Israel & the Arab World: From Conflict to Coexistence
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Introduction

It is widely believed that neither Israel nor its predecessor, the Jewish political entity in mandatory Palestine (*yishuv*), has ever been accepted by Middle Eastern Arabs as a partner worthy of dialogue. Due to the popular historical rhetoric of both pan-Arab aspirations and the annihilation of Israel, the highly publicized nature of military confrontations, and the seemingly pivotal role of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the political and historical trajectories of the region, it is understandable that an outsider looking into the region might assume that no sign of reconciliation between Israel and the Arab world ever existed until 1979, if at all. This paradigmatic approach has yielded a dichotomized understanding of the structure of the region in which the Arab Middle Eastern nations exist as a cohesive "bloc" fused not only by their common heritage, but also by their opposition to the very existence of Israel. In accordance with this dialectical understanding, the Jewish goal of attaining sovereignty has often been portrayed as a political interest to which no Arab could ever agree.

As appealing and pervasive as this belief may be, it is simply untrue; no such "bloc," either ideologically or territorially, currently exists, and historical objections to Israel's existence have been muted in today's world. The objective of this article is therefore to dispel this popular but incorrect myth by illustrating the developments which led to the destruction of unitary Middle Eastern Arab "bloc" thinking following the Six Day/June 1967 war and the ensuing evolution of localized conflicts dictated by Arab Middle Eastern leaders' perceived interests rather than pan-Arab ideology. The thesis of this article is that in spite of the grassroots enmity toward Israel, almost all Arab leaders have formulated some sort of functioning cooperative relationship with Israel to advance their national or personal interests. However, due to the Arab public consensus against such policy, all contacts until the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty were kept secret and, even today, a significant majority of such communication is unknown to the general public.

This article will argue that three regional developments have led to immense, integral changes to the structure of Middle Eastern foreign policy toward Israel:

- The demise of pan-Arabism in the wake of the 1967 War
- The emergence of the Arab nation-state and its salience in identity formation
- The gradual disintegration of the monolithic Arab-Israeli conflict

As detailed below, relations between Israel and are neighbors is now characterized by localized conflicts dictated by the personal and national interests of each country rather than a unitary ideology that rejects Israel as a viable political entity. The current formation of policy vis-à-vis Israel within this regional structure demonstrates that Israel is no longer an unwelcome pariah (if it ever was), and indicates that Israel may indeed establish a sovereign existence amongst its Arab neighbors.

The Demise of Pan-Arabism in the Wake of the 1967 War

One of the most formative, influential ideologies to take root in the Middle East was pan-Arabism. Prior to 1967, pan-Arabism was a widely accepted mantra all over the Arab Middle East, and pan-Arab sentiment was harnessed effectively by Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser.

Against the background of corrupt and impotent regimes, the 1952 Egyptian revolution and its charismatic, idealistic leader, Nasser, offered Arabs an appealing alternative. Nasser's reign included, after a short period of flirting with the West and secret indirect peace contacts with Israel, an attempt to unite his people first, and the rest of the Arab grass roots community later, under one ideological flag. These attempts encompassed terrorist activities against Israel between 1953 and 1956, the nationalization of the Suez Canal from British hands in 1956, and significant material support for the Algerian underground (FLN - Front de Libération Nationale) military efforts against French imperial forces from 1954 to 1962. These moves led to the tripartite, British, French, and Israeli, military campaign of October 1956. That round of hostilities was concluded by all three forces retreating from Egyptian territory, thus enabling Nasser to claim victory. Nasser agreed with the UN Secretary General that a United Nations Emergency Force would be deployed along the Israeli-Egyptian borders. Not surprisingly, most of this agreement was not publicized or even outlined at all, paving the way to the Egyptian eviction of UNEF in May 1967, heralding yet another round of military confrontation.[1]

Nasser's success in the mind of the Arab World only added to the accomplishment of his national and personal goal: to fortify the role of the Arab leader that he had developed. Even before launching his revolution Nasser identified Egypt as the center of three concentric circles: Arab, Muslim, and African.[2] However, he devoted most of his efforts toward the first circle, the Arab, in an attempt to become synonymous with pan-Arab nationalism.[3] In Nasser's view, legitimate regimes in the region had to be at the same time Arab, Sunni, Republican, socialist, and non-aligned in their

foreign policy. This meant that most, if not all of these regimes, became targets of subversive activity. The people of the Arab nations took to Nasser's pan-Arab ideology, and in response to that increased prestige, Nasser began preaching against the West and its local allies, be it Israel or any Arab monarchy. It could be argued that this ideology did indeed create a cohesive "bloc" of Arab states opposed not only to the existence of Israel, but also to Middle Eastern states which did not fit those criteria. However, even that vision of Arab solidarity underwent several transformations prior to the 1967 War, and it disappeared completely in the aftermath of that war.

Politically, Nasser's stance translated into the undermining of regimes that did not agree with his ideology, particularly the monarchies of [Iraq](), [Jordan](), and [Saudi Arabia](), which in turn led to unintended outcomes quite contradictory to his intentions. Contrary to his hopes, Nasser could not bring about the downfall of these monarchies in spite of his subversive efforts. The new republican regime in Iraq (1958), for instance, branded itself as the toughest competitor to Nasser for a hegemonic position in the Arab world. Another adverse consequence of Nasser's efforts produced the feeling among pro-Western regional countries of being besieged – a feeling too well known to Israel. Thus, as a direct result of the Egyptian efforts Israel was able to establish itself among the threatened Arab countries. In this way, the Egyptian initiated 1962 revolution in Yemen and the subsequent Egyptian air attacks on Saudi Arabia only served to solidify the resistance of his enemies into an efficient, yet highly secretive military coalition between Israel and Saudi Arabia. Both countries continued their public diplomatic conflicts, especially at the UN, but coordinated support for the pro-Saudi Royalists in [Yemen]() and shared knowledge regarding the Egyptian army unhindered during the civil war until 1967.

A similar and simultaneous process brought [Israel]() and [Jordan]() into such an alliance as well. After the final failure of the peace negotiations between the two countries in 1950, no more contacts continued; however, Jordan resumed its dialogue with Israel in 1960 due to Nasser's subversion against the Hashemite regime. Oddly enough, of all the players in the region, Israel included, Jordan was in the most precarious position during the 1960s, exposed to growing internal and external threats to its regime and to the king personally. King Hussein had reason to fear the pro-Nasserite regime in [Syria](), which joined with Egypt as the United Arab Republic in 1958 and added to Jordan's encirclement by anti-monarchy regimes. The king also felt threatened by the republican regime in Iraq. Surrounded by hostile regimes, Hussein was forced into two uneasy alliances: one, with his perennial enemy, the dynasty that had robbed his family of the Muslim holy places in the mid-1920s - the Saudi Kingdom to the south, and second, with Israel to his West. The secession of Syria in 1961 from the short-lived U.A.R did not alter Jordan's geopolitical standing among its

Arab neighbors. U.A.R President Nasser continued to single out the two monarchies of Jordan and Saudi Arabia as targets for subversion aimed at toppling their respective regimes and replacing them with pro-Egyptian leaders. A series of attempts were made on the king's life during the tenure of the U.A.R and thereafter, while the Jordanian Prime Minister was assassinated by a bomb planted in his office in August of 1960.

If the failure to change the monarchical regimes was not enough to tarnish Nasser's image as the "leader of the Arabs," a few more blows only added to that end result, ultimately damaging the credibility not only of Nasser but also of pan-Arabism. In 1963-64, Syria's call for an attack against Israel in response to the diversion of the sources of the Jordan River was not answered by Nasser because it did not conform to his interest in devoting less attention to the conflict and more to international issues. In 1967, Syria renewed its calls for an attack on Israel. By this time, Nasser needed to regain his stature. The Soviet Union also pushed him into a conflict with Israel. Nasser subsequently closed the straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, violating international conventions on freedom of the seas and crossing a red line Israel had warned would constitute a casus belli.

Although the ensuing battle lies outside the scope of this article, in converting his position from a popular grass roots hero into the head of the 1967 military coalition, Nasser could not evade the lion's share of responsibility for the eventual defeat. Even after withdrawing his resignation in response to "spontaneous" demonstrations of support, the damage to his image was irreparable. He would no longer be looked upon as leader of the Arab people. Egypt experienced great damage to its military and civilian infrastructure during the June War and the War of Attrition that lasted until 1970. At the Arab summit conference in Khartoum in August 1967, the oil-rich countries of the Persian Gulf agreed to grant financial support to Egypt. For this reason, Egypt was forced to end its efforts to subvert the Saudi government and recognize the legitimacy of all forms of Arab government. The concept of "unifying the Arab World from the Ocean to the Gulf" under Nasser remained a slogan and a vision, but in reality it began to fade away in the early 1960s, and has disappeared in contemporary Egyptian rhetoric and policy. Hosni Mubarak, only the fourth president of the republic of Egypt, failed to inherit the Nasserite heritage as the "leader of the Arabs."

Prior to the rise of Nasser the Arab people lacked both a figure to rally behind as well as a cause to rally around. Nasser both established himself as an effective and charismatic leader and provided the people with enemies, namely illegitimate Arab regimes, the "Zionist entity," and supporter of both, the "West." With his rapid decline following the 1967 War, the Arabs lost the last pan-Arab leader as well as the idea of resisting these existing or imaginary enemies. Although other countries

attempted to fill that role, they each failed. Those failures can be attributed to two factors: failure to provide a leader, or failure to provide a cause. Today, the presence of multiple countries in the region vying for that leadership role tears countries in multiple directions, preventing unity in the modern Arab world. This demise of the leader of the Arabs concept was one major factor in the breakup of the myth of an Arab Middle Eastern "bloc." With the demise of Nasser and pan-Arabism, Arab people had not only lost a leader but a cause as well; what could have potentially served to successfully unite the Arab Middle Eastern nations as a "bloc" had dissolved.

Today, the old dream of uniting all Arabs under one nation is no longer a viable political platform, if indeed it had ever been. The change in the nature of the conflict in the aftermath of the 1967 war was only one of many factors that would continue to influence the re-configuration of the region and the relations between the Arab actors and Israel. Others include the materializing of several functioning regional systems with active inter-relations with non-Arab/non-Muslim actors outside the traditional Arabic speaking Middle East. Today, the pursuit of national interests takes precedence; consequently, the Arab-Israeli conflict has been replaced by a series of local conflict/non-belligerency conditions.

The Emergence of the Arab Nation-state and Identity Formation and the Palestinian context

The Palestinian problem proved to be an important element in formulating the ideology of the nation state and the cementing of national identity. The West Bank, which Jordan lost to Israel, was populated with Jordanian citizens who saw themselves first and foremost as Palestinian both before and after 1967. However, before 1967 they were barred from expressing these nationalistic feelings; the Hashemite regime encouraged the integration of its Palestinian citizens into the fabric of Jordanian society, denying them any explicit national expression. Furthermore, Jordan annexed the Arab part of western [former mandatory] Palestine into the kingdom in 1950 declaring that part the "West Bank." That was followed by a process of Jordanization, at times forced. This evolution presented a difficult political and ideological dilemma, especially after the establishment of the PLO in 1964. In a nutshell, the question was: "Where is Palestine?" and hence, "Who is the representative of the Palestinians?" The answer to these questions tended to varied and changed over time. At times, the answer to these questions reflected the thoughts of some Israeli leaders who advocated Jordan [the East Bank] as an alternative Palestinian state (*al-watan al-badil*).

The 1967 armed conflict not only partially answered these questions, but it also unleashed uncontrollable forces, perhaps the most important of them being Palestinian

nationalism. The process of gradual Palestinian separation from the pan-Arab view is evident and mainly results from organizational changes in the aftermath of the war. Not only did the Arab defeat leave regimes frustrated and beaten, but also the Palestinian Liberation Organization, established by the Arab nations in 1964 prior to the [Six Day War](), was perceived by many in the region as a partner in the defeated coalition. The al-Fatah Organization, on the other hand, was established in [Kuwait]() in the late 1950s by Palestinian initiative and had been engaged in armed struggle against Israel since 1965. In this context, the initial outcome of the war was that al-Fatah took over the PLO and converted what was once a tool in the hands of the Arab nations into an organization that developed its own decision-making mechanism for political and military policies. This process, completed in 1969, placed al-Fatah's top officials, including their foremost leader, [Yasser Arafat](), at the head of the PLO.

In retrospect, two main questions have faced the PLO: its military presence in the countries neighboring Israel and its diplomatic recognition concurrent with the delegitimization of Israel. Clearly, these two challenges reflected particular Palestinian interests. At times, they contradicted Jordanian and Lebanese interests of avoiding confrontation with Israel, and at times they involved the development of an independent foreign relations apparatus, free of any Arab involvement. These particular interests, coupled with the fact that the PLO has stated its goals since the first version of the [Palestinian Charter]() was approved in 1964 as the taking over of mandatory Palestine in its entirety make it clear why the organization tried to expand its sovereignty over Jordan during the initial years after the 1967 war. Suppression of its military presence in Jordan in the aftermath of the civil war (February 1970 - July 1971) underscored a need to change tactics and emphasize the issue of international recognition. This recognition, which over the years has been made manifest on Arab, Soviet, and international organization levels, added to Palestinian self-perception as a distinct people among the Arabs. No longer were the Palestinians subsumed by an all-encompassing pan-Arab "bloc" ideology; rather, their Palestinian identity was now crucial to their process of self-definition.

Still, it was somewhat easier to acknowledge a distinct identity under Israeli occupation, and especially under the [Palestinian Authority](), than on the East Bank, which still had a Palestinian majority but was under Hashemite rule. Perhaps the road to a definitive political entity (and thus, a cemented identity) came about in the summer of 1981 when Israel indirectly and as a result of US pressure recognized the status of the [PLO]() by agreeing to a cease-fire after ten days of fighting along the Israeli-Lebanese border. This new political status, in addition to the military threat, was one of the primary motivations for the Israeli incursion into [Lebanon]() a year later that was meant to uproot the PLO from Lebanon where it had settled after having been driven out of [Jordan](). However, that invasion was not successful in preventing

the US from recognizing the PLO in late 1988 thus paving the way for Israel for the Oslo process.

The Lebanon War also forced changes in the PLO's traditional policies, thus indirectly leading to a formal PLO acceptance of the State of Israel in September 1993. Having had its infrastructure and bases destroyed and its people chased out of Lebanon, the PLO's political clout diminished. The PLO, recognizing its weakness, agreed to a joint formula with Jordan establishing their relations with Israel and the rest of the participants at the 1992 Madrid conference. From a communications standpoint, this arrangement proved problematic because Israel would talk to Jordan but Jordan wouldn't have the legitimacy to speak on behalf of the PLO based on the Rabat formula. Jordan, whose population is 60% Palestinian, also was forced to confront questions about its identity, especially after the PLO had effectively created a state within a state in the kingdom. The struggle between the Jordanian kingdom and the PLO seemed to be won after "Black September" 1970 when Hussein's forces routed those of Arafat and forced the PLO to flee the country. Politically, however, it was clear that Jordan did *not* win this civil war. In an attempt to clear Arab leaders' conscience for not supporting the PLO in the fighting, they declared at the 1974 Rabat summit that the PLO was "the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." The Rabat formula symbolized an Arab political reward for the PLO and represented the organization during the civil war. The support the Palestinians received made the question of the nature of the Jordanian kingdom more acute and pressing in King Hussein's mind. Put simply, if the PLO became the sole representative of the Palestinians, could it speak for those living in Jordan and constituting a majority in that country?

In answering the Palestinian challenge, King Hussein needed to redefine the ideological raison d'être of his kingdom, which extends over three quarters of the former British Mandate over Palestine. His response came in the form of nationality and nationalism as the basis for his country. In fact, since the 1967 War, and especially after the Rabat summit, the king, and his son the incumbent king, Abdullah II, have confronted this issue many times. According to King Hussein, Jordanian nationality is based primarily on the principle of territorialism. As both Jordanians and Palestinians reside within the borders of the Hashemite Kingdom on the East Bank, this makes them a people of one nation. Geographically, the terms of reference are no longer those connected with one pan-Arab nation, as was accepted before the 1967 war. Jordan accepted the existing borders between the Arab countries and viewed them as a starting point in defining individual nationality. Moreover, to accentuate the limits between "Jordan" and "Palestine," King Hussein asserted many times that despite the loss of the West Bank the inhabitants of the two banks continue to belong

to the same family, a nation composed of two peoples, the Jordanian people and the Palestinian people, each maintaining its own identity while sharing a similar history.

The Hashemites still pay lip service to the idea of pan-Arab unity and make references to past concepts of Nasserite solidarity; yet, Jordan no longer subscribes to this ideology. Instead, the kingdom and its inhabitants have a very specific, clearly defined national identity which separates them not only from the Palestinians living close to them but also from the Middle Eastern Arab "bloc." It is this type of blossoming of national identity that ultimately proved fatal to pan-Arab ideology in Jordan and around the Middle East.

If [King Hussein](), whose pan-Arab sympathies were unstable until the 1967 War, adopted such policies, it is not surprising that other Arab leaders, less shackled to the Arab consensus, did so as well. The leaders of Syria, specifically, formulated an interesting fusion of pan-Arabism and nationalism. Syria's President [Hafiz al-Assad]() acted as the leader of the "cradle of Arabism" as well as the main figure of the Ba'ath party that adhered to the principle of Arab unity. This, however, did not stop Assad from publicly extolling Syrian nationalism, which is distinguishable from Jordanian nationalism. While Jordan recognizes existing borders, both Presidents Assad (the son, Bashar, succeeded his father in 2000) have asserted the existence of a Syrian empire that spans [Syria](), [Lebanon](), [Israel]() and the [West Bank](). Syria's longstanding territorial outlook did not substitute for Arab solidarity until after the 1967 War. The ideological locus of Syrian nationalism is thus an equation of territorialism and identity expressing the notion of the Syrian people controlling Syrian land. The nurturing process of Syria's nationalism is an inseparable part of the attempt to realize Syrian national interests since it commenced as a response to Syria's relations with Jordan and Lebanon.

Although this paper does not have the scope to examine the national trajectories of other Middle Eastern [Arab]() nations-states, this individualistic ideology also developed in many other countries, eventually dissolving any remnants of pan-Arabism and destroying any type of "bloc" mentality. This widely experienced phenomenon of embracing a national identity unique to each country defined by physical borders and psychological characteristics was vital to the division of Middle Eastern Arab states. These inward looking changes, which separated the "bloc," provided an important impetus for the gradual disintegration of the monolithic Arab-Israeli conflict. This bloc has always been artificial and based primarily on opposition to Israel.

The Gradual Disintegration of the Monolithic Arab-Israeli Conflict

A third process leading to the disintegration of the Arab Middle Eastern "bloc" relates to the disappearance of the Arab-Israel conflict in its traditional form and its

replacement by a chain of local confrontations between Israel and its neighbors. Since the November 29, 1947, United Nations Partition Plan, the conflict with Israel had been a rallying point for the Arab nations. In the decades following the 1967 War, however, the idea of 'total conflict' with Israel began to see a reduced role, as several major players gave up on the idea of destroying Israel by force first in an insinuated way and later and later signed peace treaties with Israel (Egypt, 1979, Jordan, 1994, and de facto relations with more Arab countries).

Today, each border between Israel and its neighbors exhibits a different and unique relationship between political rhetoric and military maneuvers. Since 1967, Israel, being the focal point of regional activity, has had not only to respond to evolving situations, but also to become creative and innovative in its regional policies. The outcome of these accumulated challenges, along with the changes in the regional systems, has produced a vastly different dynamic of Israeli relations with each of its Arab neighbors.

The first cracks in the conception of total, all-consuming Arab-Israeli conflict appeared early in 1965 when President Bourguiba of Tunisia suggested that armed struggle was not the only means to achieve the goal of destroying the Zionist state. He believed that Arab ambitions could be realized in stages and not necessarily in a single concentrated military effort. During these stages, it would be possible to coexist with Israel. Bourguiba, however, was not overtly consistent and shifted between the two extremes: hinting at recognition of Israel on the one hand and maintaining that there is no room for an independent Jewish entity in the Middle East on the other. Tunisia was not a significant player, however, in the conflict and the difference in his rhetoric was not taken too seriously by Israeli policy-makers.[4] Prior to the 1967 War, the call to "throw the Jews into the sea" was more acceptable than any more sophisticated approach, and if there were any opinions other than those expressed by Bourguiba, they did not enjoy a wide following. The publicly accepted hostile attitude of citizens of Arab countries toward Israel was an asset to leaders in mobilizing grassroots support. These emotions added an ideological and national dimension to the public restlessness in May and June 1967, thus nurturing the political and military escalation leading to what the masses believed to be the imminent destruction of Israel. The eventual anticlimactic resolution of these emotions was traumatic. Despite a coordinated and integrated military effort, the Arab armies suffered a decisive defeat.

After 1967, Egypt has pursued efforts to regain land through military and diplomatic means, while Syria has aimed at achieving strategic parity with Israel. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the ensuing global changes reflected in the Gulf War of 1991, this Syrian policy was replaced in late 1991 by sporadic participation in direct, though low-level negotiations with Israel. Thus, the traditional approach toward Israel did not withstand the military test and needed to be re-

evaluated. The setback led to two processes which together eliminated part of the conflict in that the Arab nations no longer denied the presence of Israel. June 1967 saw the beginning of a process that is still continuing today, a process that expresses itself in an ever-increasing chain of conflicts between Israel and its neighbors in which varying degrees of hostility against the Zionist enterprise are the only common element. Parallel to the change in diplomacy toward Israel is a shift in attitude evident in public announcements. These two processes are intertwined, and their beginnings are evident in President Nasser's calling for the "removal of the remnants of aggression," an expression he first used in a speech to the Egyptian nation on June 9, 1967.

The aforementioned slogan by no means hints at a change in the old goal of destroying Israel, yet it does not concretely establish any modus operandi; in fact, it leaves room for a wider interpretation that at the core calls for ceasing aggressive action as soon as Israel withdraws from the territories it conquered in 1967. This interpretation would be satisfactory to nations not willing to participate in the destruction of another state but wishing to return Israel to its pre-1967 War borders. Another expression added to the post-1967 Middle Eastern vocabulary was "the unalienable rights of the Palestinian people to their homeland." Only years later did this expression develop into its commonly accepted interpretation, as reflected in the September 1993 Israeli-PLO Oslo agreement.

In spite of the failure of the Oslo accords, it is today a fact that the old monolithic conflict has been replaced by a series of agreements, tensions, and local conflicts. The signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Accord of 1979 and the 1994 peace with Jordan all attest to a process of accepting Israel as one of the Middle Eastern nations. Even the 1974 Israeli-Syrian interim agreement and the Syrian adherence to that may indicate a Syrian decision to defer a military conflict with Israel for an undefined period of time. Yet, despite the changes in the nature of conflict, a long road must be traveled before full and unconditional peace will prevail in the region.

A Regional Structure of Localized Conflicts Dictated by Interests

In the 1960s, the continued attention of the superpowers to the Middle East and the emerging Arab Cold War in the 1960s added to the intensity of the conflict. Both superpowers supported their clients financially and militarily, solidifying the military contours of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Additionally, the growing rifts within the Arab camp necessitated a foreign enemy against which all Arabs would unite: Israel. These tendencies and others like it eventually led to the 1967 War. The magnitude of the Israeli victory was such that the Arab side abandoned the idea that it could destroy Israel. From then on, all major armed confrontations were intended to accomplish more limited goals, such as forcing Israel to negotiate with the Arab side under

favorable conditions to the latter (the 1973 war). This progression has led to the appearance of a new set of unwritten foreign policy guidelines of behavior in the region, policies characterized not by unitary pan-Arab ideology or plans for the annihilation of Israel, but rather by localized conflicts dictated by leaders' personal and national interests. This is exhibited in at least four of five arenas of relations between Israel and its neighbors. [I don't see this either. While individual countries did pursue their own interests at times – e.g., Gulf states normalizing relations – they ultimately acted again as a bloc to boycott Israel diplomatically. I would suggest that Saudi Arabia now plays the role Nasser once did of keeping at least the Gulf countries in line as an anti-Israel bloc. And speaking of boycotts, the economic boycott was and to some extent still is an example of bloc behavior that ended (weakened) after the Israel-Egypt peace treaty.]

Perhaps the tensest current Israeli-Arab regional system consists of Israel, Syria, and Lebanon. In this system, the major players struggle with two major questions: determining Lebanon's future status, whether as an independent self-supporting nation or as de facto part of Syria. The latter course of action might have one additional possible nuance: a Shiite led nominally independent Lebanon ruled from Damascus. Syria's perception of itself in this context is that of a potential candidate to become the region's dominant power, through establishing strategic parity with Israel and finding ways to use the United States as a replacement for the Soviet Union. The recent resumption of full diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Syria are clearly interpreted by Damascus as a major strategic accomplishment that would harm Israel. Furthermore, the resumption is carried out in spite of continued Syrian backing for terrorist organizations in defiance of prior promises to the United States to end such support.[5] However, Syria's international behavior should also be studied through the inter-Arab prism. Syria has seen itself in spite of changing regimes, since Umayyad dynasty in the 7th century, as the center of Arabism and Damascus, its capital city, as the capital of all Arabs. Consequently, its current leaders while presented with a choice between loyalty for their version of Arabism and current world power balance will still opt for the former. Thus, even though Syria could have won US support at any time by making peace but it has chosen not due to its perception of the US as the "enemy of the Arabs and the embodiment of contemporary imperialism". It is possible to assume then that Damascus leaders see such a move as subverting the very foundations of their beliefs and consequently their regime's survival. That analysis may be supported by the fact that the U.S. has had diplomats in Syria on and off and it hasn't meant much in terms of improved relations or a meaningful peace process. The Syrian concept of "Arabism" might have been bolstered since the Iran-Iraq war by a coalition of the two non-Sunni regimes: Damascus and Tehran. That coalition has only gained in significance since the Iranian nuclear crisis taking precedence over the prospects of promising relations with the U.S.

It is through the lens of hegemonic interests that Israel and Syria formulate their policy vis-à-vis each other and individually toward Lebanon. For Israel the component of relations with the United States is added. Those questions take the primary role; all other Middle Eastern issues are pushed aside. Syria can no longer be concerned with or have its policies dictated by pan-Arab ideology or falling into step with an "Arab leader." Since the death of Nasser and the demise of pan-Arabism as a paradigm, Syria is not placed under such pressure; rather, in this new structure of regional relations, Syria is free to pursue its own national interests. Put differently, Syria is no longer opposing partial and bilateral agreements, but the outstanding inter-Arab issues with Israel cannot be resolved without Syria giving at least tacit agreement. The signing of the Israeli-PLO accords in September 1993 over Syria's objections but without any tangible Syrian reaction supports this point.

Nevertheless, Israel and Syria are constantly considering the strategic advantages that can be provided by Lebanon, and each would like to control the main gateway to the other's centers of population or at least deny its adversary access to its own strategic soft spot. These conflicting interests have led to military action by each side: the Syrian occupation from 1976 to 2005, as well as the Israeli invasions of 1982 and 2006. Syria still maintains a sphere of influence within Lebanon through the growing Shiite presence, while Israel lost its influence when the South Lebanese army collapsed in the wake of Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in 2000. Israel acted in response to public exhaustion resulting from a steady stream of casualties caused by Shi'te Hizbullah (Party of God) on Israeli soldiers. Even after Israel's withdrawal, however, attacks continued leading in the summer of 2006 into a full scale war inside kebanese territory. Due to its strategic importance, Israeli soldiers remain stationed near the border with Lebanon and the ongoing buildup of Hizbullah military forces, and the growth of its political influence in the country requires Israel to remain constantly on alert on that front. This ongoing conflict, however, is not about Arabs and Israelis, but is a function of the narrower national interests of Israelis and Lebanese.

A very different regional system is the one that has seen the most variability since the 1960s; over the years it has included Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians, with Iraq and/or Iran becoming influential at times. The one constant in the group throughout the years has been the role of Israel as one major player. Prior to the 1990s, the major problem in this system was the Palestinian question as it pertained to Jordan, Israel, and the people of the territories: for Jordan, whether it would become a Palestinian state ruled indirectly by the Hashemites or retain its Jordanian identity; for Israel, whether that nation state would remain a purely Jewish state or become a bi-national state; and for the people residing in the territories, whether they would be incorporated

into either Israel or Jordan, or be given the freedom to create an independent Palestinian state.

The interests and strategies of the two main actors reflected a different pattern of political behavior than in the Syrian-Israeli system: neither Israel nor Jordan has ever been interested in fully and officially taking over the West Bank. Thus, both nations tried to transfer responsibility for the Palestinian West Bank to the other. Even the most right-wing coalitions in Israel continued to de facto recognize the limited role of Jordan, while Israel was the caretaker government, attempting to create facts that would affect the final settlement of the sovereignty issue many years into the future. Clearly, the idea of a Palestinian state has never appealed to the Jerusalem government whether it was center-left or center-right. The only exception was the Rabin government that signed the 1993 Oslo accords which have since been practically ignored by successive Israeli cabinets. [Actually,Prime Minister Rabin said upon the ratification of an Israeli-Palestinian agreement (Oslo II) no to statehood. In his words:"an entity to ne less than a state."[6]

Palestinian issues temporarily dropped off the agenda following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent U.S.-led Desert Storm operation. The 1991 Gulf War and the missile attacks on Israel led the leadership in Jerusalem to realize that Jordan and the Palestinians together had fallen into the category of the weak player in this regional system. Iraq was now the greater danger to Israeli interests and the crucial strategic concern was to ensure a pro-Western, preferably friendly, Arab presence between itself and Iraq.

Israel adopted a two-tiered policy to achieve this objective. First, the Israeli-PLO accord was signed in September 1993 in what seemed to be an abandoning of the "Jordanian option," a traditional pillar of Israeli and Zionist Middle Eastern policies since 1946. This was followed by the Second Oslo Accord in 1995, which theoretically provided for a withdrawal of Israeli forces from territory now recognized as an autonomous Palestinian Authority. With the Palestinian issue apparently on its way toward resolution, King Husseinfinally felt safe enough in October 1994 to conclude a peace treaty with Israel.

The collapse of the Oslo process after nearly seven years in which Palestinian terrorism continued despite Israeli territorial concessions, and Palestinian frustration with the failure of Israel to relinquish most of the West Bank and Gaza Strip and allow the creation of a state, was followed by a last-minute attempt by President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak to resolve the Palestinian issue during a 2000 summit. Yasser Arafat's rejection of Barak's proposal, which would have created a Palestinian state in roughly 97 percent of the West Bank and all of Gaza, combined with the elections of Ariel Sharon in Israel and George W. Bush in the

United States, both of whom were disinterested in resuming negotiations, returned the Palestinian issue to the backburner. The 9/11 attacks and subsequent war with Iraq kept it there until the Arab states began to pressure Bush to renew American peace efforts, which he gradually escalated to the point of sending his Secretary of State Condolleezza Rice on rounds of futile shuttle diplomacy at the end of his term.

During this time, and continuing into the new American administration, the Palestinian Authority and Israel intensified their competition to control the territory east of the 1949 armistice line between Israel and Jordan and east Jerusalem. The Palestinian Authority has sought since 1993 to gain full sovereignty over this area, which it believed it would receive under the Oslo Accords, and to prevent Israel from expanding its hold over any part of these lands. Israel, meanwhile, seeks to maximize the number of settlements in the West Bank/Judea and Samaria that it can keep, and thus enlarge its territory, while maintaining a peaceful relationship with the Palestinians.

This competition between the national interests of Israelis and Palestinians is parallel to the cooperative interests of Israel and Jordan in minimizing the risks emerging from the Iranian nuclear development plan and the possibility that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq will plunge the region into a period of instability and expose these two nations to a more direct danger from Iran if the revolutionary regime were to take over Iraq.

The danger posed by Iran has also highlighted the common interests of Israel and the Arab country most afraid of Iranian hegemony, Saudi Arabia.

Today the states in the Persian Gulf system exemplify the ideological, religious and nationalist dimensions that take precedence over concerns about the Arab-Israeli conflict. Iraq under Saddam Hussein, for example, used to draw upon ancient Babylonian tradition as the source of its nationalistic fervor, while Iran fuses nationalism and Shi'i Islam to generate a climate that feeds upon the more than thousand-year-old Arab-Persian conflict. Saudi Arabia, steeped in fundamentalist Wahhabi thought, has never cared much for Arab unity, preferring instead to assert its leadership of the Muslim nations as the custodian of Islam's holy sites.

The 2003 war, and the subsequent Iraqi civil war mainly between Sunnah and Shi'a, facilitated an even further reorientation of Saudi external policy on the regional system level. As with all other Middle Eastern regional systems, the model of behavior was that of two strong players looking for diplomatic and/or military means to harness a weaker player into their side. The interest of adding Saudi Arabia and its principalities' satellites to their arsenal was one of the reasons for the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). In this context Saudi Arabia was the weak actor benefitting from the confrontation between two threatening neighbors: Iraq of Saddam Hussein and radical

Shi'te Iran. The constellation of forces changed dramatically when U.S. forces crushed Iraq and left Iran the dominant military force in the region (other than Israel). Saudi Arabia supported the war, and was relieved to see Hussein depart and the Iraqi threat disappear; however, the disintegration of Iraq into three distinct territories created new dangers. One of those territories, the Shi'ite dominated south created a potential land bridge between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Saudis now feel especially vulnerable and are competing with the Iranians for influence over the formation of the next Iraqi regime in the hope of preventing it from becoming an ally with Iran. Saudi influence, however, is far more limited.

Saudi Arabia has two options: bad and worse. The bad option is to rely on the United States to come to its rescue. This has always been the basis of Saudi defense strategy, but in the Saudi mind it is more unlikely today given the U.S. public mood regarding sending more GI's overseas. The U.S. official belief that resolving the Palestinian issue would lead to the removal the Iranian threat is probably not shared by the Saudi leaders and that American view only leads to more frustration with the Obama administration. The worst case scenario is that a confrontation with Iran is inevitable and that it will build a nuclear bomb. The Saudi predicament is even more complex since Israel and Saudi Arabia share many of their strategic concerns, but open cooperation with the Jewish state is out of the question. The only possible avenue open to the two countries is covert cooperation publicly denied by both actors. Indeed, the number of unconfirmed media reports to that effect has dramatically increased in recent years. [7]

Israel's relationship with Jordan[8] is one of the most fascinating to study. It has been characterized by alternating conflict, covert cooperation, and confusion. As early as the 1920s, representatives of the Jewish *yishuv* developed close relations with the main opposition to the infamous mufti of Jerusalem, the Nashashibi family of Jerusalem. That Zionist-Palestinian/Nashashibi coalition represented an act of balancing within the mandatory area of Palestine against the Mufti who fought the mandatory authorities, his fellow Arabs, and the Zionist presence in Palestine with the same ferocity. The principles of that early coalition have continued to inspire the nature of relations between Israel and its immediate neighbor to the east, the Hashemite dynasty of Transjordan (after 1950 - The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan). This policy of secret negotiations and ad hoc agreements with Israel lasted between 1946-1950 and resulted in the 1950 [un-ratified] non-belligerency Israeli-Jordanian treaty, and was later resumed between 1960 and the 1994 public signing of theIsraeli-Jordanian peace treaty.

Even on the level of a seemingly steady, uninterrupted and unresolved conflict, both Israel and the changing Arab coalitions tried from time to time to define more peaceful ways of encountering each other. These policies were not the result of a

conscious decision to start a process of coexistence, but rather reflected the mutual interest of each side to deny its adversary a regional hegemonic position. This demonstrates the seeds of a regional structure in which Israel's Middle Eastern Arab neighbors interact with Israel in accordance with national interests rather than as a "bloc." Egypt, for her part, participated in peace plan (Alpha) sponsored by the U.S. and Great Britain during the early stages of the new republican regime (1954-1955).[9] The plan called for a significant Israeli withdrawal from the Negev desert, which would have allowed Egypt access to Jordan and re-recognized the new republic as the "Leader of the Arab World." Concomitant with that move, which presented Israel as the object of policy, Israel initiated its own policy of a "coalition of minorities" that was intended to bring together the Lebanese Christian Maronites, non-Arab Turkey, and non-Sunni, non-Arab Iran. That line of policy continued to characterize Israeli regional thinking until the late 1970s with the fall of the Iranian Shah and the creation of the mainly Christian South Lebanese Army that was disbanded with the final Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.

Strangely enough, there is no real Israeli-Egyptian system. Since the 1979 peace treaty the two countries have developed their mutual relations into a state that could be loosely described as mutual indifference or a cold peace. It is true that Egypt has represented the Palestinians behind the scenes, especially in their negotiations with the United States; however, it is clear that this policy stems from the hope that Egypt will be part of any future economic projects in the Gaza Strip. This goal will only be attained if Egypt helps with negotiations, in a manner that the United States views as favorable. Meanwhile, in spite of their peace treaty the future of relations with Israel is unclear and will depend to a large extent on the nature of the post-Mubarak Egyptian regime.

Conclusion

The sentiment of nationalism which has become legitimate and familiar in the years since the 1967 War is related to the attempts of different Arab Middle Eastern nations to realize their particular national interests first in their interactions with Israel, and second, on the level of diplomatic relations with neighboring countries. The weakening sense of Arab unity and the increased number of regional challenges forced the founding of regional coalitions and local competition. In this new regional structure, the participants struggle to achieve goals—similar or opposing—born out of national considerations rather than unitary "bloc" thinking. The regional systems that have appeared in the Middle East since the 1967 War partially overlap, yet there is no doubt that each is inspired by individual and independent concerns. Pan-Arabism is certainly dead, though it remains to be seen what effect the development and popularity of pan-Islamism will have in the region.

The study of Israel in the Middle East is not only an analysis of the various wars, their causes and consequences; rather, it is a study of the various coalitions, regimes, leaders, and leaderships in the region and their motivations to make coexistence or peace with Israel possible. It is not about the leaders' emotional standing toward the Jewish state or grassroots enmities that have developed in the region; it is about the emerging common interests and the shared need to face a regional enemy. Only times of crisis or the feeling that stalemate would not benefit any of the parties have brought understandings and agreements. This will probably continue to be the main motivating factor behind any future movement on the regional level.

With the apparent and undeniable changes in the nature of the conflict, Israel and some of its Arab neighbors might one day, sooner than later, find themselves in the same boat: fighting radical Islam. For Israel it is Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, al-Qaeda and other fundamentalists; for the incumbent Arab regimes it is these very same organizations or their branches within their respective nation states.

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[1] Cf. Alexander Bligh, "The United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), 1956-1967– Past Experience, Current Lessons" (forthcoming).

[2] *Philosophy of the Revolution* (many editions in Arabic and English).

[3] Ismael and Ismael, 34, and cf. Gelvin, 41.

[4] Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968, Volume XXIV, Africa, Document 153.

[5] http://www.state.gov/s/ct/c14151.htm

[6] Knesset Chronicles, October 5, 1995.
http://www.knesset.gov.il/Tql//mark01/h0015913.html#TQL

[7] Cf. http://www.defence.pk/forums/world-affairs/2291-secret-contacts-between-israel-saudi-arabia.html; public denial:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5380956.stm.

[8] For a detailed study of the topic see: Alexander Bligh, *The Political Legacy of King Hussein*, Sussex Academic Press: 2004.

[9] Michael B. Oren,"The Second War of Independence", *Azure* 27, (Winter 5767 / 2007)