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ARAB POLITICAL CURRENTS AND THE PATTERN OF ARAB-EUROPEAN CULTURAL INTERACTION

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Draft
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October 15, 1994

I. Introduction

It is too rarely recognized in Western post-war political science, that the "soft data" of perceptions, misperceptions, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, ideals, and ideologies, often have a determining influence on the course of decisive political events. No doubt the discomfort of dealing with these variables stems partially from the great difficulty of isolating, defining, and measuring such data, as well as the conviction among many scholars in search of "objectivity" that "political science" could be firmly linked--more properly, reduced--to the more measurable variables of material economic interests and material power resources. Especially in the Mediterranean region where economic and power interests are pushing in one direction, and the cumulative memory of past historical experience is pulling in another, an immersion-- however preliminary and incomplete--into the patterns of attitudinal and ideological change and the outlines of cross- Mediterranean perception and misperception is absolutely necessary for gaining a fuller appreciation of the complexity of the Mediterranean project and the deep challenges that it faces.

In this paper, my aim is twofold: (a) to examine the recent development of ideological and political currents in the Arab world with the purpose of understanding their current outlines and future

course, and (b) to study the pattern of Arab-European cultural interaction with the purpose of understanding Arab perceptions of Mediterranean relations and the possibilities for developing a more mutually-understanding Mediterranean discourse. The field of enquiry is dauntingly vast, and the tools at the cultural analyst's disposal are dangerously blunt. I am convinced, however, that raising--as is done below--many of the admittedly unwieldy questions regarding beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions is of great importance. In the cases where the answers I have tried to provide are satisfactory, well and good; in the remainder of cases, we must await the input of other scholars and analysts. In trying to cover so much ground in a short space, I have been necessarily brief and synoptic in my description and argumentation; whenever possible, I have used parenthetical references to guide the reader to Arabic and Western sources that illustrate or expand on the point being made. The references, then, should be regarded largely as guides to further reading.

II. Patterns of Arab Political Thought
1. Origins of the Modern Discourse

The dialectics of modern Arab political thought were set in motion by the eruption of post-revolutionary France, in the person of Napoleon Bonaparte and a host of soldiers and a retinue of surveyors, scholars, and scientists, onto the Egyptian scene in 1798. Although Napoleon's invasion was brief and ill-fated, his occupation of lower Egypt and his foray into Palestine and the

Levant revived a Western challenge to the Arab-Islamic world that had been largely dormant since Saladin's victory over the Crusaders in the late 12th century. (Hourani 1962: 49ff) The expulsion of the Muslims from Andalusian Spain in 1492, and the contemporaneous discovery of the Americas which signalled Europe's rapidly growing political and economic power, its advancements in the sciences and technology, and the increasing marginalization of the Mediterranean, did not go unnoticed on the 'inner sea's' southern and eastern shores; however, Arab-Islamic attention was preoccupied by the phenomena of the decline and fragmentation of the Arab-Muslim heartland that had been brought about by the Mongol conquest and devastation of much of Mesopotamia and the Levant in the 13th century and then had regained a measure of confidence and self-satisfaction under the Ottoman Turks, who put an end to the Christian Byzantine empire in 1453 and presided over almost half a millennium of imperial suzerainty over much of southwest Asia and north Africa, preserving the symbols of Islamic continuity and stability in the office of the Caliph and the legal and religious institutions of the ulema. (Lewis 1993: 18ff; Hourani 1991: 85ff) The true power of Europe's scientific and technological advancements, as well as the potency of its new socio-political thinking, exemplified in the French revolution and the vibrant nationalist movements that followed it, was not fully appreciated until Europe's growing might began to spill into Ottoman suzerain territories, first 'in Egypt, but soon in other territories of the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa.

3

In the Arab provinces of the Ottoman empire, Egypt, under the autonomous viceroyship of Muhammad Ali, moved first, sending students and scholars to learn the secrets of European success and acting rapidly to develop political, economic, and military institutions in Egypt that mimicked those of the ascendant European states. These moves were followed by similar reforms initiated from Istanbul in the Tanzimat (1839-78) period. The initial views of Europe and the related initial interpretations of the Arab-Islamic predicament carried out by various essayists, journalists, and activists identified rationalism and the scientific method as the keys to Europe's technological advance, and literacy, patriotism, and effective public administration as the keys to social and political advance. With regard to patriotism, tendencies were divergent in the late Ottoman period, among Ottoman patriotism, more general Islamic patriotism, and nascent forms of Arab, Egyptian, Lebanese, and other regional patriotisms.

2. Outlines of the Contemporary Political Field

The outlines of the contemporary Arab political outlook began to take definite shape in the decades following the First World War. Indeed, the War marked a watershed in modern Arab history between, on the one hand, the Ottoman period and the living institutional links to an unbroken Islamic past, and on the other hand, the modern Arab state system, established on largely secular grounds as a mixed result of the Western Allied powers' imperial interests and the aspirations of various local elites to break free

4

of Turkish authority. Two developments in this period had a particularly formative influence on Arab political consciousness: first, the collapse of the Ottoman Islamic empire and the abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kamal in 1924 dealt a staggering blow to the dominant position of the symbols and institutions of Islam in the state and fueled the debate about the appropriate position of Islam in the political system--or vice versa--that had been ignited by al-Afghani in the late 19th century, and was carried forward by Muhammad Abduh, Rashid Rida, Hasan Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and others all the way up to the present day. Second, the betrayal of the Husayn-McMahon understanding of 1915-16 in favor of the Anglo-French Sykes-Picot agreement (also 1916), which divided the Arab provinces of the former Ottoman empire among the Western Allied victors rather than honoring the promises of independence and unity for an Arab state over most of the Levant, provided the historical material for fueling the growth of pan-Arabist feeling and the development of strong anti-imperialist and anti-Western sentiments.

In order to gain a more systematic understanding of the categories and dynamics of modern currents of Arab political sentiment, however, we would do well to separate out its main currents: Arab nationalism (both liberal and authoritarian), Islamism, Marxism, and various regional nationalisms. Only by understanding the interaction and interconnectedness among these various currents of thought can we understand the contemporary Arab political outlook and consider the possibilities for future change

5

and development. For this purpose I will use a historical theoretical framework that I have developed in detail elsewhere (1994: 3-30) and which helps to place the various ideological currents in the modern Arab world in their proper sociological and dynamic contexts.

In terms of dominant ideological currents, the 20th century can be roughly divided into three broad phases: a phase of liberal conservative nationalism in the interwar period, a phase of revolutionary secular left-wing pan-Arabism in the 1950s and 1960s, and the current phase of radical Islamism. The first gave birth to constitutional parliamentary political systems dominated by latifundist and comprador local bourgeoisies and promoting a liberal, laissez faire political and economic order. The second was the result of the entry of the petty bourgeoisie into political center stage and acute dislocations of the Second World War, the collapse of British and French imperialism, and the loss of Palestine. This shift in this second phase was spearheaded by activist military or party leaders, and established authoritarian governments with strong pan-Arabist and social reformist agendas. The third phase of radical Islamist opposition to the dominant regimes has several causes: first, it represents the attempts of socio-economic out-groups--principally, newly-urbanized and disadvantaged lower middle class elements--to challenge the hold on political and economic power of the petty bourgeoisie, or new middle class, that moved into power in the 1950s and 1960s; second, it is the revolutionary expression of a rising generation that

6

rejects the bleak socio-economic and cultural status quo and seeks to challenge the hold on power of the previous generation through radical religious politics; third, it is the gradual reaction to the many failures of the modern Arab state, from the failure to promote rapid and fair socio-economic development, to the failure to defeat Israel, accommodate political participation, preserve or generate social values, and prevent excessive Westernization.

3. The Roots and Rise of the Islamist Opposition

The current ideological scene, then, is dominated by the Islamists who, since the late 1970s have posed a region-wide challenge to governments as diverse as the Algerian, the Egyptian, the Jordanian, the Israeli, the Syrian, the Lebanese, the Iraqi, the Turkish, the Iranian--even the Saudi. In the Arab Sunni world, these movements represent the culmination of an intellectual and political development that began with Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. It was Afghani who first articulated and called for a specifically Islamic response to the challenge of the West and the evident backwardness, in many fields, of the Islamic world. He insisted that a revived and repoliticized Islam could and should provide the central identity structures and motivating force for citizenship, social cohesion, and political engagement in the modern world. He argued that Islamic nationalism could have all the evident strengths of Western nationalism with the added strength of having congruent religious, moral, and spiritual categories. In order for this revival of socio-political Islam to succeed, however, and in

order for Islam to play an enlightening and progressive role in modern Islamic civilization, it had to be re-examined and re-interpreted. He regretted the closing of the gates of _ijtihad_ in the 12th century, and insisted that a radical re-interpretation of contemporary Islamic traditions in the light of rationalism and science was absolutely necessary so that Islam would not stand in the way of reason, science, and technology, but would rather foster and encourage them. Indeed, he hoped for a protestant reformation of Islam, and fancied himself as its Luther. (for more on Afghani, see Keddie 1983; Keddouri 1966; Kerr 1966)

His main disciple, Muhammad Abduh, shied away from the activist political strands of Afghani's life and thought, but carried on Afghani's reformist and modernizing efforts within Islam and enjoyed considerable influence as Egypt's grand _mufti_. (see Abduh 1956) The conservative element in Afghani's thought was developed by Rashid Rida, who emphasized the need to bring Islam back as the mainstay of social, political, and economic life, and who emphasized the self-evident and literal nature of the religion as expressed in the Quran and the Hadith. (see Gibb 1947 and Rida's articles in _al-Manar_) Afghani, after all, was of Persian-Afghan Shii origins, influenced by the currents of Shii theology, and exposed also to the thought of sufism, Western philosophy, and freemasonry; Rida, on the other hand, came from a conservative Sunni background in Tripoli, Lebanon, and understood Islam more as a reinforcement of tried and true traditions.

It was the straight-forward, literalist approach to Islamic

8

revivalism that would have the most direct mass appeal. The first Islamic mass movement that would capitalize on the simpler elements of Afghani's appeal and benefit from the possibilities of modern mass party organization was the Muslim Brotherhood established in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. The Brotherhood would grow from a small religious and philanthropic association to one of the largest parties in Egypt within little over a decade. (see Ismael 1985; Mitchell 1969) Banna's aim was to reassert the position of Islam as the organizing framework of social, political, personal, and economic life in what he perceived as a rapidly secularizing society. The message was simple and compelling: that God had revealed his will through the Quran and the example of the Prophet, and that it was up to good Muslims to reform society in order to bring the Quran and the Sharia--God's will--back to center stage. (Banna n.d.: 11, 186, 359) Banna's strategy was based on proselytizing, persuasion, and campaigning, and avoided direct confrontation with the state or the rhetoric of revolution. The Brotherhood would sprout branches and sympathizers in most of the Arab countries, and would provide the breeding ground for most of the more radical Islamist leaders and groupings that emerged later.

The principal ideologue of the post-1970 radical Islamist groups was Sayyid Qutb, a former member of the Brotherhood who had been imprisoned as part of the general crackdown on the Brotherhood by the regime of Gamal Abd al-Nasir in the mid-1960s, and who articulated a radical revolutionary Islamist position before his

9

death in prison in 1966. (Haddad 1982: 68; Dekmejian 1985: 90) In his thought, Qutb was influenced by the Indian Islamist Abu A'la al-Mawdudi (d.1979), and adopted from the latter his basic view about the apostasy of contemporary Muslim society, and the need for total revolution both against society and the state. (Sivan 1985: 23) Qutb's argument was, simply, that those societies and states that did not apply or live by God's law could not consider themselves Muslim, even if they maintained a claim to being Muslims. In this milieu of apostasy, true Muslims must withdraw from common society, form their own true Muslim societies (as the Prophet had done in withdrawing with his followers from the corruption of Mecca to the promise of Medina), and prepare for and launch a new _jihad_ of word and deed to bring Islam back to a now non-Muslim world. (Qutb 1964: 14-18; 1965: 110)

The thinking of Qutb struck a sympathetic cord among wide sectors of Arab populations disillusioned with authoritarian pan-Arab or monarchical regimes that were unable to deliver on socio-economic development, failing in the struggle against Israel, corrupt, and increasingly reliant on repressive police measures to maintain public order. Throughout North Africa, the Levant and the Arabian peninsula, radical Islamist groups sympathetic to Qutb's views emerged to challenge social and political institutions. They gained encouragement and confidence through the Islamic Revolution in Iran of 1979, the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat in 1980, the Islamic uprising in northern Syria, the growth of Hizballah in Lebanon, the attempt to take over the Mosque at

Mecca by a self-declared Mahdi and his followers, the conquest of power in the Sudan, and many other developments, including, most recently, the victory of the Islamists in the Algerian elections and the eruption of widespread civil disorder after their cancellation.

Among the reasons for the rapid growth of the Islamist current, are the following: first, politicized Islam has an accessible and understanding mass audience, so that once enough members of the intelligentsia moved to it as a political option, it was fairly easy to mobilize mass support.

Second, the ideologies of liberal nationalism, revolutionary secular pan-Arab nationalism, and Marxism had all lost their ideological luster by the early 1970s after having been tried and failed; with the memory of Ottoman Islamic society almost completely faded, Islam appeared as the only political program that had not yet been tried.

Third, as Mannheim (1952), Rintala (1968), and others have noted, there is a natural dialectic in the successive political ideological choices of rising generations; in their natural quest to define themselves in contradistinction to their elders, rising generations naturally choose a form of political expression that is opposed to that of their parents. After fifty years of secular ideology in the Arab world, the appeal of religion to the young was a potent and attractive way to express natural generational conflict.

Fourth, the defeat of 1967 and the obvious failure of post-

11

independence Arab governments to deliver on virtually all of their promises of political, economic, and social development, brought their public honeymoon period to an end; they were given a chance, and they failed; it was now time for trying a radical alternative. (on the many effects of 1967, see Ajami 1981)

Fifth, as Arab governments grew increasingly repressive in the 1950s and 1960s, most other political parties and groupings of intellectuals folded or collapsed. Within the mosque system, which could not be closed down, the Islamist groups had access to a network to which they could retreat and preserve their thought and organizational links. In many Arab countries, the Islamic groups could also continue as organized public groups outside the mosques as religious or philanthropic organizations not directly affected by bans on political organizations. Moreover, since religious discourse was a type of discourse that could not be easily suppressed, in most Arab countries Islamic forms of political expression became the only forms open to those dissatisfied with the status quo. In other words, successful government repression of other political forms of political expression indirectly swelled the ranks of the Islamists.

Sixth, after the Iranian revolution and the assassination of Sadat, Islam came to be seen as the principal framework of revolutionary change; Khomeini, in a sense, became the Che Guevara of the 1980s, with similar appeal among youth. Therefore, intense dissatisfaction with the status quo, which required radical revolutionary change, naturally suggested a revolutionary Islamic

response. Islam, in a sense, became synonymous with radical change.

Seventh, with the oil boom of the 1970s, financial--and hence, political--power shifted from the central secular pan-Arab nationalist states of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (especially after 1980), to the conservative oil-rich monarchies of the Gulf. With this gradual shift in money and power came a shift in funding patterns for schools, universities, the media, publishing houses, and social and political groupings. This shift would cause a reinjection of vigor into conservative religious values.

Eighth, the main capitals that had developed and disseminated secular thought throughout the 20th century, Cairo, Beirut, Damascus, and Baghdad, became increasingly ineffective in the 1970s: Beirut tore itself to pieces, Cairo became sequestered after the Camp David Accords, and Damascus and Baghdad were virtually snuffed out as intellectual centers under the weight of increasingly repressive Ba'thist police states. This would necessarily strengthen the Islamists.

4. Islamists, Statists, and Liberals

The Islamist challenge to the status quo in the Arab world has crystallized three broad groupings of political attitude: Islamists, statists, and liberals. It is through understanding these three groups, that one can get a feel for the nature of the debate in contemporary Arab politics. Among the Islamists, of whom we have given a rough intellectual biography above, there is

13

general common ground regarding the necessity of rolling back secularism and implementing the Sharia in state and society. Where there is a spectrum of variation, is in the strictness of the interpretation of <u>Sharia</u>, the intensity (shading into violence) with which its implementation is demanded, and attitudes toward cooperation with or uncompromising hostility toward the state and other political groupings. (see Esposito 1983)

The statist perspective is that held by the military, party, and/or royal elites that sit atop the various Arab states. For these groups, regime survival, security, and overall stability are virtually the sole motivating aims. Their interests lie in politics and how to preserve and protect the present political system from breakdown, coup, or revolution. Their interest in change is only tactical and is operative only when they are convinced that limited and controlled change is the only way to avoid graver risks and uncertainties. The perspective of these relatively small groups is important not only because of their direct influence on politics, but also because this perspective enjoys some sympathy among wide sections of the new business bourgeoisie, the public sector middle class, and self-described realists among the intelligentsia. For these people, the stability provided by the state, regardless of its shortcomings in many fields, is the only bulwark against worse evils such as social fragmentation on the Lebanese model or Islamic totalitarianism on the Iranian model. These people do not look to political ideals or ideologies to guide their opinions, but rather deal with politics in its every-day aspect, interested only in

maintaining stability, and providing modest social and economic development where that is possible. Among these people, there are various shadings of ideological background from pan-Arabist to regional nationalist, and from leftist-socialist to conservative-traditionalist, but their operative political outlook is that determined by political pragmatism and realism.

A third group which is emerging in contradistinction to the above two, is a liberal group. This group is the smallest of the three and is comprised of some members of the professional middle class, a majority of the intellectuals, and sections of the student body. This group is neither statist nor Islamist, but sees instead the necessity of political reform in lifting government repression, ensuring basic liberties of speech, assembly, and conscience, and establishing full and working democracies. They are committed to the separation of religion and politics and feel that the popularity of the Islamic movement stems largely from the travails of government repression and the absence of any other means of venting frustration or participating in the political process. The growing presence of this group has become felt through the multiplication of various human rights, women's rights, environmental, and other non-governmental organizations and pressure groups. (see Norton 1994, 1995) It has also become more prominent after the democratization of large sections of Latin America, Asia, Eastern Europe, and the former-Soviet states. Many people in politics and business are beginning to recognize, based on these world developments, that a liberal-democratic political

order might be the only stable path for sustainable social and economic development.

5. Reflections on Future Political Trends

Despite the obvious difficulty of prognosticating about the future of any social and political trends, it is helpful to isolate some factors relevant to political and ideological change that might help us understand some of the factors and forces involved in ideological shifts in the Arab world.

First, from the perspective of class, ideologies are especially useful for political and economic out-groups to challenge the legitimacy of in-groups, and mobilize support for an overthrow of the dominant class. Once groups or classes accede to power their strong reliance on ideology can begin to fade, as they now have access to the normal levers of political, economic, and cultural power through their dominant position in the social and political system. In the Arab world, we saw the national bourgeoisies promote ideologies of liberal nationalism to challenge first the Turks and then the British and the French for power in their respective societies. After the Second World War, we saw the same class successfully challenged by the petty bourgeoisie which used the ideological battering ram of revolutionary pseudo-leftist pan-Arabism to unseat the upper bourgeoisie and accede to power. In both cases, once the rising class succeeded in its quest for power, its dependence on and attachment to the ideology that allowed it to challenge the previous status quo gradually faded. Once in power,

16

in-groups tend to grow less ideological and more interested in the pragmatic promotion and protection of their political and economic interests in the status quo.

Within the context of the above, the current Islamist wave represents a successful ideologization of Islam by social and economic out-groups, largely newly-urbanized and lower middle class elements, that find in ideologized Islam a powerful battering ram against the entrenched interests of the professional, previously urbanized, and largely secular nationalist middle class. (see Ibrahim 1980) The Islamist wave, then, is not an undefined reawakening to a cultural and religious heritage, but an element of a highly politicized struggle between socio-political in-groups and out-groups. What interests us here, therefore, is the likely course and outcome of this struggle. Whereas the overthrow by a local bourgeoisie of foreign imperialist bourgeoisies, and the subsequent overthrow of local bourgeoisies by local petty bourgeois and middle class forces represented class revolutions that were part of the necessary logic of post-colonial socio-economic and political development and had their counterparts in most developing countries, a subsequent overthrow of the entrenched middle class by lower classes and other social out-groups is highly unlikely. The balance of social and economic forces favors the entrenched middle class, and still marks it as a rising class with wide economic and political potentials still untapped.

In class terms, therefore, the overthrow of the middle class is highly unlikely and the struggle between this class and less

17

empowered classes and out-groups is likely to continue in deadlock indefinitely. In terms of political discourse, this indicates that Islamism will continue to be the language of political and socio-economic opposition for some time to come, while statism and liberalism will continue to be the political orientations of the dominant middle class. In other words, the class structure of the Arab world is much more stable today than it was in the 1910s and 1920s when local bourgeoisies moved into power, or in the 1940s and 1950s when the middle class overthrew the bourgeoisie; and, consequently, the polarized ideological positions of the constituent socio-economic groups today are not likely to shift quickly.

A second fact that must be taken into account when trying to understand the future of political currents in the Arab world is, of course, the capacity of the present states to absorb and manage the high levels of discontent and opposition. This is a largely structural-functional factor having to do with the ability of state institutions to successfully use methods of persuasion, cooptation, and coercion to avoid a breakdown of the political system and to maintain the status quo. As Skocpol (1979) has pointed out, successful revolutions often have more to do with a breakdown of state capacities to absorb and manage opposition than with some inevitable class dialectic. In this regard, the future of the Arab world is far less predictable, because developments in this sphere depend on the policies of each government and the particular circumstances of those policies' implementation. The qualitatively

different condition of Islamists in Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and the Sudan, to name just a few cases testifies to the varied and ungeneralizable nature of the fortunes of the contemporary Islamic opposition and the extent to which its success or failure depends on undetermined variables of policy and purposive action.

The generalization that can be made about the modern Arab state is in itself equivocal in that (a) there is little doubt that the Arab state has developed institutional capacities to monitor, influence, and control society far beyond the level of local states in the 1940s and 1950s, but (b) the Arab state in the 1980s and 1990s is going through an acute crisis both of legitimacy and of resources that cripples those very same capacities. Therefore, in the modern Arab state's struggle to contain opposition and maintain the present political system there is no guarantee that the state's institutions will in all cases be equal to the task. Any serious breakdown of state capacity would likely lead to an effective offensive by the opposition and a radical change in the status quo.

Third, from the perspective of generational opposition, there is much in the development of Arab ideology that follows generational patterns. This is natural in a society with high population growth rates in which youth make up a large and--given slow economic development--frustrated stratum. As studied by Mannheim and others, the frustration of rising generations takes a naturally antithetical attitude toward the status quo and toward the older generation which dominates it. In its challenge to the

19

previous generation and its attempt to define itself in contradistinction to that previous generation, a rising generation usually chooses an ideological orientation that is antithetical to that of its predecessors. In the Arab world, the generation that supported a mildly pro-Western liberal nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s was risen against by the next generation that supported a fairly socialist, anti-Western, secular, pan-Arabist nationalism; and in the 1970s and 1980s, the new generation has supported a politicized and radicalized Islam as an antithesis to the secularism, nationalism, and pseudo-Marxism of the previous generation.

It is in the nature of youth movements to be fairly mono-thematic and inclusive in nature, given the strong peer pressure among cohort groups and the openness of the young to impression and suggestion; what interests us in this regard is that, if this analysis is correct, the natural antipathy between successive generational groups is likely to militate toward a reaction against the current generational fashion sometime in the medium-term future. In other words, the Islamism which serves today as the expression of the frustration and outrage of the current generation cannot be effectively used by the next generation, given that the outrage the next generation will seek to express will be directed, naturally, against the preceding--i.e. the current--generation. Although it is not possible, through this type of analysis, to discern which ideological orientation will be chosen by the next generation, we can be fairly certain that two succeeding

generations will not use the same ideology, and that Islamism will eventually go out of fashion for youth, as was generally the case for youth throughout the period roughly between 1920 and 1970.

Fourth, in peering into the future of political currents in the Arab world, we cannot ignore the effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union, increasingly hegemonic American power, and the near conclusion of the peace process. In all three cases, the effects of developments are less predictable than at first appears.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War has obvious long-term stabilizing and pacifying effects in the region, given that many of the arms races and many of the conflicts that plagued the region for the past four decades were related to the Cold War. On the cultural or ideological level, however, the Cold War and the ideology of the Soviet Union had provided a ready-made Western response, in the form of revolutionary Marxism, to the Western threat of imperialism. Because of the Cold War, the West--and indeed, Christendom, to speak more broadly--was not perceived as monolithic, and Western threats could be responded to with Western ideologies and remedies. With the end of the Cold War, however, the West is increasingly becoming--or being perceived as becoming--more monolithic in its political, economic, and cultural orientation. A perception is growing of one capitalist, over-liberal, Christian, imperialist West pursuing a global agenda of political, economic, and cultural domination, with the Muslim world as one of its main targets. The events in Bosnia, and the perceived double standards used in the UN for implementing UN resolutions

against Arab countries as opposed to others, for many, only confirmed these suspicions. In brief, the end of the Cold War could have hidden escalatory effects on local political attitudes alongside the more obvious pacifying effects.

With regard to the growing monopolarity of American power in the region, the same possibility of positive and negative effects exists. On the one hand, the growing dominance of American power has caused more and more Arab governments to gradually line up in the American camp--despite some adamant holdouts like Libya, Iraq, and the Sudan; and this has signified to many observers the emergence of a spirit of realism and negotiated compromise among Arab states with regard, not only to Israel, but also to the world order in general, a spirit that these observers largely attribute to the dominance of one world power and the absence of alternative world-power options. However, as the contrast between the official and popular attitudes toward the confrontation between Saddam Hussein and the American-led coalition over Kuwait in 1990-91 indicated, the other possibility is that while Arab governments move inexorably deeper into the American camp, the gulf is widening between their positions and the attitudes of their people. Instead of heralding a new era of non-confrontational international politics in the Arab world, the growing Americanization of Arab foreign policy might be generating a growing gap between governments and peoples in the Arab world that may be more dangerous than the original radical positions of their governments, and that might result in increasing domestic polarization followed

22

by regime crisis and breakdown.

With regard to the recent advances in the Arab-Israeli peace process, the same political cultural unknowns surround its results. To most observers, the successful conclusion of the peace process will have fairly uniform positive effects in terms of reducing regional tensions, and ushering in a period of peace and cooperation in the Middle East region. While this may be partially, or even largely, true, some of the possible negative consequences should not be overlooked. (a) The ending of the Arab-Israeli struggle at the level of states may rob the present Arab states of much of what little remains of their political legitimacy and could very easily strengthen the hands of the Islamist opposition. (b) The ending of the struggle at the level of states could encourage the reinterpretation of the struggle from the old interpretation of a struggle between Arab nationalists and Zionists to a perhaps more volatile and intractable conflict between Muslims and Jews; in other words, the perceived surrender of the secular Arab nationalist states that waged the bulk of the struggle against Israel could be the final nail in the coffin of secular Arab nationalism and could facilitate the reinterpretation of regional conflicts on purely religious grounds. Not only would the conflict be transferred from the level of states to the level of populations, but it would also be transferred from a secular nationalist ideological framework to a religious ideological framework.

In partial summation, then, the course of political thought

and political attitudes in the Arab world is subject to many factors and cannot be confidently predicted in any direction. Suffice it to say, that some of the rosier predictions about the future of Arab politics, linked to the end of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli conflict, etc., should be balanced with appreciation of other possibilities and other directions.

III. Perspectives on Europe and the Mediterranean

Despite the common geographic, climatic, and even cultural attributes shared by most peoples around the Mediterranean basin, this has not kept the Mediterranean from being an arena of intense competition and conflict. (see Boxer 1983) Indeed, the absence of strong geographic barriers and the smallness of the Mediterranean have often served to heighten and intensify competition over limited resources, and the interrelatedness of races, religions, cultures, and histories around the basin has often given a particularly strong internecine intensity to regional conflicts. Paradoxically, proximity and interdependence are two preconditions for escalation of conflict, and it may be this long history of proximity and interdependence that makes the Mediterranean basin a particularly eventful and volatile region. The key for opinion- and policy-makers is to see how to turn the elements of commonality and interdependence into forces for peace and cooperation and how to ensure that the competition, which is natural and healthy, remains productive and non-violent. Most of these issues are beyond the

scope of this essay, but I will attempt, in the following part of this essay, to present a description of Arab views of Europe and the Mediterranean in order to get a better handle on where the areas of misunderstanding and misperception--or even well-placed apprehension--are and what can be done about them.

1. Arab-Islamic Perspectives on the Mediterranean

While some actions of governments and organizations are shaped by considerations of interest, most popular perceptions, preconceptions, and prejudices are formed by generationally-filtered interpretations of recent and not-so-recent communal historical experience. A good starting point, therefore, for an understanding of Arab perspectives on Europe and the Mediterranean is a glimpse at regional history from an Arab perspective.

First, from the perspective of religious culture, there is a Mediterranean emphasis in Judaism and Christianity that is much less pronounced in Islam. Despite their exile to Babylon, Jewish perspectives remain rooted in the Mediterranean land of Israel. For Christians as well, the religious narrative is rooted in the towns of ancient Mediterranean Palestine and develops a strong Mediterranean theme as Paul and other proselytizers use the Mediterranean as their main highway for spreading the faith and as the Mediterranean-centered Roman empire eventually adopts Christianity, and it and the Mediterranean-centered church it promotes become the main institutional symbols of the faith. In the religious narrative of Islam, the central drama revolves around the

towns of Mecca and Medina deep in the Arab interior and the tenets and rituals of the faith maintain that inland-oriented geographic worldview. Jerusalem does figure prominently as the third holiest city in Islam and the site where Muhammad ascended to heaven, but it serves more to define the extent and reach of the Prophet's message rather than to shift its perceived geographical center. Furthermore, in the development of Islamic empire, the Mediterranean soon emerged as a barrier or boundary to Islamic expansion rather than a highway. While the new faith spread solidly over land in the Levant and North Africa, and into Persia and other lands to the east, Islam made fewer and more precarious inroads across the Dardanelles and the Straits of Gibraltar. Despite its many weaknesses, medieval Europe, across the Mediterranean, resisted Muslim expansion, and this standoff rendered the Mediterranean, for centuries to come, a dividing sea which trading and military vessels would continue to criss-cross but which would not have the central and unifying significance it had in the Roman and early Christian eras.

From the perspective of Arab-Islamic history as well, it is significant that the main capitals of Arab-Islamic empire, Damascus and Baghdad, were inland capitals, and that among the main long-term politico-military threats to the Islamic empire, after the defeat and conversion of the Persians, was the surviving Christian Byzantine empire in Constantinople and the Christian remains of the Holy Roman Empire in southern and western Europe. The Mediterranean, therefore, was perceived more as an arena of

conflict and a geographical boundary of Islam than a central sea of common culture and interest.

At the cultural historical level, the early centuries of Islam, especially under the early Abbasid Caliphs, saw an opening up to the thought and civilization of Hellenism and a translation and elaboration of many of the philosophic and scientific themes of Hellenic culture. (Watt 1991: 52ff) As Greek thought shaped and influenced the Romans, the same was partially in the process of taking place to the Arabs. The process was aborted and reversed, however, in the 12th century, after the escalation of conflict between the polarized positions of the Hellenic-influenced Mu'tazalite Muslim philosophers and the anti-sophist Ash'arite religious literalists. The decisive conclusion of the conflict in favor of the latter led to a sweeping and successful vilification of Hellenic philosophy, and provided an ideological foundation for hostility toward Hellenism and the culture it gave birth to on the northern shores of the Mediterranean.

The Crusades, of course, were the first major and truly threatening challenge by Western Christendom. Although they were not the first confrontation, their penetration, duration, and religious character rendered them, even almost until today, the defining event in Arab-European relations. With regard to the Mediterranean, the fact that the Crusades received ample naval support across the sea and that the Christians, especially the Italian Genoese and Venetians, enjoyed the overall advantage on the water, just confirmed perceptions that the Mediterranean was a

hostile front. This is certainly not the place to go into the massive and complex influence of the Crusades on Arab perceptions of Europe, suffice it here to mark their centrality in the definition of the Arab-European relationship.

After the Crusades, and between the 13th and 18th centuries, much of the Arab-Islamic world was more preoccupied with internal division and domination from Mongols and Turks from the northeast than with direct competition and confrontation with Europe. Mediterranean trade continued--although it ebbed in importance as European trade grew increasingly global--but the scientific and technological advances in Europe still commanded little awareness or interest on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean. The tragic loss of Andalusia in the late 15th century was counterbalanced by the earlier defeat of Byzantium and conquest of Constantinople; hence, it was not interpreted as an indication of a growing power imbalance between Christendom and Islam, but rather as one episode in the ongoing struggle between the two civilizations, with Islam comfortably holding what was perceived as the central territories of Arabia, Mesopotamia, the Levant, Egypt, Anatolia, Persia, as well as all of North Africa and large parts of southern Asia, and Christendom holed up in what was still perceived as the marginal and peripheral territories of western and northern Europe.

2. The Equivocal Essence of the Modern Arab-European Relationship

As mentioned in the first part of this essay, the moment of

reckoning for the Arab-Islamic world vis-a-vis Europe began with the Napoleonic conquest of Egypt in 1798 and led to a complex process of interaction, action, and reaction that shaped the politics of the 19th and 20th centuries. From the very beginning, the Arab reaction to Europe was equivocal, and therefore, to this day, is very hard to simplify and define. In earlier centuries and earlier encounters, Christendom was an enemy in all senses of the word: military, political, cultural, and religious; beginning in the 19th century, however, Europe was now both friend and foe; both enemy and guide; both example and counter-example. It posed the gravest military and political threat to the Arab-Islamic world since the conquests of the Mongols, but at the same time it presented convincing evidence of superiority in many fields other than the military, including science, technology, education, public administration, political organization, and commerce, to name a few. The complexity of the relationship with Europe stemmed exactly from this paradoxical ambition both to befriend Europe and learn its ways, and at the same time vilify it, attack it, and defeat it. The path of modern Arab-European relations would trace a jagged zig-zag path between the two poles of this dilemma.

In the first three-quarters of the 19th century, European imperialism (beyond the brief excursion of Napoleon) had still not fully exploded into the Arab-Islamic world, and consequently the positive aspects of the relationship dominated, with the interest of forward-looking governmental and intellectual elites in Egypt and other provinces of the Ottoman Empire directed toward

29

understanding the well-springs of European progress and success and looking for ways to import and develop them internally. However, with the subjugation by European powers of Algeria in 1870, Tunisia in 1882, Egypt also in 1882, Morocco in 1911, and then most of the Arab east in the wake of the First World War, the conflictual aspect of the relationship rushed to the fore. The conflictual element remained dominant throughout the interwar period and beyond, first within the context of fighting the direct imperialism of Britain and France, and then within the context of fighting Western-backed zionism and the indirect imperialism of the United States.

Throughout most of this long period the paradoxical relationship was maintained, and opposition to European and Western power was pursued through the agency of idealized Western concepts and movements such as nationalism, socialism, and various strands of Marxism. Only within the Islamic movement did there arise a largely non-Western response to the Western threat. But even there, homage was paid to the scientific and technological advances of the West and to the strong contribution that rationalism had made to the advancement of Western economies and societies. This mixed collection of positive and negative attitudes toward the West has marked Arab-European relations throughout the present century; it has dogged efforts to build strong trans-Mediterranean alliances, threatened Westernized elites within the Arab countries, and maintained a high level of hostility and distrust, mixed with envy and respect, across the Muslim-Christian divide.

The nature of the sense of threat and perceived domination is at three levels. At the level of politico-military affairs, direct and indirect intervention in domestic and regional political affairs is seen as designed to weaken the Arab world and protect Western and European interests in oil and Israel. The latter is seen as a Western creation, backed by Western powers in order to keep the Arab world divided at its narrowest point and to serve as a local watchdog for the West in order to strike at local powers that get too strong. In economic terms, all the theories of imperialism and underdevelopment are brought in to describe how the very nature of capitalist center-periphery relations are structured in such a way as to impoverish the developing countries and enrich the industrialized ones. At the cultural level, the Westernization of popular culture through television and radio is also seen as a deliberate attempt to enfeeble and dominate local societies.

3. Attitudes Toward Mediterraneanism

With regard to Mediterraneanism, i.e. a conscious project to develop and build on a distinctly Mediterranean identity, the concept did have its adherents in the Arab world, although it remains highly problematic. In the first half of the 20th century, Mediterraneanism was a fairly integral part of the political philosophy of Egyptian nationalism, Lebanese nationalism, and a number of North African writers.

In the writings of Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid and Taha Husayn in Egypt, the country's historic, dynamic, and positive interaction

31

with the various cultures and civilizations of the Mediterranean world, from Ancient Egyptian and Greco-Roman times onwards, is emphasized. Egypt's Arab, Islamic, and African connections are downplayed in favor of redefining the Egyptian nation along Mediterranean lines. The Mediterranean identification was seen as advantageous in that it enhanced the sense of Egyptian independence through delinkage with the larger Arab and Islamic world, and linked Egypt's identity to a fairly politically neutral category such as the Mediterranean which was neither completely European and Western nor completely divorced from the Arab-Islamic world. It was recognized by these thinkers as well, that the Mediterranean identification would bring Egypt's identity-orientation closer to its real economic interests, for Egypt's economic future was recognized as being dependent on vigorous intra-Mediterranean cooperation and trade; on the other hand, Arab and Islamic nationalism were regarded as being perhaps emotionally and psychologically satisfying but running counter to Egypt's real interests. (see Lutfi al-Sayyid 1937)

Among the theorists of Lebanese nationalism, such as Michel Chiha, Charles Corm, Said Akl, and others, Mediterraneanism was also central. Because of its multi-religious and multi-confessional makeup, and because of its polyglotism and geographic location between East and West, Lebanon was defined, by Chiha for example, as a crossroads, a meeting place, a place of interaction, between East and West, Christendom and Islam, Europe and the Arab world. This mission was dependent on Lebanon's position on the eastern

shores of the main highway between East and West, Europe and the Arab world: the Mediterranean. The country's Mediterranean vocation was mythologized further by an identification with the ancient Phoenicians who flourished along the shores of present day Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, that had their main cities in Tyr, Sidon, and Byblos, and that survived and thrived through mastery of maritime skills on the Mediterranean. (see Chiha 1950, 1952) For these Lebanese thinkers as well, Mediterraneanism was a way to reinforce Lebanese independence, deemphasize links with the Arab and Islamic world, and identify with a politically neutral category that seemed to represent a compromise between full identification with either Europe or the Arab world, East or West, Christendom or Islam.

Among north African intellectuals as well, there was a marked tendency to highlight the specificity of the maghreb as opposed to the mashreq countries and to reinforce the sense of independence of maghreb states from pan-Arab and pan-Islamic claims through an emphasis on the maghreb's special Arab-Berber ethnic mix and its historically close interaction with Europe. The Mediterranean dimension was especially championed by portions of the heavily Francophone maghrebien elites that felt more cultural affinity with the French metropole than with other Arab or Islamic capitals. In all cases, however, and especially in the maghrebien case, this Mediterraneanism was tempered by deep reservations regarding the colonialist and imperialist past and the negative role of key northern Mediterranean countries, most notably France and Italy,

but Spain and Portugal as well, in that past.

Throughout the 20th century, a lukewarm and ill-defined Mediterraneanism has remained a part of the foreign policy discourse of many Mediterranean Arab countries. Largely because of its lack of definition, and its lack of congruence with indigenous cultural, political, and religious categories, it never commanded significant and enthusiastic popular support. At the same time it was directly challenged by the main ideological currents that swept the Arab world: Arab nationalism, Marxism, and Islamism. The first emphasized ties of language and regarded the European powers as altogether separate and hostile national entities; the second, emphasized the imperialist nature of European interests, and the exploitative ambitions of the European industrial powers in the underindustrialized southern and eastern mediterranean countries; the third, of course, emphasized the religious basis of social and political life, and the deep gulf between the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds.

Among many intellectuals today, there is a recognition of the many interests that can be enhanced through Mediterranean cooperation. These include growing environmental concerns that can only be tackled collectively, as well as interests in developing the trans-mediterranean volume of trade, tourism, investment, banking, industrial cooperation, and other forms of business interaction. (Frendo 1989: 232) The reservations with regard to Mediterraneanism revolve around a number of issues.

First, there is wariness that Mediterraneanism might only be

a cover to grant legitimacy and an autonomous identity to the unequal power and economic relations between the industrialized and unindustrialized countries of the Mediterranean. The fear is that Mediterraneanism is being promoted by European powers merely to perpetuate the unsatisfactory status quo across the Mediterranean rather than propose a radical program of cross-Mediterranean reform. (Daher 1993: 45; Ben Yahia 1993: 2)

Second, there is concern that Mediterraneanism may simply be Europe's partial response to the regional economic blocs that are emerging elsewhere in the world; in other words, as the United States is seeking to secure markets and sources of raw material for its economy through the North African Free Trade Agreement, and Japan and the new tigers of South East Asia are seeking to close off the southeast Asian trading area, Europe may be trying to secure North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean as a sphere of economic influence of its own in order to help it compete with the Americans and the Asians.

Third, there is a fear that Mediterraneanism is also partially a European response at the political level to growing American influence in the region and around the world; in other words, Mediterraneanism in this respect may be perceived as a means to carve out a European sphere of political influence in an increasingly American global environment.

Fourth, there are misgivings that while Europe might be preaching Mediterraneanism to its Mediterranean neighbors in North Africa and the Middle East, there are growing political movements

35

in the southern European countries that are whipping up hostility to Arab and Islamic immigrants, insisting on the racial and cultural superiority of Europe, and trumpeting open chauvinism for Christianity over Islam. The events in Bosnia did not help to dispel this latter view.

Fifth, as indicated in preceding paragraphs, their are also many reservations about any thoroughgoing Mediterraneanism running as it does against the two strong ideological currents of nationalism (both local and pan-Arab) and Islamism.

What is to Be Done?

As is evident from the above analysis of contemporary Arab political currents and perspectives on Europe and the Mediterranean, there are numerous problems of misperception and hostility that would have to be broached before the development of a strong and institutionalized Mediterraneanism could be contemplated. The broad objectives of Mediterranean activism, especially at the level of affecting political culture and attitudes, should include some of the following.

First, Mediterraneanism should endeavor to develop a reformist and progressive socio-economic and political content in order to have a solid basis for its appeal. A simple appeal to geographic regionalism or a romanticization of the archaeological past have not been and will not be sufficient to provide an intellectual and ideological basis for Mediterranean cohesion. Moreover, Mediterraneanism as it stands now still represents, for many, a

legitimization of North-South relations that are colored by the colonial past and shot through with massive imbalances and inequalities. (Chesnais 1990: 24-25) For Mediterraneanism to appeal to non-industrialized countries of the Mediterranean, it must offer a new deal, including concessions from Europe, and new opportunities for developing countries, and this must be made clear and must become integral to the thought and agenda of Mediterraneanism.

Second, the call for Mediterraneanism must focus not only on the Southern countries, for it is not only there that resistance to the idea exists; efforts must be equally expended to promote the acceptance of Arab and Islamic persons, values, and religious practices in the concerned southern European countries where racial, cultural, and religious chauvinism are growing. Attention is also due to the European media which now blanket the Arab world and which often project Arab and Islamic stereotypes that are demeaning and repugnant. (Ben Yahia 1993: 8) The culture of Mediterraneanism, if it is to be promoted, must involve adaptation, reform, and acceptance on all shores of the Mediterranean sea.

Third, the various cultures of the basin should intensify their contacts and interaction and look for ways to learn from, and develop understanding of, one another and identify areas of common value, common tradition, common intellectual principles, and common objectives. This can be encouraged through all forms of cultural, educational, artistic, religious, archaeological, and folkloric exchange and cooperation programs. It should include intensive

efforts to introduce European audiences to Arab and Islamic cultures in order to balance the extent to which European and Western culture has been introduced into the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Fourth, meaningful Mediterranean cooperation and cohesion will not develop with the currently deep differences among Mediterranean political and economic systems. Mediterraneanism can only flourish within the framework of (i) liberal legal orders based on respect for human rights and the rule of law, (ii) democratic and pluralistic political orders in which competing currents of thought can coexist peacefully, and (iii) market economies in which intra-Mediterranean interests and institutions can develop gradually and freely without the excessive obstruction of political or ideological elites. In other words, what is needed is an extension of "democratic space" in order to provide the context for growing regional cooperation and integration. (Ben Ali 1994: 7) In this context, support should be afforded to liberal activist groups and other institutions of civil society in the region; encouragement and support should also be extended to liberal political parties and to democratic groups that are actively engaged in the political process. In the economic sphere, encouragement should be given to significant privatization and de-bureaucratization measures in the Arab countries in order to free up local economies and enhance the role of private citizens in determining investment, development, and trade activities.

With regard to Islam, efforts from Europe, involving leading

Christian religious figures and the Vatican, must be redoubled to redefine a healthy and mutually respectful relationship between the two world religious groups. The effects of the First World War, with the defeat of the Ottoman Islamic empire and the abolition of the Caliphate is the Arab-Islamic equivalent of the Germans' Versailles, in that it has provided the seeds of discontent that have threatened the stability of the region ever since. To understand the effects of such developments, imagine the reaction in Europe to the mirror-event of an Arab-Islamic occupation of Spain, France, Belgium, Holland, and parts of Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, followed by the abolition of the Papacy. The depth of the shock and the imbalances across the Mediterranean must be constantly brought to the fore in order that analysts, policy-makers, and opinion-makers can begin to develop the tools to deal with some of the causes and consequences of these dangerous imbalances. Until the Mediterranean community faces some of these very deep-rooted problems, the chances for any meaningful "Mediterranean project" will remain extremely slim.

To conclude, we are far from having a homogeneous and consensual "Mediterranean cultural area." (Pina-Cabral 1989: 399) And since the ideologies, ideals, beliefs, and attitudes of groups and individuals will continue to play a major role in the determination of politics, attention to the crisis areas of this cultural interaction must remain high on the agenda of concerned states and organizations. "Above all, Man is mind," Gramsci says,

and unless we address the concerns, grievances, perceptions, and misperceptions in the minds of all parties around the Mediterranean basin, the Mediterranean project will remain a good idea whose time has not come, and important common Mediterranean interests will remain incoherently realized and insufficiently supported.

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