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Regional Institutions State Withering  
Or consolidation  
The case of Arab Summits

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Regional Institutions state withering or Consolidation.  
The Case of the Arab Summits.

I. Arab Summits: Statism or Regionalism?

There is no doubt that regional institutions play an important role in triggering off integrative potentialities. However it may be useful to draw a distinction between two different cases; on one hand regional intergration would be enhanced if there were functions which require regional institutions to be commissioned to do them.

This also needs a political will which motivate state members to behave according to regional standards and not parochial interests. In this case one would argue that such institutions would be a step toward the weakening of the state's role and toward the strengthening of regionalism.

On the other hand, regional institutions may be established and then followed by attempts to design certain functions for them to do. Such institutions would be under state's control and their resolutions, not binding anyhow would't lead to more integrative processes. Not with standing such a theoretical debate, three different explanations may be looked at in understanding the emergence of Arab Summits as a regional institution.

FIRST: External threats as motivations for Arab leaders to decide how to confront them. This is related to what is known in national security studies as threat perception.

According to this explanation state power was to be consolidated.

SECOND: Leading role from the central regional power i.e, Egypt. The central regional power is the state which control the initiative to strengthen centripetal forces and minimize the role of centrifugal forces. It is a state which emphasizes the identity of the region and leads it toward national consensus.

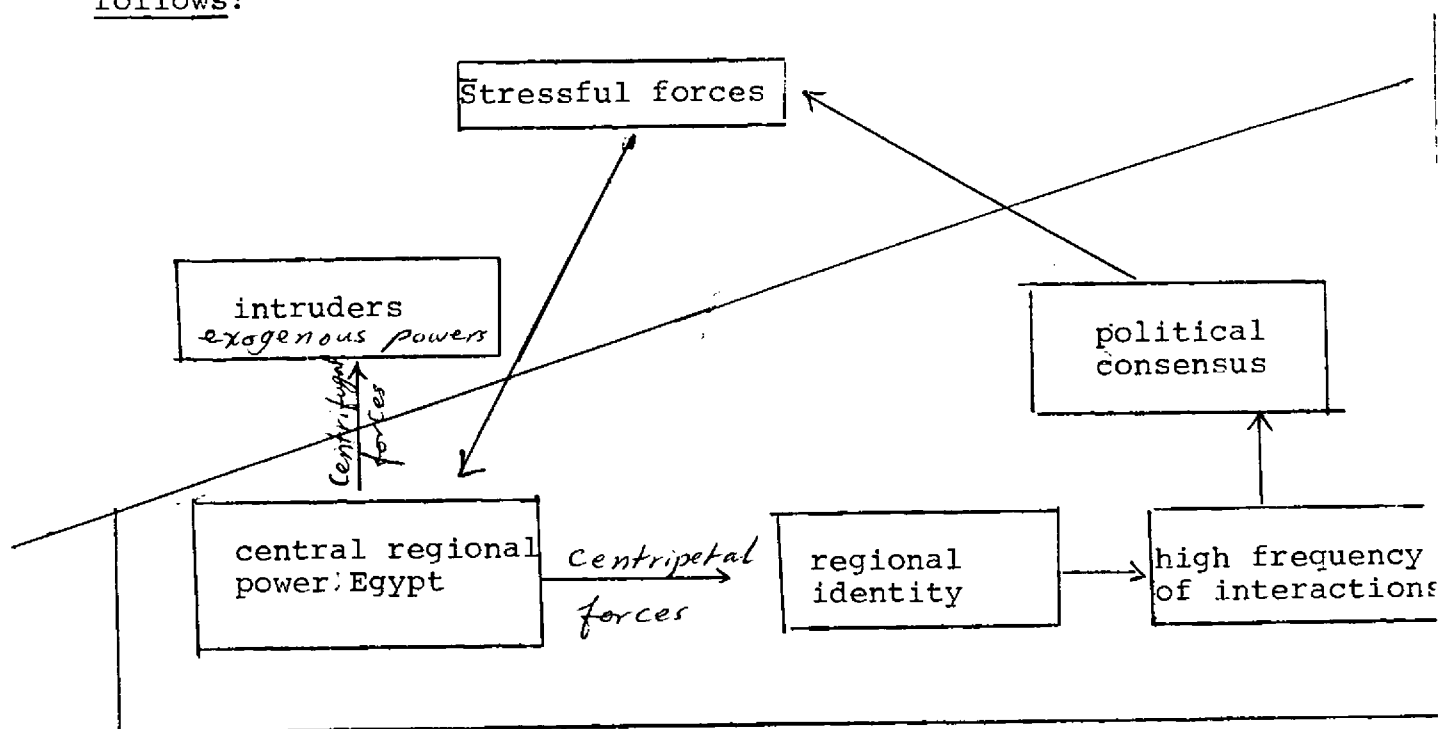
In this case Arab Summits would diminish state power and lead to a sense of regionalism.

THIRD: Internal legitimacy in the transition from post-colonial stage to independence. i.e from non-state position to formal state status. States needed regional support in a stage which was characterized <sup>by</sup> diffusion of power and fragmentation of political elites. Internal legitimacy was linked to both regional recognition and acceptance within the framework of regional institutions. Hence, participation in Arab Summits was seen as an instrument to strengthen state power against internal opposition.

Accordingly, we have two opposing poles. On one hand threat perception both external and internal leads to consolidation of power and statism. However, when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict, preparations and confrontation were to be left to the auspices of the Arab Summits.

The establishment of the PLO after the first and second Arab Summits in 1964, is another indicator of statism when other Summits delegated the confrontation responsibilities to that organization.

On the other hand, Egypt the central regional power seized the initiative and the leadership of Arab Summits until 1967. Egypt's vision was to transform that state oriental system into an integrated region under its control. This role can be seen as follows:



The central regional power would lead the region toward its identity, create intensive inter-state interactions, push for political consensus concerning the regional goals and keep the region away from the intruders. In other words, it works for regionalism which means low level of statism.

The forementioned contradictory poles can be illustrated by studying resolutions of the Arab Summits between 1964-1985. During this period fourteen Arab Summits took place. Between 1964-1974 the Summits dealt with most serious issues which concerned the Arabs. The seven Summits that took place during that decade aimed at creating Arab consensus and a unified Arab stand. While during the next decade i.e between 1976-1985 none of the seven Summits that took place included all Arab States. Hence, many doubts were raised regarding Arab consensus and Arab national goals which means that statism surpassed regionalism.

## 2. 1964-1974 Regionalism through Arab Summits

The league of Arab States which was established in 1945 was the only regional institution until the Arab concluded the "Treaty of Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Among the states of the Arab League" in April 1950. This treaty is the most significant joint Arab document concerning defense and security. According to article

II. The Contracting States shall consider that an armed aggression committed against anyone or more of them, or against their forces, to be an aggression against them all... they undertake to hasten to the aid of the state or states against an aggression is committed and to take immediately, individually and collectively, all measures and to utilize all means available, including the use of armed force, to repress the aggression and to restore security and peace.

A Permanent Military Commission formed of representatives of the General staffs of the contracting states and a joint Defense council formed of Foreign Minister and National defense Minister were to be established.

More important is article 10 which requires that " Each of the contracting States undertakes not to conclude any international agreement which may be inconsistent with this Treaty, and not to adopt in its international relations any course which may be contrary to the aims of the Treaty."

Between 1950 and 1964 there were many bilateral agreements dealing with issues of defense and security such as the mutual defense pact between Egypt and Syria concluded in 1955. However Arab Summits provided new channels for regionalism. We will take only issues of great importance and see how they developed over time to find out how regionalism reached a state of collapse in the Arab system. They are, threat perception i.e perception of what is the principal threat to Arab national security, and Arab defense policies.

A. Threat "erception: Israel; Principal Threat

All seven Arab summits between 1964-1974 reiterated the Arab consensus concerning Israel as the principal threat to their security. The first summit which took place in Cairo in January 1964, considered Israel as the principal danger which threatens the Arab nation and that the Israeli attempts to divert the water's of Jordan River increase that danger. The same stand continued through out the summits to the degree that the fifth summit which took place in Khartoum in 1967 put forward a collective Arab policy toward Israel. The summit decided that there shall be no peace <sup>with</sup> Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and that the Arab nations shall take action to safeguard the right of the people of Palestine to their homeland.

In order to maintain that consensus the Sixth summit called for annual meeting in April of the Heads of States. At the same time, rich Arab oil producing countries were asked by the Seventh Summit to financially support the confrontation states and the PLO. The summit also approved the PLO as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. According to these resolutions, Arab States were looked at as a corpse with a division of labor, i.e. States with military preparedness and human capabilities to confront Israel and other states to support them by putting part of their material capabilities at their disposal. As a matter of fact one may look at the Seventh Summit in Rabat 1974 as the most important in confirming Arab consensus regarding many regional issues.

The Arab decided in this summit to make use of all international forums especially the U.N in order to disclose the racist and expansionist nature of Israel and to encourage the acceptance of PLO in such forums while PLO was given the "observe" status in the UN in 1974, Zionism was considered as a kind of Racism by the UN General Assembly in 1975. The summit also discussed the Arab-Afro dialogue and the Arab-Europe dialogue. Both dialogues were important in getting the sympathy and the understanding of the African and European regional sub-systems. Both dialogues continued in different forms until the 1980's. Arab economic relations and Arab communication and information were discussed as functions which need regional support.

B. Arab Defense Policies:

Arab Economic interations didn't have the same luck as the Arab defense policies in Arab Summits. In all first seven Arab Summits defense policies especially against Israel were discussed.

The first summit established unified Arab Command to the Arab armies. The General Commander was an Egyptian and Cairo was a Headquarter. The second summit in the same year (1964) approved collective Arab action plan to liberate Palestine. It called for the support and safeguard of Arab defense for states in which Jordan River runs. The third summit asked the unified Arab Command and the Palestine Liberation Army to work for the establishment of Palestinian forces. The fourth summit called for Arab collective effort in order to get rid of the consequences of the Israeli aggression and Liberate the Arab Occupied Territories. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Lybia were asked to pay annual fund until the liberation of the Occupied territories takes place. The sixth summit which took place in Algeria in 1973 called for all military support to be guaranteed to Egyptian and Syrian fighting fronts. The same commitments were emphasized by the seventh Summit. It called for a joint Arab commitment to the liberation of the Occupied territories, and for a joint effort to isolate Israel politically and economically. It also encouraged the Arab states to abandon their differences and fights, because they are peripheral to the struggle with Israel.



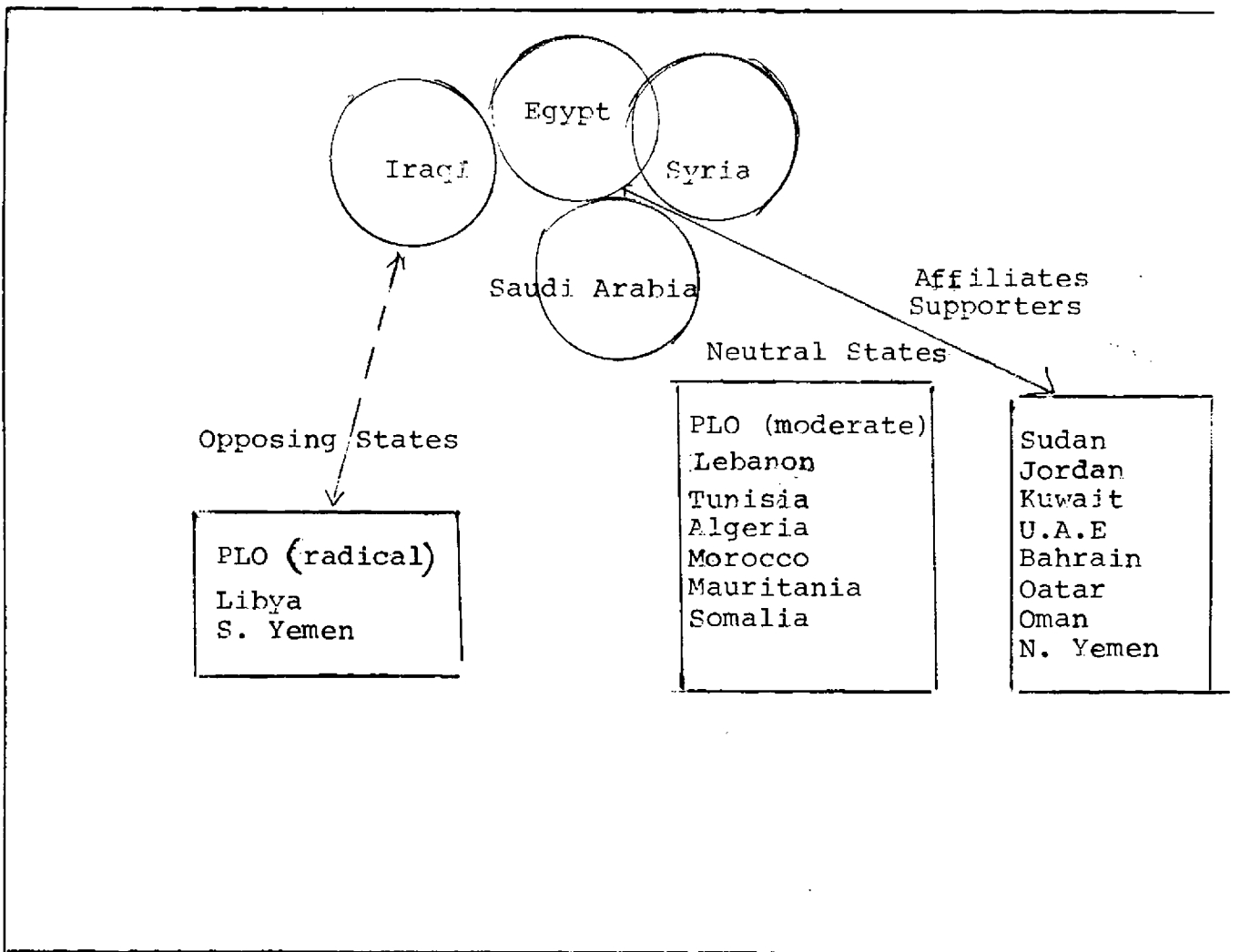
As we have seen regional security policies were determined in the Arab summits. Does this mean a diminishing role of state apparatus. In the case of states which under goes a nation building stage, security and defense policies are the most significant terms of state authority and sovereignty. There fore when the first Arab seven Summits decided the regional defense and security policies of the Arab state they dealt with issues of state authorities. A clear example of this sort is the resolution adopted by the Arab Summit concerning cease fire between Jordan and Palestinian forces. A high commission was established to supervise the implementation of the summit resolution. Jordan as a state, didn't defy but conceded.

What helped in this period to strengthen the sense of regionalism and inte gration is thenational commitment by the leading Arab States especially Egypt, Syria and Irag. It may be important in this regard to mention that the headquarters of 32% of Arab unions and Arab specialized Agencies before 1970 were in Cairo. The distribution of the headquarters of the same institutions between 1971-1979 was concentrated in the three countries Egyt, Irag, and Syria as follows: 36%, 21% and 9% respectively. This means a concentration of regional power. It means also that there was no adverse competition between these three states concerning who decides the regional agenda. From regional perspective this progressive camp was stronger than the conservative one led by Sandi Arabia which was concerned more with state consolidation.

By the end of this decade, Arab Sub-system looked as follows:

The Arab Sub-system in 1974

Israel: Intruder.



### 3. Statism through Fragmentation

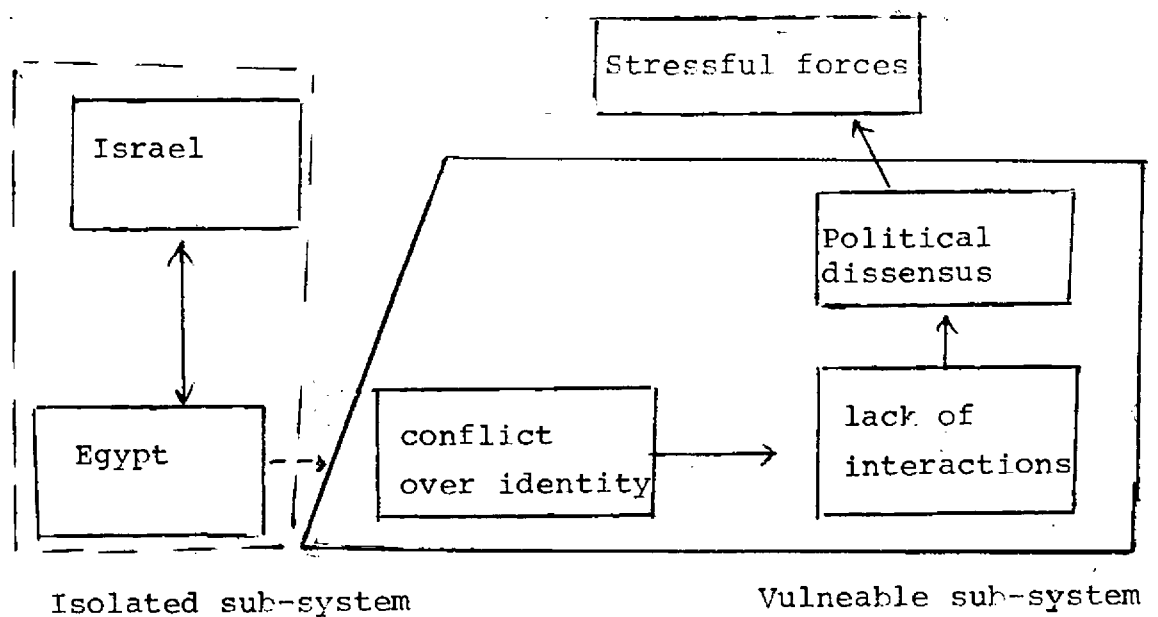
As mentioned earlier none of the subsequent Arab summits included all Arab actors. Many changes took place in the Arab Sub-system which accelerated the statism trend and led to the retreat of regionalism.

FIRST: The oil boom which started in 1973/74 divided the Arab system into two classes of states, i.e rich OAPEC members and poor states. Rich states, with no more capabilities wanted to play more active political role on the expense of the traditionally recognized and accepted leaders such as Egypt. The decline of the role fo Egypt led to the retreat of regionalism.

SECOND: Arab Summits were based on the Egyptian / Syrian Pan Arab ideas and policies. By 1973/74 Pan-Arabism became vague and amorphous ideology. At the same time the conservative Saudi regime adopted "Islamism" as a new ideology for a large concept of the region which includes not only Arab states but also Islamic actors. The rich states were defending an Islamic sub-system while poor states were not keen to defend the Arab sub system. This contention between Arabism and Islamism still at hand led to the collapse of regionalism.

THIRD: Strong doubts were raised regarding national consensus. Israel started to approach the central regional power i.e Egypt through the first and second disengagement agreement in 1974 and 1975 respectively. These attempts reached their threshold in November 1977 when Mr. Sadat the President of Egypt visited Israel, Camp David Accords in 1978 and a peace treaty in 1979 were signed by Israel and Egypt. The implication of this development is that the former leading power of all summits defied and broke off the Arab consensus regarding the principal threat to their security.

These developments led to a dramatic change in the structure of the region as follows:



An isolated sub-system was formed from Egypt and Israel while a number of vulnerable sub-systems were formally established such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Libyan-Moroccan Union, the Libyan-Syrian axis, the rejectionist front, and the Nile Valley integration. The regional system, in other words became totally fragmented.

We will deal with three main issues which were raised in past decade between 1976-1985 which indicate that the Arab system is more oriented toward state power. These are state security Vs. regional security, inter-Arab tension and parochial interests and diffusion of regional power.

A. State Security Vs. Regional Security:

Starting with the Lebanese Civil war as early as April 1975 and the Egyptian Israeli Second disengagement treaty in September 1975 each Arab state became more concern with its own security than regional security and defense.

The seven summits that took place between 1976 and 1985 discussed states security more than regional defenses.

The Lebanese civil war, then the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982 and the Iraqi-Iranian war were cases of state's security.

In this regard three main observations are important.

FIRST: Resolution of Arab summits became non binding to Arab states when the ninth summit-known as Baghdad In 1978 called for suspension of Egypt's membership in the league of Arab States and that Arab States should sever their diplomatic relations with it. Baghdad II reached final resolution to implement such punishments. However Sudan, Oman, and Somalia didn't sever their diplomatic relations with Egypt while Jordan decided to reestablish its diplomatic relations with Egypt in 1984. On the other hand while the ninth summit called for Iraq, Libya, Algeria Saudi Arabia, U.A.E Qatar and Kuwait to pay annually \$ 3500.00 million to Syria, Jordan, and PLO; Kuwait unilaterally decided in 1975 to halt its aid to both Syria and Jordan.

SECOND: Arab perception of Israel seems different than before. None of the summits after 1974 considered Israel as the principal threat. They still talk about the Zionist enemy in general terms. More important is the fact that the regular Arab summit in Fez, Morocco, in 1982 discussed the recognition of Israel. All this confirms that state security started to precede regional security.

#### B. Inter-Arab Tension and Parochial Interest

Arab summits became more involved in debating inter-Arab tension. They called Arab States to filter out and improve Arab environment. For instance, the most recent urgent Summit in Casa-Blanca, Morocco, in August 1985 formed two committees to mediate between different Arab states.

Added to this, is the fact that the unanimity rule which characterized all Arab Summits started to collapse. This means that consensus was replaced by dissensus.

Of course tension among Arab States means that each one of them considers its own parochial interests more important than the interest of all others. It means also that there is no collective Arab will and that interactions in the region became bilateral, i.e. state to state interactions. In other words the relation between Arab states became no different from the relations between any of them and exogenous, non-Arab-states.

### C. Diffusion of Regional Power

During fourth summit in Khartoum, the Saudi role started to emerge. But it became obvious after 1973 that Saudi Arabia wanted to be the Central regional power in the region. What helped the Saudis to build such an image is both the oil wealth and the lack of capabilities and will on behalf of Egypt to play that role. However after <sup>Egypt</sup> signed a treaty with Israel in March 1979, Iraq, Libya, and Syria were added to Saudi Arabia as competing states for "leaders" status.

Therefore each of them created its own way of exerting influence. Syria occupied Lebanon theoretically according to Riyadh summit in 1976 which established Arab deterrence force, i.e recognition of the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

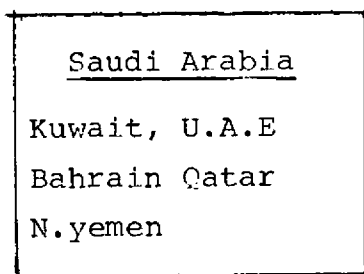
Syria, also created its own influence inside the Palestinian Organizations.

Libya reached a union with Morocco in 1983, and tried to strengthen its relations with states around Egypt as an attempt to isolate Egypt even in OAU. It also made a decision to get rid of Egyptian Labor force and other Arab workers as a way to show power and exert influence. Iraqi president issued what is called "National Covenant " in 1980 which expressed his will to replace the Egyptian role. However the war with Iran encouraged by the Gulf States hindered him from pursuing his goal.

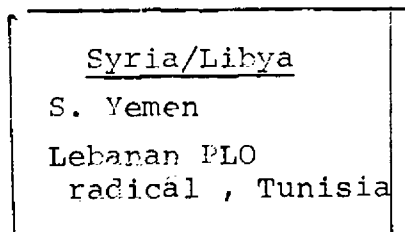
Saudi Arabia and the other six gulf States excluding Iraq established the Gulf Cooperation Council under the auspices of the Saudis.

The Arab Sub-system has never been so fragmented and geared toward state parochial interest. Here is how the system appears.

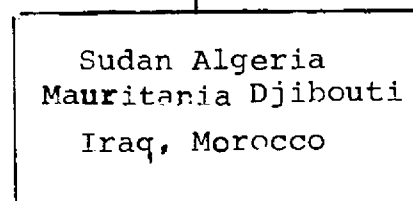
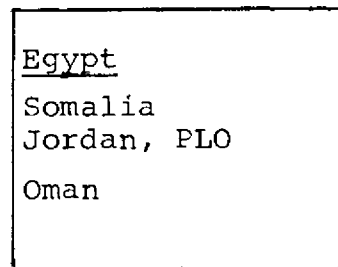




Saudi Block



Syrian/Libyan



Egypt Block and neutral states

4. CONCLUSION:

Arab summits can be channels for integration and regionalism. if used to create consensus and confirm collective indentity. Successful summits need a leading power to control the initiative and be a catalyst for regionalism. The role of external threat enhances only the integrative characteristics of the region. The leading power needs to be altruistic and to have the capabilities and the will to play the role.

The absence of such a central state, creates strong doubts about the identity of the system and encourages states to defy all regional arrangements. In an integrative system statism is linked to lack of regional will and to the absence of consensus. Statism means fragmentation and weakness. It means also lack of interest in and concern about national and regional issues.

END NOTES:

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2. The Alexandria Protocol Pact of the League of Arab States,  
Joint Defense and Economic Cooperation Treaty between the states  
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3. Ibid.
4. For the development of Arab alignments see Alan Taylor,  
The Arab Balance of Power, Syracuse Press, 1982, PP. 122-124
5. Ibid, PP 153-155.

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