

Moslems, Jews and geography

countries that reflect a consistent perception among Arab leaders of common problems that cannot be resolved independently, and a consistent push toward cooperation in solving these problems. This commonality of interest is real in spite of the significant ideological, economic, political and social differences among the Arab states. One of the most significant objectives of the cooperative system has been to bring under control external influences, and hence to reduce the impact of external powers on the course of Arab destiny.

This has paralleled the tide of political transformation within Arab states that has swept out traditionalist regimes set up by colonial administrations as puppet or client governments and swept in nationalist regimes strongly opposed to foreign interference. In fact, by the late sixties, half of the Arab states were governed by revolutionary nationalist regimes and there were only five states left with traditional monarchies — Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and Oman. These monarchies fear for their own survival against the nationalist tide — a fear that both makes them more dependent on external alignments and forces them to compromise with nationalist sentiment.

Paramount issue — Arabs versus Israelis

The overriding common problem facing the Arab world has been the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Arab-Israeli conflict system has also experienced expansion since 1958. The emergence of the Palestinian resistance movement and of the PLO as significant forces in the two regional systems were direct outcomes of the centrality of the Palestine issue to Arab political development.

In spite of the strains of conservative-nationalist com-

petition that mark Arab cooperation, the common problems of continued Israeli occupation of Arab territory, Israel's annexation of Jerusalem in 1967 and the plight of the Palestinians maintain a central cohesiveness. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war served to heighten the centrality of the problem to all Arab governments and served to deepen the feeling in the Arab world of external influence as the root of the problem. Even the conservative regimes closely allied to the United States regard American support of Israel as the central problem in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Egypt's isolation from the Arab cooperative system as a result of its withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict through the Camp David accord reflects the commonality of orientation on the Arab-Israeli dispute.

The Arab-Israeli conflict cuts across ideological divisions within the Arab world. Demonstrating this is the support given throughout the Arab world to the PLO. In 1974, the PLO achieved observer status at the UN and in 1974 the UN passed a resolution condemning Zionism as racism. Israel has been effectively isolated from the Third World through concerted Arab cooperation.

Israel's invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982 and the massacre of the Palestinian people in the refugee camps are regional issues of common concern to the Arab world irrespective of ideological, political, economic and social divisions. These events heighten the concern in the Arab world over the role of external forces in fomenting attacks against the Arab world. Even the most conservative governments of the Arab cooperative system seek to reduce external dependence by strengthening Arab cooperation. □

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