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Integration in the Arab World: The Institutional Framework

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The contrast is there, clear, rarely disputed and quite depressing. On the one hand the hundreds of thousands of Arabs applauding Nasser or mourning him. On the other, the droning and boring 'activity' of the Arab League of States, the institution created to embody 'the Arab idea'. What does the inelegant building on Khaireddine Pacha street in Tunis have in common with the feverishly militant *'uruba* of the fifties, or with the ideal of Arab unity? The Egyptian *Rayyis* of yesteryear and today's Arab bureaucrat might share a few pieces of vocabulary, a reference to some dusty past, or a common anti-Western discourse. The words might be the same, the spirit could not be. The times, the places, the individuals, the tempo, everything looks different. Who could have thought that the League could be displaced from its Cairo building, symbolically located between the Egyptian Foreign Ministry palace and the popular Midan at-Tahrir? Who could have thought, only a decade ago, of a Tunis-based Arab League, in the very country which had once taken the extraordinary step of freezing its membership in the League, and which had opposed so thoroughly the Nasserist brand of Arab nationalism?

But a closer look would indicate that the discrepancy is much older. Arab nationalists have never really identified with the institution. Arab nationalism was clearly based on the utopian idea of an single Arab state, while the League is the embodiment of another cultural tradition, that of a grouping of mutually independent, sovereign states. This 'original sin' is, in a way, aggravated by another, no less disturbing fact. The Arab League was, at least partially, a British idea while Arab nationalism was rapidly drawn to adopt an increasingly virulent anti-colonial — and particularly anti-British — tone (Goma, 1979).

One distinguished voice in this critical trend is that of Sati' al-

Husry, 'the father of Arab nationalism'. In 1951, al-Husry complained that the League's charter provides for 'a weak and shallow link between the Arabs': 'The League's Council lacks executive power, and its resolutions are not binding' (al-Husry, 1984: 112). But al-Husry was, as always, an optimist. His hope was based on Article 19 of the Charter which leaves the door open for amendments to the Charter, in order to establish stronger bonds among its members. He also hoped to see Arab governments taking advantage of Article 19 which encourages them to sign bilateral or multilateral treaties that strengthen their links beyond the minimal ground established by the League's Charter.

Writing six years later, al-Husry lamented the fact that neither Article 9 nor Article 19 had been used by the newly independent Arab governments. Quite to the contrary, he noted with despair that certain existing Arab bonds had been weakened or eliminated altogether, such as the common economic interests between Syria and Lebanon. He went further, discovering with rage, that relations among Arab states were being established on the basis of 'balance of power'; as if, he says, these Arab states were independent actors.

Al-Husry's impatience with the burgeoning state system became mere anger when this principle was manipulated by the new states in order to serve their own individual interests. He noted that any attempt to establish unity between two Arab states was met with the active hostility of all the others under this recently established and absolutely condemnable principle of *tawazun* (balance).

Al-Husry began his professional career in the Ottoman bureaucracy and his brand of nationalism points to the persisting Arab dilemma *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman legacy. Many Arab *publicises* (Shakib Arslan and his brother 'Adel being the best examples) tried to build bridges between their Ottoman past and the post-1918 realities (Cleveland, 1985), but the mainstream has chosen to repress this past. Arab nationalism was one of the latest 'modern' ideologies to spread in the Empire, contributing to its destruction. Arabs were preceded by the Serbs, the Greeks, the Rumanians, the Bulgarians, the Armenians and, to a large extent, by the Turks themselves who developed a modern form of nationalism years before the inhabitants of their Arab provinces. The Arabs' attachment to the caliphate (a religious barrier), and the lesser Western influence on them (as compared to the European/Christian nationalities which were part of the Empire) explain this bizarre situation, where the dominating nationality becomes relatively aware of its own soul before its dominated dependencies.

Nascent Arab nationalism took on strongly anti-Ottoman overtones. This trend is already visible in a proto-nationalist movement such as the Saudi/Wahhabi one in the mid-eighteenth century. It becomes much clearer in the following century, both in Muhammad Ali's enterprise and in the writings of the Arab Renaissance (*Nahda*). Examples are numerous: in Rifa'a at-Tahtawi's insistence on Egypt being a *Watan* (fatherland) on its own; in 'Abdallah an-Nadim's 'Egypt for the Egyptians' slogan; and in the pamphlets circulated around 1880, in Beirut and Damascus, criticising the Turk officials' impotence and corruption. Al-Kawakibi (1849–1903) is the first real Arab nationalist author of some standing, followed by Az-Zahrawi, Rafiq al-'Azm and others. After 1908 — the triumph of the radical modernists in Istanbul — the anti-Ottoman mood spread to most of the writings, and secret Arab societies developed in the whole area. By 1916 and the beginnings of the 'Arab revolt' against the Ottomans, under the Sharif Husayn of Mecca and with British help, anti-Ottomanism became definitely part (indeed the most important part for some time) of the Arab nationalist ideology (Hourani, 1983; Ad-Duri, 1984).

Arab–Turkish relations recovered quite rapidly after World War I, despite the Turkish military pressure on northern Syria and on Mosul. But the ideal of a united oriental, basically Muslim, state was soon to be severely impeded by the creation of a multitude of small local states. The Arabs' view of their Ottoman past remained therefore quite problematic. They were to develop a nostalgia for a recent past, when the whole region was ruled by a single state, but they could not reconcile this nostalgia with their modern nationalism. In fact, Arab nationalism was too much a prisoner of its anti-Ottomanism to be able to present itself as heir to the Ottoman unitary legacy. This paradox, composed of a mixture of nostalgia and condemnation, was aggravated by the nationalists' fear of awakening the popular religious substratum, that — they felt — could threaten their secularist enterprise. Their embarrassment was all the more clear in view of the fact that theirs was a 'nationalism explicitly secular but having, like everything in the Middle East, a concealed religious element' (Hourani, 1981: 16). On the other hand, they could not fill the 'gap between their active anti-Ottoman past' (the Muhammad Ali heritage in Egypt, the Saudi one in the Arabian Peninsula, and the Hashemite-led Arab revolt in Greater Syria) and the fact that 'behind the vision of Arab unity lay memories of a lost imperial grandeur' (Hourani, 1981: 18).

This unresolved paradox led to an active unitary myth hardly

reconciliable with the state system established (or in some areas merely strengthened) by the European powers after World War I. Hence this deep frustration with the Arab League, a fruit of a modernistic inter-state co-operation ideology, imposed on top of a substratum of nostalgia for a single Arab-Islamic state and the dreams of modern-era Arab nationalists. Between the disintegration of the Empire and the shallow reunification of its Arab parts in a technocratic league, too little time had passed. The quarter of a century separating 1919 from 1945 was too short a period to establish the states carved out of the deceased empire as final loci of loyalty. Being an inter-state organisation, the League indirectly confirmed the resilience of the *tajzi'a* (disarticulation) that took place in 1918, and the explosion of a unified *umma* into what one observer of the Arab League has called 'shrapnel states'.

Representatives of these exploded units were to create the League. The starting point could be found in the policies followed by Anthony Eden (the then British foreign secretary) in order better to organise Arab forces against the Axis powers, most notably in two of his speeches in May 1941 and February 1943. The first Arab initiative came from the Egyptian prime minister, An-Nahhas, who discussed the matter with Syrian and Lebanese representatives. Another initiative was launched by the over-active Iraqi prime minister, Nuri as-Sa'id, in January 1943 in which he proposed: (1) to reunite 'Geographic Syria' (Syria proper, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan) into a single state; (2) to create an Arab League made up of Iraq, a re-united Syria and any other Arab country. The autonomous state of Lebanon's Maronites and a few Jewish enclaves in Palestine would be recognised. During 1943, first Nuri, then the Egyptian government were to follow up this idea, both encouraged by Britain.[1] During these consultations, the Egyptian line prevailed and Nuri was forced to leave aside the Hashemite designs on Syria as a pre-condition for the establishment of the League. The Egyptian inter-state view also won out over Syrian insistence on the establishment of a supra-state confederacy. The Egyptian line was, in fact, favoured by Lebanon, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and was indirectly backed by the British government. It partly explains why Alexandria was chosen as the city where the preparatory committee would meet to create the new entity on September 25, 1944. Six months later, the League's charter was signed (Goma, 1979; Shihab, 1978).

The prevalence of the inter-state view was made manifest in many signs. One of them was the selection of the word *jamia* to name the new unit, wrongly translated into 'League', a much stronger word,

that would have been rendered in Arabic by *Hilf* or *Tahaluf*. This latter word was favoured by Syria and was rejected, together with the favourite Iraqi expression of *Ittihad* (Union). Another detail illustrates this minimalist view: the word 'states' was explicitly added. Hence the transformation of the official name from 'The Arab League' into 'The League of Arab States'. No ambiguity remained. Syrian and Iraqi longings for a federation or a confederacy were thwarted, together with Arab nationalist dreams.

THE LEGAL FOUNDATIONS

The legal framework on which the Arab League's system was built has become a very complex one. The inception document is the 'Protocol of Alexandria' signed on 7 October 1944 by the representatives of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. This protocol established the League as an inter-state organisation whose resolutions are only binding on those states who have voted for them. The protocol left the door open for closer relations, clearly recognised Lebanon as an independent and sovereign state (a Lebanese precondition for joining, in view of Syrian reluctance to recognise it as such) and highlighted the conflict over Palestine as a crucial issue for all Arabs.

Six months later (22 March 1945), the nascent League was given a charter, signed by the five countries represented in Alexandria, now joined by Saudi Arabia and Yemen, selected as co-founding member states. Later, the charter was to be signed by Libya (1953), Sudan (1956), Tunisia and Morocco (1958), Kuwait (1961), Algeria (1962), the YPDR (1967), Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and the UAE (1971), Mauritania (1973), Somalia (1974) and Palestine as full member (1976). The last country to join was Djibouti (1977). The Comores Islands' request to join was discreetly refused (League of Arab States, *Majmu'at*, 1985: 23).

The charter furthermore abridged the objectives fixed in Alexandria. The Arab states were no longer requested to co-ordinate their foreign policies, but the League was established as the principal forum for resolving inter-Arab conflicts (Article 5), and was empowered to help any Arab state against a foreign aggression (Article 6). Resolutions must be passed unanimously, or, when the majority rules are used (mainly on procedural questions), they only bind the majority's member states. Article 8 clearly specifies that no Arab state can challenge the political regime of another state, or try

to undermine it. Article 9 leaves the door open for more substantial forms of co-operation among Arab states but Article 19 adds that, in order to amend the League's charter itself, a two-thirds majority is required. If an Arab state does not agree with an amendment, it can leave the League with no prior notice.

The highest body in the League is its Council. But since the charter did not specify who was to represent the member states in this Council, Arab summits were subsequently considered as Council meetings at the highest level. The Council's resolutions are prepared in the committees. The most important of these is the Political Committee whose existence is not mentioned in the charter but which rapidly became the most important forum for regular consultation on political issues. A treaty signed on 10 May 1953 provides the League with all the usual features of an international organisation such as a legal personality (i.e. the right to own, contract and go before a court), *laissez-passers* and immunities.

Five years later, the region was shaken by Western schemes to 'organise' its security, and a tripartite (France–Britain–US) agreement was being framed to this effect. The League's Council met on April 30, 1950 and adopted a Pact for Mutual Defence and Economic Co-operation. Article 2 in this pact states that any aggression against an Arab country is to be considered as an aggression against them all. The pact explicitly mentions the co-ordination of their defensive capabilities to this effect and the creation of a permanent military committee representing the Arab chiefs of staff. This committee is to prepare contingency and long-term plans to be agreed upon by a Council for Mutual Defence, composed of each country's ministers of defence and foreign affairs. Article 6 adds that this Council's resolutions (and this is an important novelty), could be passed by a two-thirds majority and be binding for all the League's members. The pact is to be considered as having precedence over all other related treaties.

According to Article 10 of this Pact no treaty in contradiction with the pact could be signed by a League member. The Arab states should, on the contrary, adapt their international relations according to the pact's privileged status. Article 10 was, inevitably, used as the grounds for the Arab states' suspension of Egypt's membership after the signing of the Egyptian–Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979. An appendix to the pact provides that, in case of a joint action, the general command is the right of the country which has committed the largest number of soldiers and the greatest amount of weapons to these operations.

The 1950 Pact also provided (Article 8) for the creation of an economic council to supervise Arab co-operation in economic matters. This council became the Economic and Social Council in 1977. But already in 1959 (probably under the influence of the nascent EEC), the League transformed this council into an autonomous entity capable of accepting all Arab countries, including those who preferred to remain outside the defence pact framework. This was probably the first — and largely unsuccessful — step towards isolating economic co-operation from the repeated disruptions caused by political and security considerations (League of Arab States, *Majmu'at*, 1985: 28).

This first step was strengthened in 1980 when, for the first time, an Arab Summit was specially convened in Amman in order to adopt a charter for Joint Economic Action. Syria, Libya and Algeria boycotted the summit, while fourteen Arab countries signed the charter and three other states joined it later on. The charter is remarkable for its militant pan-Arab vocabulary. It explicitly states the existence of an Arab *umma*, which has 'a common destiny and a pre-determined solidarity' and the obligation to provide 'a balanced development, national (pan-Arab) security, liberation, unity and authenticity'. The Arab world is referred to as a *watan* (fatherland), and economic integration is stated as a central goal (League of Arab States, *Majmu'at*, 1985: 65).

The signatories explicitly accepted (Article 1) the 'neutralisation of economic action' by its 'isolation from inter-Arab feuds and political conflicts'. They established the precedence of inter-Arab economic relations over any other such relations and the principle of freedom of movement for Arab capital and Arab labour between their countries. Also adopted were the principles of narrowing the gap between rich and poor Arab countries, of economic planning on a pan-Arab, supra-state level and of regional integration in financial and trade matters as well as Arab participation in the establishment of the then-famous 'New International Economic Order'. The Amman Summit of 1980 also adopted a strategy for joint economic action that goes into specific details. This document established a long set of programmes aimed at developing military industry, human capital, technology transfer, food security, energy, industrialisation and basic infrastructures. A treaty was also adopted at this summit concerning Arab capital investments in the Arab world aimed at encouraging and protecting these investments. This treaty was complemented a year later by another one (ratified only by nine countries) aimed at encouraging inter-Arab trade.

The legal framework also includes a number of other treaties signed under the auspices of the Arab League. The first one (1945) deals with cultural co-operation. A few treaties deal with judicial matters, including extradition. A 1953 treaty (amended many times) created an Arab union for communications. A treaty signed and revised many times between 1945 and 1954 established an Arab Postal Union, another one (1955) created a union of Arab radio stations. In 1956, six Arab countries created the Arab Potassium Company. Thirteen Arab countries (this group does not include Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Morocco and five smaller states) are signatories of a treaty establishing 'economic unity' among them, along the lines of EEC. Another treaty, signed in 1960, provided for the co-ordination of oil policies, but only Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Egypt and Palestine actually ratified it. In 1963, a treaty (signed by seven states) created an Arab shipping company; another (ratified only by Syria, Iraq and Egypt) created an Arab Oil Tanker Company. This latter should not be confused with another, more successful one, created in 1972 by the OAPEC members.

In the mid-sixties, the Arab states began to establish a few sister organisations to the League, along the UN system model. In 1964, the Arab equivalent to UNESCO (ALECSO) was created. Soon heavily bureaucratised, it now has its headquarters in Tunis and a budget that is almost equal to the League's. An Arab Labour Organization (together with an Arab Labour Bureau) followed. Organisations in charge of industrial, agricultural and tourist development were created, as well as a number of authorities and institutes to organise co-operation in nuclear matters, aviation, weights and measures, oil research, desertification, maritime transportation, satellite communications, etc. But only six Arab countries ratified the treaty for inter-Arab Labour migration, with no Gulf states among them. This treaty gives Arab migrant workers the right to move freely to the host country and, when he is there, the same rights that the country gives to its own domestic labour force (Articles 1 and 6).

With the steady flow of oil revenues came the idea of funds organising aid from the rich to the poor states of the region. The first to be created was the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (Kuwait 1968). In the wake of the 1973 war (and oil shock) the Arab summit convened in Algiers created an African sister institution, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, ABEDA (Khartoum) in order to channel Arab aid to black Africa. The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) was created in Abu Dhabi in 1976

along the lines of the IMF, with objectives such as the correction of deficits in Arab balances of payment, stabilisation of exchange rates, encouraging inter-Arab monetary co-operation and the establishment of an Arab ECU, the Dinar.

The Arab world is thus largely equipped with the political, economic, financial and cultural institutions it needs to develop co-operation among its member states and, to an enviable extent, its own integration. Very often, the text reflects reality (like in Marx's *camera obscura*), but viewed upside down. At the beginning, in the 1940s, states — as international entities — seemed too vulnerable and governments were not willing to commit themselves to more than inter-state relations and organisations. More often than not, the treaties' vocabulary was dry and legalistic. Paradoxically, when it appeared that states were more resilient than expected, the treaties' vocabulary became inflated with pan-Arabist grandiloquence. The League's 1945 charter does not speak of an Arab *umma*, but the 1980 Charter on economic co-operation speaks only in these terms. This paradox indirectly shows how governments came to manipulate sincere pan-Arabist feelings to their advantage, quietly becoming experts in mixing isolationalist policies with a pan-Arabist vocabulary.

THE LEAGUE FROM WITHIN

Arab states are not very generous with their League. In the mid-80s, its budget is quite modest (32.4 million dollars in 1986). Like all heavily bureaucratised institutions, the League spends most of its budget on itself. One-sixth of the budget goes to the directorate of personnel and accounting alone. The rest is distributed in the various fields in which the League is supposed to be active. Information takes the lion's share (one-third of the budget), followed by such services as 'Palestine', Arab affairs, economic or military affairs. But in all these fields, the budget is barely sufficient to pay the personnel and routine expenses such as rent and telephone bills. One and a half million dollars a year go to the Boycott of Israel Directorate, which is in charge of the famous 'blacklist' of companies supporting the enemy's war effort (League of Arab States, *At-Tanmiya*, 1985).

Even this modest budget is not covered by the states. Some of them have taken to the annual habit of asking the League's Council to exempt them from paying their share because of their poverty

(Mauritania) or due to special circumstances (Lebanon). Others do not even care to justify their failure to pay. The oil states could easily cover this, and even larger budgets, but they are reluctant to do so, partly so as not to institutionalise the non-paying states' practice but mainly for political reasons (such as their growing interest in other institutions more favourable to their views, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council or the Muslim World Organisation).

The first item on the budget (and by far the most important) is the salaries. There are some 570 League employees including the General Secretary, 6 assistant general secretaries and some 53 directors of departments and units. A careful look shows the extent of bureaucratisation: the number of administrators is far greater than the number of experts, and the number of executives is quite disproportionate to that of workers. An assistant general secretary is paid around 5,000 US$, a senior expert around 3,500 US$ per month. Of these 570 individuals, 97 work in the General Secretary's office. Indeed, around 52 per cent of those employed by the League work in some administrative job directly related to the internal organisation of the League and not in any of its fields of activities. Most of the employment is inter-Arab; only overseas offices can employ local personnel.

The League has 21 offices overseas: 10 in Europe, 6 in the Americas, 2 in Asia and 3 in Africa. Some 185 individuals are employed in these offices. The budget for these offices in 1985/6 was 8.1 million dollars and their job is to represent the Arabs as a unit, and the League, in some influential capitals and with international organisations. But even in these externally-oriented appendices to the League, personnel salaries alone represent 52 per cent of the budget. This leaves relatively little to work with in such expensive cities as New York, Tokyo or Geneva.

The Arab League's high-level personnel generally hold a PhD or at least a BA in some field. Of the 87 individuals belonging to this category, 32 are working in the field of information. Their expertise is quite varied with a clear predominance of jurists (22, or 25 per cent), economists (14, or 16 per cent) and political scientists (8, or 9 per cent). In the lower, third category, jurists (31) also predominate together with those holding degrees in literature (26), business (16), sociology (15) and political science (13), out of a total of 190 individuals.

When the General Secretariat was in Cairo (1945–1979) more than half of the League's employees were Egyptians. After its move to Tunis, the Tunisians became by far the largest group among the

employees. A number of Egyptians (around 50) moved from Cairo to Tunis but the great majority remained in Cairo and were therefore replaced. After the Tunisians, the largest group is now made up of Palestinians. Syrians, Iraqis and Jordanians are well-represented. There are almost no employees from the Arabian Peninsula and no Moroccans. Despite this heavy concentration of employees from a limited number of countries, the employees are expected to have no loyalty except to the League, to be neutral on political issues and to report to the Secretary General (SG) alone. The SG and the directors are given diplomatic status. The employees are named by the SG who (Article 4) should try to see that as many countries as possible are represented in the League's highest ranks (though there is no compulsory quota). Only Arabs can work at the League (League of Arab States, *At-Tanmiya*, 1985; League of Arab States, n.d., Laouiti, 1982).

Geographically, Cairo was the natural base for pan-Arab institutions (the League and ALECSO among others). After 1979, Tunis was chosen thanks to its relatively light weight in inter-Arab politics, because the Gulf countries appreciated its pro-Western stand, and because of its government's lack of regional ambitions. The League's secretariat thus moved to Tunis, together with ALECSO and two smaller organisations. Three economic institutions (the Arab Fund, OAPEC and the Arab Insurance Authority) are in Kuwait, another small country. The AMF and two smaller institutions are in the UAE, while ABEDA and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development are headquartered in Khartoum. Four technical pan-Arab organisations are based in Amman. The League's official guide to the pan-Arab legal framework actually includes 24 organisations including the League itself. Almost all these units are based in small or even marginal Arab states with four exceptions (two in Baghdad, one in Damascus and one in Riyadh). This geographical distribution is actually an interesting symptom of the diffusion of power within the Arab regional subsystem since 1967. Many poles are in competition, but they have to meet in small, modest capitals to try to find a common ground (*Dalil*, 1986).

Egyptian domination of the League was best illustrated by the personality of its secretaries general. The first, Abd ar-Rahman 'Azzam, was a former minister with strong Arab-Islamist views. He was followed in 1952 by another Egyptian, Abd al-Khaleq Hassuna, who remained in his position for more than twenty years. He was followed by a Nasserist official and a former Egyptian minister for foreign affairs, Mahmud Riyad. Riyad offered his resignation in

March 1979 when the League's Council decided to transfer the secretariat to Tunis. He was succeeded by a former Tunisian minister of information, Chadli Klibi. 'Azzam had to fight hard to establish the rules of the game and to impose the secretariat's interpretation of the charter against the states' encroachments. Hassuna was a low-profile bureaucrat who allowed his own government to dominate the League for more than two decades. Riyad tried, on the contrary, to play a political role, notably in inter-Arab conflicts, in co-ordination with the Egyptian government but with some autonomy. Finally, Klibi redefined the League's mission in a way that gave precedence to external information on inter-Arab politics. This attitude could be explained by the present Secretary General's own lack of familiarity with these politics, by the lack of support from his government, and by the multiplication and hardening of inter-Arab conflicts far beyond the League's capacity for dealing with them. One must also remember that by 1979, when the Tunis era began, many member states were systematically undermining the League's position by creating and/or strengthening other regional, and inevitably rival, institutions.

RIVAL FRAMEWORKS

From the very inception of the League, it was clear that it could not pretend to be the sole and exclusive regional grouping. The door to closer co-operation among a few Arab countries was left open by the Charter. On the other hand, participation in the UN system encouraged relations beyond the limits of the Arab world. Regionally, it was hoped that no overlapping or institutional rivalries would occur. Recent history, however, shows that besides the persistent state challenge to the efficiency of pan-Arab institutions, dissatisfaction with the League and other political considerations have led some Arab countries to look for parallel and clearly rival frameworks.

The religious challenge to the official secularist, modern definition of the League was the first to be felt. The League's first general-secretary, 'Azzam Pasha, who came from a background where pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism were close to each other, if not the one and the same trend, would have liked to use the Islamic tones more openly, had it not been for the opposition of Lebanese, Syrian and the nationalist-secularists in general. Together with Muhammad Ali 'Alluba and Muhammad Salih Harb, 'Azzam had

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been a member of the second Egyptian government formed by 'Ali Mahir, with an openly-expressed pan-Arab ideology. 'Azzam was Mahir's ideologue and his adviser on the Palestine question during the famous London conference of 1938. In his writings, he clearly linked the project of Arab unity to the unified Arab-Islamic empire of the past, and Arab nationalism to the mission of Prophet Muhammad twelve centuries earlier, that is 'to save the world'.

But Nasserism was soon to dominate Arab nationalism (and therefore the League's official ideology). At the beginning, Nasser was rather vague on his ideological preferences. In his *Philosophy of the Revolution*, he singled out three equally important circles in which Egypt was to develop her foreign policy: Africa, the Arab world and the Muslim world. Of the latter he said 'How could we ignore the existence of an Islamic world to whom we are bound by links of religious doctrine as well as by the reality of history' (Nasser, 1954: 12). Nasser, not unlike the 1930s mainstream, viewed the Arab world as part of a larger Muslim world, a view that was clearly expressed by thinkers such as Muhammad Rashid Rida or by Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim brethren.

It was his early confrontation with the Brotherhood and the clearly pro-Western path chosen by many Islamic countries of his time (notably Iran and Pakistan), that drew Nasser and consequently the Egyptian-dominated League's secretariat, into the adoption (around 1955–56) of a much clearer nationalist-secularist attitude. Full-blown in 1958 during the unity with Syria episode, this ideology was strengthened by the Saudi-Iranian attempt in the 1960s to replace the Egypt-dominated Arab League with a Western-oriented Islamic one. In fact, the Muslim World League was to be established in 1962 with clearly pro-Saudi tenor, illustrated by the selection of a Saudi base (Jiddah), a Saudi chairman and general secretary and an annual meeting in Mecca during the pilgrimage month. The challenge to the Arab League's ideology was indirectly included in the Jiddah-based organisation's insistence on 'Islam as being a bond that supersedes nationalist loyalties'. The Arab world is presented as just part of a larger world (the Islamic *umma*), while the Palestine question is 'at its foundation, a struggle between Islam and its enemies'. This policy also inspired the various attacks on the League's alignment with Nasserist Egypt that were printed in many pro-Saudi papers of that time, notably in *al-Hayat* (Beirut).

The Muslim League was soon to appear too weak and too feebly organised to face the Arabist challenge. Hence the idea of an Islamic Pact, organised this time as an inter-governmental organisation. The

call for an Islamic summit came from an Iranian-Saudi meeting in late 1965. But Nasser's reaction was as tough as usual: 'The reaction in the Arab world has allied itself with colonialism in order to destroy the Arab nationalist idea'. He added 'The Islamic Pact or Conference is a colonialist venture'. This attitude froze the nascent Islamist idea for a while, but it re-emerged in the wake of the 1967 war, in view of Egypt's devastating defeat and the ensuing new balance of power among Arab states. Both Jordan and Saudi Arabia were now behind the idea and an Islamic organisation was officially established in 1969, in the wake of a bizarre Israeli attack on the Dome Mosque in Jerusalem. After many meetings, the organisation's charter was adopted in 1972. Forty-two states (including all the Arab League's members) joined the organisation.

A *second* challenge to the Arab institutional framework came from politically-inspired groupings which tended to let the East/West conflict supersede the pan-Arab nationalist ideology. In the first period of the League's life (1945–1958) this challenge basically came from the two Hashemite regimes, established in Jordan and Iraq, which were unhappy with the increasingly anti-Western line adopted by the Cairo-based League. These two regimes were clearly encouraged by the West, notably in the tripartite declaration of 1950 and even more in the 1955 Baghdad Pact, founded upon Turkish-Iraqi-Pakistani military co-operation and backed by the West. The Eisenhower Doctrine of 1957 was another illustration of the intrusion of the East/West conflict into the Arab sub-system. Later challenges to the Arab framework came from some radical Arab countries' alliance with newly-Marxist Ethiopia, or from the Syrian-Libyan support for Iran in the Iraq-Iran war, at the expense of Arab Iraq. The most serious challenge, however, was to come from the very country that had used and dominated the pan-Arab framework for so many years: Egypt. It cannot be doubted that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty constitutes an absolute repudiation of the Charter of the Arab League and of the 1950 inter-Arab Defence Pact. Arab reaction to this Egyptian behaviour was harsh: Egypt was excluded. Sadat reacted by unsuccessfully trying to establish a shallow 'League of Arab and Islamic Peoples' to support him. This League rapidly proved to be stillborn.

These successive failures did not prevent Washington from continuing to seek an ideologically-organised grouping that would replace pan-Arabism with a local reflection of the East/West conflict. After the Baghdad Pact and the Eisenhower Doctrine, Kissinger, Brzezinski and Alexander Haig all tried to establish a sort of

strategic-ideological understanding in the region, which would divide the Arab states into radicals and moderates in order to mobilise the latter against 'the Soviet threat'. Haig even thought of 'a strategic consensus' which would include not only Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, but also Israel.

Names might change but this US view remains basically the same. Arab states do not have, in the Arab idea *per se*, enough of a substance to build a strong grouping. This idea could actually be ignored; states do exist and their governments in the world, like so many other governments, are compelled to choose between East and West. It is not by chance that Nasser was, at the same time, an active Arabist and a leader in the non-alignment movement, two different ways of expressing the same position. Instead of choosing between Moscow and Washington, the Arabs can choose to be themselves, as Arabs, and aliens to the East/West conflict. Arabism was thus associated with opposition to bloc politics, and consequently to the US, precisely because Washington had much more to lose from such an attitude than Moscow (not to mention the US support for Israel). In his way, M.H. Heikal (1978) had expressed this conflict as a confrontation between an Arab vision based on history, culture and solidarity and a US vision of the Arabs made of pure geo-strategic criteria. But one could put it in more theoretical terms: the intrusion of a superpower into any regional sub-system inevitably leads to new political cleavages among the member states or to the deepening of the existing ones, to the polarisation of local actors along inter-national (i.e. extra-regional) lines, and consequently to the weaken-ing of regional co-operation and/or the framework of integration.

A *third* challenge to the Arab framework comes from local groupings of Arab states, organised along lines of local geographical proximity. The Arab League's charter encourages such groupings, though Lebanon was anxious to have its independence (from Syria) clearly stated in the Alexandria Protocol. In 1961, the League was pushed by the Egyptian government to condemn the Iraqi attempt to annex Kuwait and the League's secretariat has equally welcomed the numerous attempts at unity which have been made by various Arab states (notably the ever-unionist Libya). It has also warmly greeted the local sub-groupings of Arab states.

These sub-groupings are basically four. The first one concerns the Maghreb states, for which the French-organised conference of North Africa could be considered a precedent. In 1958, the representatives of three Maghrebi parties (the Moroccan Istiqlal, the Algerian FLN and the Tunisian Destour) met in Tangiers, where a

federal union of the three states was stated as an objective. The constitutions of the three countries mention their belonging to the Maghreb with no further commitment to institutionalise it. A few co-ordination committees do exist within the Maghreb, including a permanent one based in Tunis. But the whole idea remains rather theoretical, notably in view of the Algerian-Moroccan feud, the erratic Libyan policy, Tunisia's attachment to its independence and the Western Saharan problem.

The second sub-group includes the states of the Nile Valley. During the Nasser era, this idea was generally frozen, mainly because of Sudanese sensitivity about possible Egyptian domination. But in the seventies, both Sadat (Egypt) and Nimeiry (Sudan) paid much more attention to it. In 1974, many common institutions were established, including an economic council and a joint parliament. But the revival of the South-Sudanese rebellion and the overthrow of the Nimeiry regime led to a downgrading of the idea.

The third sub-group includes the Fertile Crescent states. There is indeed a Lebanon-based party, founded by Antun Sa'adeh, which calls precisely for the unity of this area in one 'pan-Syrian nation'. The idea was, however, discredited by its association in the 1940s and in the 1950s with British-Hashemite schemes directed against both Syrian-Lebanese republicanism and Egyptian influence in the region.

The fourth, and possibly most successful, sub-group is the one formed by the six petro-monarchies of the Gulf, i.e. the Gulf-Cooperation Council (GCC). The council is based on numerous previously unsuccessful attempts, generally initiated by Britain or with British support. Launched in 1981, it has since been institu-tionalised with headquarters in Riyadh and a Kuwaiti General Secretary. Summits of the six countries have been held regularly since then and a few agencies have been created to carry out resolu-tions on economics, education, security and other fields. A certain degree of military co-operation and weapons standardisation has been achieved. The six countries have also agreed upon an almost unified attitude towards the Iraq-Iran war, though this unity is often the victim of individual deals with one or the other of the two belligerents. This very relative success is basically due to a high degree of similarity in the social fabric, political institutions and ideological vision in the six states. It is also explained by the deep feeling of vulnerability they share vis-à-vis poorer, more densely populated and politically active neighbouring states.

The Arab League's General Secretary has welcomed the creation

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of the council, and President Bourguiba of Tunisia considered it an excellent model to be followed in the Maghreb. The GCC tries to present itself as a step towards Arab unity and a model for the pan-Arab organisation.[2] However, both Iraq and the Yemen were unhappy with their exclusion while other Arab governments felt that this council was meant to isolate a *'club des riches'* from the poorer remainder of the Arab world. It is indeed difficult to think how this council would have been established at all if its six members were not six conservative, rich and vulnerable states; if Iraq were not busy fighting Iran; and if Egypt had not been isolated by the Camp David agreements. The basic criteria for evaluating this local grouping's relation to the Arab framework were the role it would play in resolving the inter-Arab conflicts, its treatment of Arab nationals and its participation in the development of the whole Arab world. In the first six years of its existence, the GCC did not achieve much on any one of these three issues, and consequently did not greatly improve its image in the rest of the Arab world. One thing it did achieve was the institutionalised, regular, consultation among the GCC heads of state, while pan-Arab summitry was running into impasse.

ON THE USE OF SUMMITS

Summitry was not such a common practice in the wake of World War II. In the Arab world, some leaders would simply have refused to see some others, or would have not felt safe outside their palaces. It took a few years before bilateral summits became a practice, and rather longer before the idea of putting together all Arab heads of state under one roof became practical. This was not only due to poor communications, though national airlines were still non-existent in some countries and air travel hazardous. The time for such an event was simply not ripe. In the 1950s, for example, the idea that some thrones were to crumble was widespread and it would have been a great error to suddenly provide legitimacy to a regime doomed to disappear. because a summit necessarily helps in strengthening all regimes' legitimacy through their recognition by the governments of other (especially hostile) states.

By the mid-sixties, the radical regimes had experienced enough problems and the conservative ones had shown enough resilience to make such a gathering possible. Dreams of rapid unity were thwarted by a breakdown of the Egyptian-Syrian unity in 1961. The conservatives (Yemen, Sudan, Tunisia) were eager to show that they

too had teeth and there was a feeling that the newly independent Maghrebi states should be more intimately integrated within the Arab family. Hence Nasser's invitations to all Arab heads of state to come to a first summit meeting in Cairo. The Arab League offered the moral framework but nothing in its charter provided for such an event. The summit's highly political character also explains why the League's role has always been marginal. Arab summits were soon to become part of inter-Arab politics, almost a routine yearly event. Thirteen summits have taken place since 1964. But each one's meaning was always altered by contingent political considerations.

In the first decade, the main debate was almost exclusively centred around the Arab-Israeli conflict. This conflict was at the same time a useful pretext to convene the summit, as well as the very substance of any pan-Arab stand. Israel's attempt to divert the Jordan river waters facilitated the convening of the two first summits in 1964. A pan-Arab military command was created and the PLO was established during this period, soon to be interrupted by the stunning defeat of 1967. The fourth summit meeting, in Khartoum, was crucial in giving back some confidence to the Arab world and in re-unifying the Arabs around three famous NOs: to peace, to negotiations, to the recognition of Israel. Two successive summits in Rabat and Algiers confirmed this stand, while preparing for the 1973 war. This was followed, in 1974, by a new summit in Rabat where the PLO was recognised as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, a penalty for Jordan's refusal to participate in the 1973 war.

But with this summit in 1974, the very basis upon which the heads of state used to meet disappeared. Egypt soon signed the Sinai-II agreements, followed by the Camp David accords and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaties. In 1975 the war in the Sahara erupted to set Algeria and Morocco at odds; Iraqi-Syrian relations became very tense; the Lebanese war began in 1975. Meanwhile, the oil countries (most of them geographically peripheral and politically conservative) were too busy recycling their petro-dollars to be really drawn to these 'old' practices. After 1974, the resolution of inter-Arab conflicts, instead of being a major side-effect of the summits, became the only real point on the agenda. Some Arab countries were not ready to attend these summits or even to abide by their resolutions. Others stopped investing in them: they came to these summits simply because the others were there, or even chose to boycott them.

Despite this disintegration of the Arab system, the Arab summits succeeded (Baghdad 1978) in stating a clear policy of refusal of the

Egyptian-Israeli accords, and in launching (Amman 1980) an Arab development decade. But other factors led to a gradual disintegration of these stands. Countries such as Iraq, Jordan and the PLO soon re-established their links with Cairo, while the Amman resolutions became dead letters. The attempt to devise a joint Arab stand concerning the Palestinian issue (Fez 1982) was destroyed by the militant American refusal. Still able to oppose (Baghdad 1978) and to propose (Fez 1982), Arab summits were impotent in keeping Arab ranks even minimally united. In the mid-1980s the mere convening of a summit seems to have become very difficult.

The Egyptian defection partly explains this impotence, though the Baghdad summit demonstrated that the Arab heads of state could meet in the absence of Egypt, and even against it. Oil has developed what one could call 'Gulf isolationism' *vis-à-vis* pan-Arab needs, feuds and institutions. Inter-Arab and civil wars became too costly, too long, and too intractable to be settled during a rapid conciliation of two leaders within the walls of a conference room. In the last days of his life, Nasser could still try summitry against the civil war in Jordan, and be relatively successful in negotiating an honourable way out for the two main protagonists if not a real end to the confrontation (1970). In 1976, summitry could still offer some legitimacy for Syria's entry into Lebanon, negotiated earlier at a Riyadh mini-summit convened thanks to Saudi mediation. But since Baghdad (1978), summits have been convened and met while some heads of state persisted in refusing to talk to each other. It is true that the Arab sub-system has been heavily penetrated by foreign forces. It is also true that the issues at stake in Lebanon, in the Shatt al-'Arab or between Egypt and the Arab world are too important to be brushed aside in order to have a superficial reconciliation.

In analysing Arab summitry, the personal factor must also be taken into consideration. Some heads of state have been there for ten, fifteen or even twenty-five years without interruption. They know each other quite well and, in many cases, have intimately linked their policies to the struggle for the elimination of another country's regime. How could Assad meet with Saddam Hussein or with Yasser Arafat; how could Qadhafi meet with leaders he has spent his time insulting? By the 1980s the lack of renewal in the Arab leadership (sometimes falsely called stability), has led to a mixture of pesonal cum political enmities which have kept a tight grip on pan-Arab politics. Though this mixture is not the sole explanation for the sub-system's impotence, it seriously hampered efforts at reconciliation among leaders and re-activation of the pan-Arab

institutions, mainly because everybody in the Arab world knew about it and because leaders became the very prisoners of this knowledge.

ASSESSING THE LEAGUE'S PERFORMANCE

Many opinion surveys in the Arab world have asked the Arabs how they view the League. The answers are systematically negative. In the oft-quoted survey conducted by S.E. Ibrahim in 1977, it appeared that 78.5 per cent of the respondents were not happy with the minimal inter-Arab link embodied by the League (Ibrahim, 1980). In a poll conducted by an Arab weekly magazine in 1986, only 3 per cent of the respondents thought that the League had succeeded in representing the Arabs (*Al-Majalla*, 1986). This frustration, as I have said at the beginning, was born with the Arab League itself. The League has survived, and so have the frustrations.

A posteriori explanations for this failure are numerous. Some still insist on 'the original sin'. Ahmad Tarabayn, for example, thinks that 'the League was not, at its inception, a real step towards some form of unity. It was, on the contrary, an antidote to the Hashemite-inspired schemes for domination and a way to maintain the state system's status quo' (Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1983: 66). This explanation consequently goes further than to lament the failure of the Arab League to unite the Arabs. It views it, on the contrary, as an obstacle before this unity.

There are, on the other hand, those who think that the League has accomplished a great deal. It is the way General Secretaries speak of their achievements. There are also those who think that, after all, the League has kept alive an Arabs' framework for consultation and reconciliation, if not for actual joint action. In this perspective, the League is just a mirror of the Arab lack of solidarity as well as of their continuous attachment to the Arabist idea. Some take the argument a bit further: discussing the call for the adoption of the majority rule in the League's resolution-making process, one Arab ambassador had this answer: '4,000 resolutions were adopted by the League since its creation; 80 per cent of them, though adopted by unanimous vote, were never applied'. His conclusion is logical: there is no need to establish majority rules, since even when unanimity is possible it remains ineffective (Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1983: 94). His more serious, and final, comment goes further. All calls for a supra-

state entity are absolutely erroneous. Why should states give up part of their sovereignty, to whose interest and in pursuit of what objectives? In other words, if Arabs are not ready for a higher level of co-operation, why entrust the League with more power?

Other observers, more or less prisoners of quantitative methods, came out with bizarre conclusions. One Egyptian scholar has studied the League's efficiency in the resolution of inter-Arab conflicts. His method is based on a set of carefully weighted variables (number of persons killed in the conflict, visits by the League's representatives to the field, etc.). He found that the League was extremely successful in resolving Lebanon's civil war, the Iraq-Kuwait conflict (1961) or the repeated inter-Yemeni hostilities (Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1983: 184). To be fair to the author of such amazing ideas, one has to say that the League has often resembled, and even bettered the UN on a larger level, as the place where agreements already struck in bilateral talks are, in a sense, given an official long-lasting stamp. However, there remains the fact that the League's impotence in resolving inter-Arab conflicts has become legendary, precisely because Arab governments so often remind the world that they form a single nation.

Those who defend the League use other arguments. Jamil Matar has remarked that the General Secretariat has always worked for Arab unity, though the charter did not empower it with this mission. He also remarked that most projects for economic integration were initiated by the League's agencies, not by the member states (*Al-Qawmiyyah*, 1979: 486). This view is fair as far as Riyad's years as General Secretary are concerned. Before him, the General Secretariat had quietly accepted a subservient role as the secular hand of the Egyptian government. After 1979 and the move to Tunis, the General Secretariat, for a variety of subjective and objective reasons, tended to content itself with an informative and propaganda role.

The League has actually had two functions: to help the Arabs defend themselves against foreign domination (liberation, security, independence) and to help the Arabs unite their ranks (co-ordination, integration, unity). How can its performance be assessed on these two issues?

The defence-liberation function was central from the very inception of the League, particularly on the Palestinian question. The League's members continued the pre-1945 Arab expression of solidarity with the Palestinians, made it official and opposed the Partition Plan before and after it was adopted in the UN. In 1950,

they took the important step of forbidding any individual state to deal with Israel, an act that would lead to the immediate exclusion of that state. This attitude was slightly amended in 1982 at the Fez conference. The League was also instrumental in bringing the PLO into existence (1964), in recognising it as the sole representative of the Palestinians (1974) and in giving it full membership (1976); all this helped it to be accepted worldwide. The League also established the Boycott of Israel bureau (headquarters in Damascus), which had some effect on Israel's international economic relations. Finally, the League did play a role in setting the standard for the level of military Arab participation in the conflict. It was within its premises that the Arab governments decided, in April 1948, to commit their own troops in support of the Palestinians. It was also within the League that Arab reaction to the Israeli diversion of the Jordan river's waters took shape and in the League's framework that pan-Arab support for the military Syrian-Egyptian initiative in 1973 was organised.

These actions did not liberate Palestine. Did the League do the least it could do in view of the real attitudes of the member states? The answer would tend to be yes. When Mahmoud Riyad decided to write his memoirs, they were almost exclusively devoted to the conflict with Israel. There is even some frustration (Lebanese, Iraqi, Sudanese, etc.) that the League's activities have been too dominated by the Palestine question and by the Palestinians. But it is also true that only something like this issue would have been able to unite the Arabs, and therefore give the League a *raison d'être*.

This was all the more so after almost all Arab states became independent. In its first two decades, the League could still draw attention to the independence of Lebanon and Syria (1945), to the withdrawal of British troops from Egypt (1945–54), to the independence of Libya and particularly to the struggle against the French presence in North Africa. In fact, the fifties were marked by a consistent anti-French attitude that substantially helped to convince France of the regional cost of its presence in the Maghreb. A similar line was taken against Britain before the independence of South Yemen.

These anti-colonialist and anti-Israeli stands greatly helped in making the League a spokesman for the Arabs. But when one turns to the organisation of Arab ranks, the performance looks very poor. The League is clearly inefficient in resolving inter-Arab conflicts. Its Council often meets days after the UN Security Council has taken a resolution on the same topic. During the Cairene period, a green

light from the Egyptian government was more often than not a pre-condition. It took the Council some six months before looking into the Lebanese civil war in 1975.

In establishing co-operation, the League has often taken the initiative, notably in the economic and cultural fields. The set of treaties signed under its auspices is quite impressive. Applied, they would have created a very high level of pan-Arab integration. This obviously is not the case. The League has prepared detailed projects, has pursued increasingly precise objectives and has tried, as far as possible, to isolate economic and cultural issues from the persistent threat of political instability. But this was not enough to convince the Gulf states that they should treat Arab migrant workers in a more civilised way, nor Syria that it should isolate the Iraqi oil pipeline issue from its conflict with Iran, nor the oil countries to invest in the poorer ones.

Should the legal framework be amended? This could indeed be done, but would be of very little help. The unanimity condition is not the major obstacle, but the lack of implementation even of unanimously voted resolutions. The charter has provided two conflict-resolution methods (mediation and arbitration) but nobody has forbidden the Secretariat from using other means. The charter did not speak of Arab summits, and did not mention the existence of a political committee, but both are now facts. The charter did not specify what constitutes aggression and did not provide for automatic solidarity with a state that is victim of aggression. But this vague wording did not prevent the Council from discussing all kinds of conflicts. The charter did not give the General Secretary a political role, but in practice, he was largely able to have one, when he wanted to.

The problem is therefore not in the bureaucracy (generally better than that of many states), nor in the charter, nor in the budget. It is in the discrepancy we mentioned, at the very beginning, between the dream of unity and the reality of inter-Arab politics. Arab regimes have been established within the framework of independent states. Most of these regimes would be threatened by a higher level of integration in the Arab world. And they clearly, systematically, oppose this integration even when the state religion is Arab nationalism. Traditional Arab nationalist thought has run into an impasse, because it was unable to recognise the existing states, whatever their origins, as resilient political units. It is still the prisoner of an unbridgeable gap between dream and reality. On the other hand, statist ideologies are still unable to convince the Arabs

that the present states are resilient against all kinds of challenges, or that there is no possible loyalty beyond the state borders. In fact, both nationalism and isolationism (*qawmiyya* and *qutriyya*) seem to be in a historical impasse.

Let us imagine that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, some Italians were struggling for the re-unification of Italy as a single state while others were looking for integration within a European framework. The two projects would have hampered each other and an impasse would have been the likely outcome. This dilemma is still real in the Arab world. Nobody is really with the state, nobody is very hopeful about Arab nationalism. Islam, as long as it is viewed as a regime ideology, and as a way to change a domestic power structure, is hardly an answer to this dilemma. In fact, both pan-Arab, inter-state institutions and Arab nationalism as an ideology have been solidly monopolised by the existing regimes. Is it unrealistic to think that a way out is in some form of liberation from the Arab governments' domination, if not of the inter-Arab institutions, at least of the Arab idea itself?

NOTES

1. Here is how An-Nahhas presented the idea to the Egyptian Senate, acknowledging British influence, Egypt's ambitions and the inter-state view, that is meant to confirm the post-war *status quo*.

> When Mr Eden made his statement, I thought about it and concluded that the best way to achieve it is to let the various Arab governments take care of it. I thought that the Egyptian government should take an official initiative by consulting other Arab governments unilaterally. Then Egypt will try to coordinate these different views as much as possible. Egypt will then invite Arab representatives to discuss the issue collectively. If there is an agreement, Egypt will then convene a meeting in Egypt, chaired by the Egyptian prime minister, to this effect. (Al-Hasani, 1978: 150)

2. 'Abdallah Bishara, the GCC Secretary General, has tried, in a paper published in a number of Arab periodicals (including the GCC's own quarterly *At-Ta'awun*) to show that GCC would play a leading role in achieving Arab unity, despite its contribution to the demise of old pan-Arabist concepts (Bishara, 1986). Arabist comments on this presentation were in general, quite sceptical.