# THE RADICAL SIDE OF PAN ARABISM AND ITS THREAT TO SOVEREIGNTY OF STATES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

## Introduction

The concept of pan-Arabism first gained international prominence after the end of World War II. Jankowski, (2016) defines Pan-Arabism as a form of ideology that espouses the unification of nations from regions such as North Africa and West Asia. At this time, the global political landscape was changing rapidly, and many countries in Europe needed rejuvenation. The USA and Russia offered help to these countries along with some Asian countries such as Japan, Vietnam and China. Simultaneously, new forces were gaining ground in the Middle East, with the Arab countries beginning to grow and become important sources of oil and petroleum. The rise in economic power of the Arabian countries in North Africa and West Asia, combined with a resistance to Western influence in the region, led to a political push for the unification of this Arab world.

Although it had earlier origins, Pan-Arabism escalated most significantly in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. This movement, however, failed, with the modern Arab world in turmoil and plagued by war and terror attacks. Intense violence was witnessed in the area as nations like Iraq invaded other countries based on pan-Arabic beliefs. By the 1990s the pan-Arabic ideology had given way to predominantly nationalist and Islamic beliefs (Ajami, 1978). The decline was steady, and its effect on the sovereign state of many of the Arabian nations has caused a long-term effect that is still being experienced. The Pan Arabic ideology failed to protect the power of each state, with disputes always resulting in violence (Sheikh, 2016). This situation has led to the decline of the Arabian nation’s power, which had been growing steadily since the beginning of the 20th century, and the situation still looks in need of help. This essay aims to evaluate the question of whether the pan-Arab movement in the 1950s and 1960s ever threatened the conventional state framework. This essay considers the question of whether the Pan-Arab movement in the 1950s and 1960s ever threatened the conventional state framework. The union of Arab communities proposed by the philosophy of pan-Arabism is essentially at odds with the traditional state system, defined by state borders and national governments. This essay discusses on Pan –Arabism and its impact in most Middle-East regions. Firstly, the essay will explore the concept of pan-Arabism in regards to its origin and decline. Second, it will discuss the impact that leaders had on Pan Arabism. Third, the essays will outline Pan Arabism Effect on Nations. It will then discuss the factors that suggest pan-Arabism did not essentially challenge the state framework. For these reasons, I conclude that although pan-Arabism threatened the social-economic state of the Middle East in the 1950s and 1960s, it did not impact the state framework greatly.

## Pan Arabic Origins and Decline

Pan Arabism refers to the belief that all Arabs form one nation and should be politically united in one Arab state. Supporters of this philosophy argue that Arab states in North Africa and the Middle East should unite and work politically, economically and socially towards Arab prosperity in the world (Barnett, 1998). One of the first pan-Arabic figures was Sharif Hussein ibn Ali, an Emir of Mecca, who sought independence for the Mashreq Arabs from the Ottoman Empire. In the beginning, pan Arabism sort of ending the Ottoman Turks rule over Arabia and the establishment of an Arabic nation that worked as one. The British, during World War I, were fighting against the Islamic Ottoman Empire, which was a powerful Islamic empire at the time. The influence it would have over Islam in the world was feared, and the British wanted a leader they could work with to usurp the Ottoman Turks and gain control of the resources in Arabia. The Hussein-McMahon Correspondence of 1915 set out an agreement that Britain would allow Hussein to be king of the Arabic nations as long as his people mounted a successful uprising against the Ottoman Turks. However, this agreement was not honoured, with the British and French allies creating an additional agreement – the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 – to divide Middle Eastern territories among themselves rather than allow the creation of an independent Arabian state. This did not go down well with the Arabic nations, who had fought the Ottomans seeking their own Arabic nation that reflected their own aspirations. In the interwar years, prominent thinkers and leaders such as Abdullah of Jordan continued to discuss and propose a range of pan-Arab ideas. Political and economic movements cropped up at this time to protect the Arab ideologies, with the Arab Renaissance party and the Arab League launched as major institutions that addressed this issue. The pan-Arabic movement at this time was affected due to the difference in ideologies between Arabs and Islam, with some sections seeing the reasons of unification as regressive to their tribal or religious beliefs. For example, Muslims were more inclined towards religion compared to Arabs who were defined regionally (Danielson, 2007)

Pan-Arabism gained new momentum at the end of World War II. The existing tension between the Western ideologies and nations and those of the Arab world had been a major factor contributing to enmity and lack of friendship between the two regions. In addition, most of the advocates of pan-Arabism state that the ideology has enabled the Arab states to build a strong alliance: hence, joining forces when it comes to forming attacks against the western world. However, there is doubt on whether this form of the alliance has brought about economic progression in Arab. This factor also explains the main reason as to why a large group of Arabians, especially youths engage in terrorist activities in a bid to meet their daily income.

## Impact of Leaders on Pan Arabism

Many leaders had a great impact on Pan Arabian, one of them being Gamal Abdel Nasser. Gamal Abdel Nasser, who was, the president of Egypt was one of the most important supporters of Pan-Arabism (Barnett, 1998). Nasser, who was born in January 1918 and died on 28 September 1970, was the second President of Egypt. The leader is mainly known for overthrowing the monarchy and introducing effective land reforms for the people of Egypt. Throughout his presidency, which started in 1956, Nasser had established a controversial relationship with most Muslim. Precisely, there was an attempt on the leader's life by his fellow Muslim Brotherhood in 1954. Despite his attempt to track down the association, President Muhammad Naquin took over the office in 1956. This attempt greatly influenced the relationship between Nasser and other Arab countries, especially the pan Arabians. This form of tension created a negative relationship between most of the Egyptian leaders such as Nasser with other Arab countries.

In addition, the leadership of Nasser intensified the relationship between the Palestine and Egypt. The dispute that existed with Palestine put Egypt in a very awkward whereby the leaders such as were forced to great a gap. Technically, Egypt was not termed as an Arabian state. Although leaders such as Pharaoh seek assistance from the Arabs, most of the Egyptians shared quite different cultural practices. Most of their cultural practices did not match with those of the other Arab countries. The leaders who existed before Nasser also intensified some forces towards the Arab countries, leading to a disastrous war. For instance, in 1952, King Farouk, who was known as a corrupt leader, was overthrown for his lack of effective leadership styles. The Egyptians also disliked the fact that he tried to integrate the Egyptians practices with those of the other Arab countries. A military coup helped in overthrowing the president, and this led to the leadership of Colonel Gamal Nasser.

President Nasser had a great impact on the relationship between Egypt and pan-Arabism. This leader, who was a son of a government functionary, also disliked the fact that the army was inadequately prepared for the war that was to take place against Israel in the next four years. Due to this form of panic, the president, made certain reforms and policies that impacted pan Arabism. Using his presidential powers in 1954, Nasser took advantage of his influence and came up with a land reform program, which would help to protect the Egyptian property from enemies. Second, the leader created a neutrality policy in regard to the nation's foreign affair. Unexpectedly, this policy showed concern for the Arabs in reference to their safety and political welfare. Late, Nasser turned to the pan-Arabian reform by joining forces with the Arab countries to fight against the invading foreign nations such as Britain. These associations boosted the relationship between Egypt and Arab countries.

Nasser showcased the importance of Egypt to the Arabic nations, and what it meant for pan Arabism. He led to the growth of the term ‘Nasserism’ due to his methods of ensuring Arab dominance in the region. He was the first politician to unite Arab states through the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958, with Egypt and Syria joining to form a united Arab front. Other figures who made this union possible were the leaders of the Ba’athist party in Syria, Michel Aflaq and Akram Hourani. The Syrian community reflected the pressure for Arabian unity through borders, with their two major political parties, the Communists and Muslim Brotherhood, both having pro pan-Arabic ideologies to address their supporter’s needs. Once Nasser overthrew the Egyptian government in 1952, he began pan-Arabic activities, with his protection of the Suez Canal and surviving Anglo-French invasion in 1956 making him a role model for many Arabs (Jankowski and Gershoni, 1997).  The Syrian leaders agreed to his leadership of an Egyptian-Syrian union, and with this, the UAR was born. The Syrian president, Shukri al-Kuwatli, signed the unification treaty with Nasser in 1958 (Tageldin, 2014). Other countries saw this and wished to join the union, including Iraq and Yemen. Nasser was a major figure of pan Arabism, and his deeds to promote the Arab nations further led to the growth of the movement before the demise of the UAR in 1961.

However, this initial momentum never seriously threatened the state-based framework in the Middle East. Despite the growth of pan-Arabism, several factors eventually led to the demise of the movement. The first major issue that was noticed was the social factor, with the joining of Arabic states leading to issues on the socio-economic activities of the community (Al-Mujahid, 2009). The Arabic states differed on how to manage their resources equally since most favoured their nationalistic policies rather than pan-Arabic ones. Second, the union between Egypt and Syria did not have a firm foundation. Although the initial belief was that the new state would lead to the prosperity of both, Egypt was more powerful in matters of finance and resources. From the outset, the union favoured Egypt more than it did Syria (Jankowski, 2016).  The capital city was in Cairo, and the UAR adopted the Egyptian flag with two new stars to show the two nations. The power given to Nasser meant he could do things unopposed, and he set unpopular policies in Syria to control their military and economy. The policies favoured Egypt more, suggesting that Nasser was more of a nationalist than a pan Arabian (Hinnebusch and Cummings, 2016). Pan-Arabism in this nationalist form could never be a real threat to the nation-state framework. Indeed, before the union, Nasser had never mentioned his will to unite the Arab world, mentioning only the Arab interests in Egypt (Ajami, 1978). The inequality led to the Syrian people becoming disillusioned with the administration, and this led to more and more resistance against the Egyptian rules (Luciani & Salamé, 2015).  Nasser failed to address these grievances and instead imposed his rule on the Syrians by shifting Syrian military bases to Egypt and appointing Egyptian officials in the Syrian administration and security forces. This caused the Syrian people to not only detest the Egypt regime but also caused the Syrian elite to become disillusioned. In 1961, Syria left the UAR after a coup, and this dissuaded other Arab countries like Yemen from pursuing a closer relationship. The United Arab States, which was formed by Egypt and Yemen, was abolished due to the same reasons in 1961, and Iraq realised it could not join the agreement lest they suffered the same fate. Thus, by 1971, Egypt had reclaimed its original name.

Another factor that suggests pan-Arabism did not essentially challenge the state framework is the strength of nationalism in Arab nations during this period (Nafaa, 1983). As pan-Arabism was at its peak, many leaders failed to realise the difference between the goals of each country. Most of these leaders were engrossed in grabbing and accumulating wealth at the expense of other poor citizens. When Nasser agreed to join forces with Syria, he did not do it due to the advantages of the two nations meeting, but rather his vision for a great Egypt (Ajami, 1978). His main goals were to ensure that Egypt was economically and politically stable compared to the enemy states. This is clear from his most famous speech in 1956 in which Nasser announced the nationalisation of the Suez Canal (Khalidi, 1991). After the failure of English and French forces to reclaim the canal, the Arab nations naturally viewed Nasser as a leader to take them forward towards a unified pan-Arabian state. But over time, it would become clear that Nasser’s vision was not necessarily consistent with the individual goals and agendas of the diverse Arab states. Nasser’s version of pan-Arabism, which was known as Nasserism, gained a large following within the Arab World, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, most people referred to the leader as the most influential person in history.

## **Pan Arabism Effect on Nations**

The pan Arabic movement had a great effect on the Middle East countries national framework, with different issues arising from the different aspects involved. The first and most major issue that is seen is territorial disputes that led to war (Khalidi, 1991). The pan Arabic movement had a huge problem due to the belief that each nation should endeavour to cut ties with the West, with any Arab politician who supported them seen as weak. As this pan Arabic theme grew in the Middle East, many leaders took over this notion and began using these themes for personal gain. Once pan Arabism had died and nationalism began picking up, leaders would discredit and attack each other based on their own pan Arabic views. The friction led to invasions, with the countries believed to be weak being taken over by pan Arabic neighbours. This was witnessed in 1990 when Iraq invaded Kuwait, with Saddam Hussein, leader of Iraq, occupying the country in the gulf. He invaded Kuwait due to the oil prices after the Iran-Iraq war of 1980, which could not rebuild Iraq to the economic status it was in before. Saddam did not use the pan-Arabic ideologies, but most of his actions are seen as pan-Arabic. The external force affecting Kuwait oil pricing meant that the Arab nations were not empowering themselves, and he took it upon himself to right this by invading the country. This situation further got worse, with the Western countries quickly shunning the move and calling for Iraq to withdraw immediately. They retaliated in return, and the gulf war began, killing thousands of people from both sides.

Another major issue that has grown over the years has been Islam in governance. As pan Arabism died, pan Islamism grew (Khalidi, 1991). One major feature that it had was that the whole of Arabia should be governed under the Koran. The religious nature of governance that is still witnessed today in these states led to many disagreements that occurred due to different interpretations of the holy book. Pan Arabism was seen as a more secular form of governance since it did not centralise its focus on the Koran, but rather on the economic prosperity of the Arab nations as one. Islam played a huge role in joining the pan Arabs, since it is a major religion, and its influence grew once pan Arabism died. The religion-based governance meant that people of other religions in the Middle East were not recognised, and this situation led to war with Israel. The six-day war, when Israeli forces beat Nasser's UAR, the Arabs had begun by bringing forces along the Israeli border (Karsh, 2017). The Jewish people have had a long-standing dispute with the Arabs, with the Arab-Israeli war of 1948 a major reason for this. The war broke out by Egypt’s preparation for war by sending troops to the Israeli border, with Israel quickly carrying out a pre-emptive strike on these forces. The pan Arabic union of Syria, Egypt and Jordan could not match up Israel’s military power, and the UAR lost important places like Jerusalem. This religious friction is seen to date, with many wars still ongoing in the Middle East to get back resources. Islam has greatly helped the State System of the Middle Eastern countries to be upheld, with Sharia law being used in most of the countries. However, the human rights aspect of Islamic rule makes the Arab nation's places that many will not go to, even Muslims of a different colour who fear for their safety.

The religious factor also gives way to another major problem caused by pan Arabism; terrorism (Khalidi, 1991). When pan Arabism was still growing, it was clear that no outsiders were to interfere with the Arab nations. This means that Arabs did not consider the many races or religions it was going to accommodate, only thinking of their needs and wants before anything else. They shunned the ways of the Western people, feeling that the economy would grow if they governed it using their laws and policies. As pan Arabism died, nationalism and purists cropped up, and they used pan Arabic policies to govern themselves. The Islamic states that have cropped up have been seen to have no accommodation for any other people other than Arabs, and with this, organizations funded by rich people began attacking other states citing their Islamic beliefs (Cesari, 2017). The growth of Islamic purists occurred on 9/11 when Al Qaeda, a group led by Osama bin Laden, carried out the worst terror attack on US soil in the modern age. Bin Laden, who believed that the USA was the greatest evil on earth, advocated for the adherence to Sharia law, which usually is seen to have great human rights violations due to its strict nature. Since he was rich, he funded terror groups which fought for the purity of Islam like the Taliban, and this led to the growth of radical elements in the Middle East (Sert, 2016). The growing danger of this groups has led to Western forces invading many countries to control these groups and protect the sovereignty of states. It has also led to the Middle East being cited as a terror threat to the globe, with many terror groups all over the world having support from the major groups here. Terrorists have promoted the state system of Middle Eastern countries but has threatened the state system of the Middle East since many of them are challenging it for its radical nature. The promotion of an Arab only nation where other people from the outside world are not considered as humans

Finally, the pan Arabic movement has led to the growth of the Arab nations, with policies borrowed from the movement to make the nations better. When Nasser nationalised the Suez Canal, he made Egypt become a great nation since the state was now gaining wealth from its resources (Helms, 2017) The strong belief in the self sustenance of the Arab nations has been seen to date, with many of these Arab countries having huge trade roles in the world. A major product that the Middle East countries produce is crude oil, which is a product in great demand. Industries all over the world usually require the commodity to function, and many other activities would be non-existent without oil and petrol products. The Middle Eastern countries have greatly supported their natural resources, and have begun accommodating Western investment and trade to sustain their people (Sert, 2016). The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a great example, with Qatar, Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, joining to form a pact with the European Union for the development of trade and other infrastructure in the Middle Eastern countries. The agreement had the GCC providing its major product to European countries as they in return gave the countries machinery and equipment needed for the growth of the GCC economy. This pact that focuses on the pan Arabic belief of making the Arab nations economically powerful has helped to the growth of major trade centers in the Middle East like Dubai. Thus, the pan Arabic movement did not only have negative effects on the Middle East, as it also advocated for the growth of the Arab nations economically.

## Conclusion

Overall, it is evident that Pan Arabism was an ideology as important as capitalism and communism in the administrative and economic sense, with the major objective being the joining of the nations in North Africa and West Asia to create an Arab state. Initially, most of these nations shared different ideologies and this created a conflicting relationship amongst the states. The pan-Arabism ideology, which was famous from 1950-1960, grew due to certain figures who played a significant role in supporting that philosophy. One such political leader was Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president from 1952. He strongly promoted pan-Arabic views, with him questioning the role of the West in Egypt and how nationalisation of natural resources could benefit the whole community. His main goal was to boost equal development and distribution of resources within the country. His views led him to make the Suez Canal a national resource which he could control, and this led to the Anglo-French invasion of 1956. His success in dealing with the Europeans led to Arab leaders wanting to join forces with him and develop a new state. At least initially, this was successfully done with Syria to create the United Arab Republic and with Yemen to create the United Arab States. However, this project quickly ended due to the poor administration of the states under one ruler. Despite this, the effect of pan Arabism is being felt to date, with Islamism taking over with a shift to more religious policies. Many wars have hit the Middle East due to territory disputes, with a continuous dispute with Israel for natural resources. A major issue has been terrorism, which has its roots in the pan Arabic beliefs that have turned into serious threats to the growth of Islamism. The use of Sharia law in Arab countries is another result of pan Arabism, along with the economic growth of the Middle East as a major source of oil and petroleum products. Pan Arabism has greatly affected the Middle East negatively, but it still has had its uses for the Arab people who wish to have great power in the region.

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