

A HISTRO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS FOR THE SCHEMES FOR ARAB UNITY

THE CAUSES OF ITS FAILURE AND SUCCESS

by

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The Arab's land is sometimes called the Levant or "land of the rising sun." It is characterized by its peculiar geography, age-old history, and its unusual resources. It is the historic home of Western civilization and was the seat of most of the great empires of ancient times. In modern times, this region has become increasingly an arena of struggle among greater empires located wholly or mainly in the Western hemisphere. Broadly speaking, geographically, four groups of territories comprise the region. They are the fertile margin of North Africa, the fertile eastern shore of the Mediterranean, the Arabian peninsula, and the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. This region presents no great difficulties of natural boundaries or of climate. From the north there is the Taurus mountains; from the east, the Persian gulf and the Tigris River; from the south, the Indian Ocean and from the west, the Atlantic Ocean. Between these borders lies the so-called "Fertile Crescent" formed by the valley of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the Mediterranean plain and the Nile valley. As for climate, it is rainy in winter, never severely cold. In summer it is dry and hot.

Strategically, it possesses an unusual position. These lands constitute a transit zone or strategic "bridge" from Europe to the Indian Ocean. Two arms of the Indian Ocean reach deeply into the desert barrier. From the head of one of these arms, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, form a navigable way from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. From the head of the other, the Persian gulf, waterways through the Tigris and the Euphrates, roads, and railroads stretch west to the Mediter-

anean and north to the Caspian Sea. It holds the keyway to three continents, Asia, Africa, and Europe. The development of aviation and motor transportation increased the importance of this region, which was destined to become the "Suez Canal of the Air". While it is difficult to forecast exactly what changes will take place in this Mediterranean-Indian corridor as a result of the introduction of civil aviation, it is beyond doubt the value of this territory will be greatly enhanced and will continue to increase in proportion to the progress made by the conquest of the air.

Economically, this area possesses rich resources. The soil of the land is one of the most fertile in the World. It is one of the world's richest sources for petroleum, which is found in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt. There are also large deposits of minerals, nickel, zinc, phosphate, nitrate, and recently large deposits of iron ore have been discovered in Egypt. There is no coal. It is, however, a rich field for the investment of industrial capital.

This land is possessed by the Semitic Arabs who hold most of Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Trans-Jordan and Egypt. Each of these countries has its own variant of the parent stock and each speaks some version of the original Arabic. Despite the slight differences of race, language and social status, certain common heritages bind the Arabs together; the great past to which the present generation is heir, the culture, the literature and language. These common roots in the past give the Arabs the motive for the modern unity. Between the Atlantic and the Persian Gulf, there live together some 40,000,000 Arabs. Most of them are Muhammadans, but not all Muhammadans are Arabs, nor are all Arabic speaking people Muhammadan. The ancestry of the Arabs living in the west is mixed. They have intermarried with native Egyptians in the land of the Nile, with Negroid tribes in the Sudan, and with Berbers on the Barbary Coast. Their language and culture are Arabic, but their racial strain is blended.

The plan of forming an Arab Union is not new. It is an idea which lived in the minds of the Arabs for centuries.

A religious Arab-Union had been achieved in the form of a vast empire extending from the Pyrennees to India. The first stone in this empire was built by the Prophet Muhammad.

After his death, the first Caliph Abu Bakr continued the building and in 636 A.D. invaded Syria. During the reign of the second Caliph, Umar, Iraq and Persia were annexed in 637 A.D. Very soon Egypt was added to the empire. The fourth Caliph transferred the capital from Al Madinah to Al Kufah in Iraq. After the death of Ali, the fourth Caliph, the period of the Republic came to an end.

During the period of the Republic the Caliph possessed both political and religious powers. The letter and spirit of the pure Islamic law was applied in every phase of life. There was one central authority in Al Madinah and the different territories annexed were considered provinces with governors appointed from Al Madinah.

The Umayyad dynasty followed, taking Damascus as their capital. This dynasty lasted from 661 to 750 A.D. The Abbasid dynasty succeeded the Umayyad and transferred the capital to Baghdad in Iraq.

During the days of the Umayyad and the Abbasid dynasties, Baghdad and Damascus were the centers of the Empires, and all the countries which belonged to them were provinces to the mother land. Islam was the real bond that connected these different parts constituting the Empire. The two Empires were a religious union.

During the decline of the Abbasid, nationalities arose in the different parts of the empire and independent states emerged from the wreckage. The Tulunide, the Ikshidit and the Fatimite dynasties arose successively in Egypt. The Hamdands and the Ayubites arose in Syria. In 1171, Salah Al-Din became the ruler of Egypt.

As quickly as they had climbed the pinnacle of fame, the Arabs fell from their high estate, as if they had exhausted their energy in one spurt of dynamic achievement. In Europe, they were ousted by Spain. In Africa and Asia they fell under the heels of the Ottomans, followers of the same religion but of different blood. From 1516 A.D. to 1914, the Arabic countries were united with Turkey under one Caliphate, administered from the new capital, Constantinople. The Caliphs were not Arabs but the people accepted them as brothers in religion.

In the nineteenth century (from 1809-1840), there was an

attempt by Muhammad Ali, the Turkish ruler of Egypt, toward forming a political Arab Union.

His attempt was based on his ambitions to build an Empire for himself. The main purpose was self-interest rather than the interest of the Arabs. The conflicting interests of the Western Powers wrecked the plan. The ill-fated Empire of Muhammad Ali is a forceful evidence of the possibility of forming an Arab Union, provided the western powers agree to the plan, or if the Union is powerful enough to stand against these powers in case of war.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century a new Arab movement began in Syria, Paris and Cairo. The movement was slow in gathering momentum because the ruling Ottoman Empire was all eyes for just such a movement and its hand was heavy on Arab patriots.

Some years elapsed before the beginning of the second Arab attempt. The plan for this attempt was made by the Sharif Hussein of Mecca in 1915. The outbreak of the first World War in 1914, with its slogans of democracy and the rights of small nations, stimulated Arab nationalism. In 1915, the Allies decided to make use of the Arab desire for independence. The British promises to the Arabs were made in the course of correspondence between Sir Henry McMahon, High Commissioner in Cairo, and the Sharif Hussein of Mecca. The British negotiations with Hussein led to a diplomatic exchange with France which resulted in the Secret Sykes-Picot agreement of May 16, 1916, between Great Britain, France and Russia. France was to obtain Syria and Lebanon; Great Britain was to take Iraq and all the provinces on the Persian Gulf. A National Home for the Jews was to be established in Palestine. This agreement was communicated neither to Italy nor Hussein.

Sharif Hussein in his attempt to unite the Arabs was motivated by a religious zeal. His ambitions to create a religious Arab Union and to become the Caliph of the Muslim World were the powers behind his efforts. He did not give any attention to the interests or aspirations of the Christian inhabitants of the Arab world, who, although they were in a minority constituted a strong element in the Arab land. They wanted a secular and not a religious Arab Union. Sharif Hussein, in

his Declaration of Independence outlined the future of the Arab world as an Islamic Union. The Christians being uninterested in this form of a union did not cooperate.

The lack of unity in the Arab front was its weakness and encouraged the Western Powers to achieve their political ambitions and to defeat the Arab cause.

Sharif Hussein by his success and by his failure is a living example that the Arabs will never progress, or achieve a lasting success as long as they use religion as a means for political ends.

The period between the first and the second World Wars was a period of struggle between Arab nationalism and the European imperialism. Victory was on the side of nationalism. Iraq won its independence in 1932, and entered the League of Nations. In 1936, Egypt completed its independence ; Syria and Lebanon in 1941. Palestine during the intra-war period was a field of friction between the Arabs and the Jews. Many attempts were made to solve this problem but no solution could be reached.

In the intra-war period the Arabs did not forget their aspiration for forming an Arab Union but they knew that the Western powers were against such a Union, and that their opposition was strong enough to doom its accomplishment in its infancy.

During World War II the importance of the Near East and its political significance emphasized the necessity for an Arab Union which would administer affairs in this strategic sphere. The war brought changes in the Balance of Powers. Some of the Big Powers lost their supremacy, others appeared in the picture.

Britain who is farsighted, realized that she was losing her supremacy to two new world powers, the United States and Russia. Realizing her inability to compete with them she decided to make a friend and an ally of the Arab world.

The Arabs knew that small and weak countries could not live in this world and understood fully that unity between the Arab states was essential for their survival.

The interests of the Arabs and those of Britain met. This was a vital step in the formation of the Arab Union which came to be the League of the Arab States.

In May 1941, Mr. Anthony Eden, the British Secretary of foreign affairs declared that Britain would give full support to any plan for forming Arab unity. But the Arabs ignored this declaration. They doubted the sincerity of Britain. They were afraid that Britain would use them for her own interests as she had done before. Again in 1943 Mr. Eden repeated his declaration. By this time the Arabs were convinced of Britain's sincerity because of her assistance and support of Syria and Lebanon in their fight for independence. The plan of Nuri Al Said, Prime Minister of Iraq to unite the Arabs in 1942, as cited in his Blue Book, did not succeed. Many Arab Nationalists believed that there were defects and dangers in his proposals. They were afraid that the inclusion of Palestine in this union with its *status quo* might result in the expansion of the Zionist movement in the Arab land. Moreover the proposals that the Christians of Lebanon would revert to the status they held before 1914, which allayed the fear of some Christians that they would be swallowed up in an Arab Muslim state, nevertheless revived all of the disadvantages of the old regime : the limitation of opportunity which forced many of the Christian inhabitants to emigrate in the past, the feeling of separation and distinction which a special regime inevitably gave them, and the encouragement of outside loyalties, without providing any new or positive advantages. In 1943, Egypt took the lead and invited all of the Independent Arab states to send representatives to Egypt to discuss the question of a League of Arab States.

In the preliminary negotiations the ambitions of Sharif Hussein's family reappeared. King Abdullah of Transjordan tried to convince the Arab states to help him annex Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan under his rule. But none of them helped him satisfy his ambition except Iraq.

Out of the negotiations come the willingness of all the Arab countries to cooperate and in October 1944 they signed the "Alexandria Protocol". Thus the Arab League was formed which was to strengthen and consolidate the ties which would bind all Arab countries and direct them toward the general welfare of the Arab world : to improve its conditions : insure its future and help realize its hopes and aspirations. In March 1945, all of the Arab countries signed the Pact of the League.

Since its formation the League has faced many difficulties. All of the Arab countries dominated by the Western Powers appealed to the League for help. She did not hesitate to do everything in her power to give the desired help. This antagonized the ruling countries.

The League was not always successful. One particular case was that of the Palestinian questions. In this the Arab League was defeated. It has also been shown that some of the Arab ruling families are looking after their own self-interests rather than for the common interests of the Arabs.

CONCLUSION.

There are forceful evidences of the possibility of forming an Arab Union provided the Western Powers agree to the plan, or if the union is powerful enough to stand against these powers in case of war, and provided the union is not based upon religious beliefs.

The attempt of Muhammad Ali to unite the Arabs in one Empire in 1840, was wrecked because the Western Powers did not agree to the plan and the Union was not powerful enough to stand against these powers.

The plan of Sharif Hussein of Mecca to form an Arab Union in 1916 failed because he based his attempt on pure religious tenets.

A strong Arab League is hopeless until the ruling dynasties and the Arab Leaders sacrifice their personal ambitions for the general good. In the meantime, the Arab League should curtail its activities in the Arab lands dominated by the Western Powers in order to gain their sympathy and support while she is still an infant.

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