynamics, there were no major changes in the Arab coalitions, except for a temporary alliance of Syria with Iraq during the war, largely as a result of domestic reasons. The change of regime in Iraq and the Arab and Western pressure on Syria, as well as its deteriorating economic situation due to the closure of the Iraqi market, put pressure on Asad. But his enforced withdrawal from Lebanon-- a move precipitated by the war-- undoubtedly inflicted a serious blow to what seems a tottering regime. All the same, Egypt and Saudi Arabia remained the leading states of the system, with Egypt playing a more prominent role in this crisis. Perhaps Saudi domestic problems and its military inferiority led it to play second fiddle. A major change occurred with regard to Libya's place in the system, as the country disengaged itself from the Arab radical camp. Yet, it seems that the

roots of this change predate the war, which only accelerated this process.

In Arab public opinion, the Iraqi and Israeli-Palestinian tracks are closely connected since both are considered territories under foreign occupation that should be liberated.¹⁰² In reality, however, the link is less pronounced. Though the intifada ended in the aftermath of the war, this development was more related to domestic Palestinian affairs (the death of Arafat) and to certain other processes within the Israeli and Palestinian societies than to the Iraq war.

The war was instrumental in intensifying the calls for reforming the Arab League and democratizing Arab regimes. What made these calls more serious than before was the extent of the Arab dialogue, as well as the fact that two leading Arab states-- Egypt and Saudi Arabia-- came with initiatives of their own.¹⁰³ If that dialogue and these initiatives are a true indication of social undercurrents then the atmosphere in the Arab world seems ripe for change.¹⁰⁴ Clearly, however, the Western pressure in the wake of the Iraq war contributed to that dialogue. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that some of the ideas are based on the EU model. Whether these changes would actually be implemented is largely dependent on three factors: the degree of desire and commitment of Arab leaders; the level of pressure coming from Arab society; and the level of pressure exerted by the international community. All these dimensions existed in the post-Iraqi crisis period but their affect has so far been partial. Unless Arab regimes feel more secure and legitimate, the chances of transferring some responsibilities from the state to the Arab League, thus transforming it into a powerful regional organization, are slim.

The Arab League has been under attack

since its foundation in 1945. Yet, while celebrating its sixtieth anniversary this year, scholars, instead of announcing its demise time and again, should consider what has made the League so durable in spite of the many setbacks it has suffered. The Iraqi crisis gave a partial answer: states and leaders are still unwilling to relinquish their pan-Arab identity, which is reflected in this institution. Moreover, any foreign interference or steps perceived as attempts to replace the existing Arab order-- such as the Greater Middle East project-- are bound to reinvigorate the calls for retaining-- and even reforming-- the existing order. The Iraqi crisis demonstrated that in spite of the many malfunctions of the Arab system, news of its demise was premature. In addition, as long as Egypt sees itself as the most important Arab actor and the League as an important tool in promoting that role, it would invest efforts, as it did in the recent crisis, to preserve that system and that institution. Fear of losing its special position in a broader system is the main imperative for this Egyptian behavior.

Arab discourse often blurs the distinction between reforms for democratization and reforms of the Arab political order (mainly associated with the activity of the Arab League, but also relevant to economic, legal, and cultural issues). But a distinction has to be made since the introduction of domestic democratic reforms, taken within the jurisdiction and territory of a certain regime, may be easier to implement than reforms on the collective Arab level. So far, most of the reforms of the individual Arab states were taken at the periphery of the Arab world. The populations seem to long for such reforms, but autocrat rulers at the core of the Arab system are tenaciously holding onto power. In Saad Eddin Ibrahim's opinion, the Middle East may catch the third wave of democracy,

but whether it would be "a spring wind or a sandstorm" depends on how the regimes accommodate the Islamists.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, reforms should primarily emanate from an Arab conviction of necessity and not from submission to external pressures. Otherwise, they would resemble the *tanzimat* of the Ottoman Empire. While the Arab states-- unlike the empire-- would not collapse, they would surely suffer from political and economic stagnation. In such a scenario, the impotence that characterized the Arab system during the last decade-- vividly demonstrated in the Iraqi crisis-- would continue. In conclusion, the Arab world stands at a crossroads between stagnation and renovation. Unless *Bait al-'Arab* or *al-Bait al-'Arabi* undergoes serious renovation, its tenants will continue living in a wrecked house.¹⁰⁶ But the fact that Arab leaders and intellectuals recognize the need for reforms may tell us that the renovation has already commenced.

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NOTES

¹ Edward Said, "The Condition of the Arabs," *al-Hayat*, May 26, 2003. The term *hamla* may be translated as a campaign, attack, occupation, and control. For an analysis of the debate surrounding the French *hamla*, see Shimon Shamir, "Light and Fire: The Debate in Egypt over the Historical Meaning of Bonaparte's Invasion," *Alpayim*, No. 20 (2000), pp. 9-35. [Hebrew]

² Patrick Seale, *Daily Star*, October 6, 2003.

³ Amr Hamzawy, "Understanding Arab Political Reality: One Lens Is Not Enough," Carnegie Endowment Policy Outlook, March 2005, p. 1.

⁴ Shibley Telhami, *NPR.org*, March 14, 2005 (www.brookings.edu/views/op-ed/telhami/20050314.htm)

⁵ For several studies that attempted to analyze the episode shortly after, see Shai Feldman (ed.), *After the War in Iraq: Defining the New Strategic Balance* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003); and several articles in *Shu'un 'Arabiyya*, No. 115 (Winter 2003); *Shu'un al-Awsat*, No. 111 (Summer 2003); and *al-Siyassa al-Dawliya*, No. 152 (April 2003). See also various articles in *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi* for the years 2003-5.

⁶ On the Arab summit, see Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Inter-Arab relations," *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)*, Vol. 20, 1996 (Boulder: Westview, 1998), pp. 69-80.

⁷ Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Inter-Arab Relations," *MECS*, Vol. 24, 2000 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2002), p. 70.

⁸ The agreement (UNSC Resolution 986) allowed Iraq to export oil for food and medical equipment in the sum of \$2 billion per half a year. In 2000, the sum increased to \$5.2 billion. For an excellent overview of this program and its beneficiaries, see "Oil for Food: Impact on Iraq and Its Main Arab

Trading Partners," www.escwa.org (no date provided). According to this report, during the years 2000-2002 Egypt was the top Arab trade partner with Iraq and the third largest trade partner with Iraq after France and Russia. For Jordan, Iraq is the most important export market for Jordanian goods, as Iraq accounted for 19 percent of Jordan's total exports in 2002. Similarly, Syria and Lebanon increased substantially their trade with Iraq during the years 1997-2002.

⁹ *MECS*, 2000, pp. 64-65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-83.

¹¹ On the Saudi plan, see Elie Podeh, *From Fahd to 'Abdallah: The Origins of the Saudi Peace Initiatives and Their Impact on the Arab System and Israel*, Gitelson Peace Publication No. 24 (Jerusalem: The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 2003).

¹² This was followed by the Aqaba meeting, which included Bush, Prime Minister Sharon, King Abdallah, and Abu Mazen.

¹³ Eyal Zisser, *Assad's Syria at a Crossroads* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuhad, 1999), pp. 89-110 [Hebrew]. Though Syrian-Iraqi relations improved mainly after Hafiz al-Asad's death in June 2000, the two countries signed, already in 1998, an agreement to repair an oil pipeline that has the capacity of 1.4 million barrels per day, which connects Kirkuk with Banias and which was not in use since 1982. Syrian-Iraqi trade between 1997-2003 is estimated around \$5 billion. See "Oil for Food: Impact on Iraq and Its Main Arab Trading Partners," www.escwa.org p. 6.

¹⁴ On Syria in the Arab system following Hafiz al-Asad's death, see *MECS*, 2000, pp. 56-59.

¹⁵ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 15 and 26, 2003; *Ha'aretz*, January 30, 2003

¹⁶ *Ha'aretz*, February 10, 2003; *New York Times*, February 21, 2003.

¹⁷ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 17-20, 2003; *Ha'aretz*, February 20-21 and 23, 2003.

¹⁸ Ibrahim Nafi', *al-Ahram*, February 28, 2003.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; *Al-Hayat*, February 28, 2003, March 1, 2003.

²⁰ See, i.e., Ibrahim Nafi', *al-Ahram*, February 28, 2003; Karim Bakraduni, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 1, 2003; Fahd Diab, *al-Thawra*, March 1, 2003.

²¹ For the text of the resolutions, see *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 2, 2003.

²² For details on the summit, see *al-Hayat*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *al-Ahram*, *Okaz*, *al-Thawra* (Syria), *Ha'aretz*, March 2-3, 2003.

For more details of the UAE initiative, see Tzvi Bar'el, *Ha'aretz*, March 4, 2003.

²³ For details, see www.itp.net/new; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 13, 2003.

²⁴ For some details on these initiatives, see Amir Taheri, *Jerusalem Post*, February 7, 2003.

²⁵ Da'ud al-Sharian called it the "failed summit," see *al-Hayat*, March 2, 2003. Nabil 'Abd al-Fattah called it "the summit of Arab impotence," see *al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, March 15, 2003. See also Ahmad al-Ruba'i in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 2-3, 2003; Mustafa al-Fiqi in *Ha'aretz*, March 2, 2003; Ashraf al-'Ashari and Suzi al-Jnidi, *al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, March 8, 2003.

²⁶ Fawaz Gerges, "Rudderless in the Storm: Arab Politics before and After the Iraq War," *Dissent* (Winter 2004), see www.dissentmagazine.org/menutest/articles/wi04/gerges.htm, p 2.

²⁷ Ashraf al-'Asari, *al-Ahram al-'Arabi*, March 8, 2003.

²⁸ On the ISO conference and its resolutions, see *al-Ahram*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *al-Hayat*, March 6, 2003.

²⁹ Headline: "Egypt Says No to War... Yes to Peace," *al-Ahram*, March 6, 2003.

³⁰ *Al-Thawra*, March 8, 2003.

³¹ *Ibid.*, March 10, 2003.

³² For the text of the statement, see *al-Hayat*, March 25, 2003.

³³ *Al-Hayat*, March 25-26, 2003.

³⁴ See a well-publicized interview of Asad with the Lebanese daily *al-Safir*, in *al-Thawra*, March 28, 2003.

³⁵ *Al-Ahram*, March 28, 2003; compare with *Ha'aretz*, March 23, 2003.

³⁶ For reports on massive demonstrations, see most of the Arab newspapers during April 2-5, 2003. See, in particular *al-Hayat* during these days. Egyptian demonstrators, for example, demanded the closure of the Suez Canal - which was used by U.S. marine forces.

³⁷ See *al-Thawra* during these days, which made a connection between the current imperialist attack on Iraq and previous Syrian and Arab struggles.

³⁸ The Kuwaiti *al-Qabas*' headline was "Iraq [Is] Free," April 10, 2003.

³⁹ See, i.e., *al-Ahram*, *al-Hayat*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, *Okaz*, April 10-11, 2003.

⁴⁰ *Al-Hayat*, April 11, 15, 17, 2003; *Ha'aretz*, April 15, 2003; *al-Ahram*, April 15, 2003.

⁴¹ On the deterioration of US-Syrian relations, see Nathan Gutman, *Ha'aretz*, April 14, 2003; *al-Hayat*, *al-Qabas*, April 21, 2003.

⁴² *Al-Hayat*, *al-Qabas*, *al-Ahram*, April 19, 2003. The editor of *al-Ahram* succinctly summarized the Arab position in the title of his column: [the US:] "Get Out of Iraq and Take Off Your Hands of Syria." See Ibrahim Nafi', *al-Ahram*, April 25, 2003.

⁴³ On Mubarak's tour, see *al-Ahram*, April 21-25, 2003; *al-Hayat*, April 22, 2003.

⁴⁴ A cynical title of an article by Jamil Matar captured the problem: "Guy Garner [the US-nominated ruler in Iraq]... in the Arab summit." See *al-Hayat*, April 23, 2003.

⁴⁵ The decision to re-admit Iraq was not an easy one. Initially, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and other states reportedly objected to the admission of the current Iraqi regime. It was reported that the U.S. exerted pressure on member states to admit Iraq. See *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 28, 2003; September 3, 6, 9, 2003; *al-Jazeera*, September 9, 2003.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., the meetings in Sharm al-Shaikh on November 22-23, 2004, see *Ha'aretz*, November 22, 2004.

⁴⁷ For the text, see <http://www.albawaba.com/news>, May 24, 2004.

⁴⁸ *Al-Hayat*, March 25, 2005. See also the Arab cold attitude toward Iraq during the deliberations of the Arab foreign ministers in September 2004, www.weekly.aharam.org.eg/print/2004/708/re7.htm

⁴⁹ On Iraqi elections, see Ibrahim al-Marashi, "Boycotts, Coalitions and the Threat of Violence: The Run-Up to the January 2005, Iraqi Elections," *The Middle East Review of International Affairs* (January 2005); "Iraqi Vote Mirrors Desire for Democracy in Muslim World," The Pew Research Center, February 3, 2005, www.people-press.org/commentary/display.php3?AnalysisID=107

⁵⁰ For the text of the bill, see <http://www.theorator.com/bills108>, May 1, 2003.

⁵¹ For more details on Syrian-Iraqi economic relations, see "Oil for Food: Impact on Iraq

and Its Main Arab Trading Partners," <http://www.escwa.org>, no date. See also Tzvi Barel, *Ha'aretz*, December 10, 2003.

⁵² *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 5, 2003.

⁵³ On December 1, 2004, Asad gave an interview to the *New York Times*; these views were also transmitted to U.S. Senator, Bill Nelson, who delivered them to Israel. See *Ha'aretz*, January 11-13, 18, 2004. See also his interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 19, 2004. See also Eyal Zisser, "What's Behind Bashar al-Asad's Peace Offensive," *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 95, January 11, 2004.

⁵⁴ On the visit to Turkey, see *Ha'aretz*, January 14, 2004; Asad's interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 19, 2004.

⁵⁵ On a certain document that was signed with Saudi Arabia and Egypt, see *al-Jazeera*, *al-Hayat*, January 18-20, 2004; *al-Watan*, January 20, 2004.

⁵⁶ For information on the Lebanese events and the Syrian decision, see in general the Lebanese press for February-April 2005. For early calls in Lebanon for Syrian evacuation, see William W. Harris, "Lebanon," *MECS*, Vol. 24, 2000 (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2002), pp. 382-83.

⁵⁷ *Ha'aretz*, December 21, 24, 2003; Yehudit Ronen, "Qadhafi's Christmas Gift: What's Behind Libya's Decision to Renounce WMD?" *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 93, December 24, 2003. On Qadhafi's position in the past, see Yehudit Ronen, "Libya's Qadhafi and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1969-2002," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40 (2004), pp. 85-98.

⁵⁸ For the text of the plan, see *New York Times*, *Ha'aretz*, *al-Hayat*, May 1, 2003.

⁵⁹ *Al-Ahram*, *al-Hayat*, *Ha'aretz*, *New York Times*, June 3-4, 2003.

⁶⁰ *Al-Ahram*, June 8, 2003. See also reports on a Mubarak-Asad meeting on July 7, 2003, *al-Hayat*, July 8, 2003. On meeting with Saudi officials, see *al-Hayat*, July 21, 2003; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 7, 10, 2003.

⁶¹ On this initiative, see *Ha'aretz*, January 25, 2004; *al-Hayat*, March 2, 28, 2004.

⁶² For the text, see <http://albawaba.com>, March 24, 2004. The Tunis Arab summit of May 2004 followed the same position.

⁶³ Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, "Patrons, Clients and Shepherds: The Sharm al-Shaykh Summit," *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 124, February 13, 2005; *Ha'aretz*, February 9, 2005.

⁶⁴ Meir Litvak, "The Palestinian Cairo Agreements: Between Lull and Truce," *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 130, March 27, 2005.

⁶⁵ For some of the previous attempts to reform the League, see Ahmad Yusuf Ahmad, "Islah Jami'at al-Duwwal al-'Arabiyya: al-Mutaghayyirat al-'Arabiyya," *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi*, No. 301 (March 2004), pp. 42-65.

⁶⁶ Hasan Abu Talib, "Islah al-Jami'a...Mu'dilat Iltizam al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya," *al-Siyassa al-Dawliya*, No. 153 (July 2003), p. 99.

⁶⁷ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 13, 2003; www.itp.net/news

⁶⁸ Amir Taheri, *Jerusalem Post*, February 7, 2003.

⁶⁹ For some of the interesting contributions, see: Musa's interview, *al-Jazeera*, May 11, 2003; Sameh Rashed, Faysal 'Allush, *al-Hayat*, May 16, 2003; Edward Said, *al-Hayat*, May 26, 2003; Patrick Seale, *al-Hayat*, May 30, 2003; Muna Makram Ubeyd, *al-Hayat*, June 18, 2003; Muhammad al-Ramihi, *al-Hayat*, June 25, 2003; Jamil Matar, *al-Hayat*, July 1, 2003; Patrick Seale, *al-Hayat*, July 4, 2003; Ibrahim Nafi', *al-Ahram*, July 25, 2003; Editorial, *al-Ahram*,

July 30, 2003; Ahmad Hamrush, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, September 15, 2003; Ahmad al-Ruba'i, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 17, 2003; Ahmad Jabir, *al-Hayat*, April 14, 2004.

⁷⁰ In addition to the sources mentioned in previous note, see Abu Talib, "Islah al-Jami'a," pp. 102-3. The idea of setting up an Arab justice court had been raised for the first time in 1964, see Ahmad, "al-Mutaghayyirat al-'Arabiyya," p. 44. Also, an Arab Common Market was established in 1964 but never implemented.

⁷¹ Ibrahim Nafi', "Nahwa Ru'ya Mutakamilla li-Tatwir al-'Amal al-'Arabi al-Mushtarak," *al-Ahram*, July 25, 2003.

⁷² For the text of the speech, see *al-Ahram*, July 27, 2003.

⁷³ *Al-Ahram*, July 28, 2003. See also editorial, *ibid.*, July 30, 2003.

⁷⁴ See, i.e., Abu Talib, "Islah al-Jami'a," p. 98.

⁷⁵ For some of the criticism, see Gilbert Achcar, "Greater Middle East: The US Plan," *Le Monde Diplomatique* (April 2004), <http://mondediplo.com/2004/04/04world>

⁷⁶ The text of a "working paper," circulated by the U.S. in preparation for the G-8 summit scheduled for June 2004, was published in English and Arabic by *al-Hayat*, February 13, 2004. This and the following section is primarily based on Jeremy M. Sharp, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: An Overview," *Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report for Congress*, February 15, 2005. For a critical view of the U.S. role, see Thomas Carothers, "A Better Way to Support Middle East Reform," *Policy Brief 33* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment, 2005).

⁷⁷ The first, the conference on "Democracy, Human Rights and the Role of International Criminal Court," was held in Sana'a; the

second, entitled "Arab Reform Issues: Vision and Implementation," was held in Alexandria. For the resolutions, see *CRS Report*, p. 4; *al-Ahram Weekly*, No. 683, March 25-31, 2004. The Egyptian sociologist Saad Eddin Ibrahim called the Alexandria Declaration "a sort of Arab Magna Carta." See "The Sick Man of the World," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2004. See also the importance attached to it in *Arab Human Development Report 2004* (New York: UN Development Program, 2005).

⁷⁸ Mubarak expressed a typical attitude, see *al-Hayat*, March 2, 2004.

⁷⁹ For some sources that shed light on these talks, see *al-Hayat*, March 2-3, 27-28, 2004, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 29, 2004.

⁸⁰ See the text of the Tunis Declaration.

⁸¹ *Al-Hayat*, March 24, 2005.

⁸² See the positive note of Musa, *al-Ahram*, May 26, 2004; and the Saudi response, *al-Hayat*, May 25, 2004.

⁸³ See, i.e., Ghassan Charbel, *al-Hayat*, May 21, 2004; Barry Rubin, *Jerusalem Post*, May 23, 2004; Marwan Bishara, *International Herald Tribune*, May 24, 2004; Editorial, *Ha'aretz*, May 25, 2004; Salama Naamat, *al-Hayat*, May 27, 2004.

⁸⁴ See, i.e., Jihad al-Khazen, *al-Hayat*, May 25, 2004.

⁸⁵ *The Daily Star*, 26 May 2004.

⁸⁶ *Newsweek*, May 27, 2004.

⁸⁷ See Egypt Foreign Minister's statements, *al-Hayat*, May 25, 2004;

<http://www.alarabonline.org> May 27, 2004.

⁸⁸ See, for example, Muna Makram Ubayd, *al-Hayat*, March 29, 2004.

⁸⁹ For the text, see "Partnership for Progress and a Common Future with the Region of the Broader Middle East and North Africa, June 9, 2004,

http://www.g8usa.gov/d_060904c.htm

⁹⁰ *CRS Report*, p. 5.

⁹¹ See in this connection, Joshua Teitelbaum, "Between the International Hammer and the Local Anvil: Municipal Elections in Saudi Arabia," *Tel Aviv Notes*, No. 129, March 15, 2005.

⁹² *Ha'aretz*, May 27, 2005.

⁹³ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Islam Can Vote, If We Let It," *New York Times*, May 21, 2005.

⁹⁴ Hamzawy, "Understanding Arab Political Reality," p. 1.

⁹⁵ *The Daily Star*, October 6, 2003. For a development of this same view, see Asher Susser, "The Decline of the Arabs," *Middle East Quarterly*, Vol. 10 (2003), pp. 3-16. For an opposite view, see Muna Makram Ubayd, *al-Hayat*, March 29, 2004.

⁹⁶ Seale, *The Daily Star*, October 6, 2003.

⁹⁷ For the full sources and other references to literature on the Arab system, see Elie Podeh, "The Emergence of the Arab State System Reconsidered," *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol. 9 (1998), p. 51.

⁹⁸ See the various articles in a special issue on Arab media and reform, *Arab Reform Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 11 (December 2004).

⁹⁹ On the impact of the Kuwaiti-Iraqi crisis, see As'ad AbuKhalil, "A New Arab Ideology? The Rejuvenation of Arab Nationalism," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 46 (1992), pp. 22-36.

¹⁰⁰ "Iraq and the Arabs' Future," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (2003), p. 2.

¹⁰¹ For possible scenarios, see Ephraim Kam, "The War in Iraq: Regional Implications," in *After the War in Iraq*, pp. 101-114.

¹⁰² For a comparison between the two cases, see Patrick Seale, "Should the Arabs Fight American Imperialism?" *al-Hayat*, May 30, 2003.

¹⁰³ For a similar view, see Muhammad Sa'ad Abu 'Amud, "Nahwa Istrategiyya Gadida lil-'Amal al-'Arabi al-Mushtaraq," *Shu'un 'Arabiyya*, No. 115 (Winter 2003), p. 55.

¹⁰⁴ For a similar view, see Ahmad al-Ruba'i, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 17, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *New York Times*, May 21, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ This analogy is based on Ahmad al-Ruba'i, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, March 2, 2003.