Understanding the Diversity in the Arab World

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ABSTRACT

The idea of Arab unity has been a central motive in Arab politics since the declination of the Ottoman Empire. This idea emerged in the late 19th century, initially aiming at unifying the Arab countries in one single state. In the Arab hearts and minds, Arab unity is strongly felt, no matter if Arabs live in poor or rich countries, the basis of this unification is the common Arab heritage, language, culture, religion and history. The declared objectives of Arab unity were and still are to create unity, economic and social development, eventually enabling the Arabs to live in a good condition and to resist imperialism’s new ways and means and to achieve national security.

Whereas for the Arabs, in my point of view the reason that stands behind the Arab’s failure in unifying themselves in one single state till today is that because they have the spirit of nationalism but merely with no good plans or strategies on how to gain their unity.

The Arab World was and still is divided into twenty two countries. This diversity has political, economic and social implications on the Arab World, being part of the Third World countries, subject to those likely impacts. The objective of this paper is to examine the most important political, economical and social implications of diversity on the Arab countries, and to suggest appropriate policies that can be applied to reduce the negative impacts, and maximize the positive ones, on those countries.

1. INTRODUCTION

Diversity affected the Arab World. From a political, social and economic perspective –at the present time- the Arab countries are not homogenous in many aspects. There are considerable differences among them in political regimes, economic size and structure, populations’ size, income per capita, poverty… etc. Such differences will be reflected in the type of problems those countries may face, and in the policies they may be adopted to address the challenges of diversity.

The Arab World was affected through its international relations by the developed countries, and did not obtain its comprehensive national independence nor had achieved development, national unity or security. But rather, the Arab World, i.e. Arab countries obtained their nominal independence and remained living in dependency and separation, divided into more than twenty developing and underdeveloped countries. These features are considered a problem which impedes Arab development, independence and security.

Research Objectives: This research aims to analyze and to shed some light on the impact of diversity and other factors which had a significant influence on the Arab world’s involvement and strategy in the unity, development, independence and national security.

The significance of this research is to have more information about the Arab world circumstances: unity, diversity, development and national security.

In order to achieve the above mentioned aims and objectives, this study consists of six parts following the introduction.

These parts will include a review of different definitions and perceptions of substitutive capacity as derived from the literature. The researcher will identify the main features of the Arab countries that are relevant to our assessment.

This article covers also the alternatives that are introduced so as to overcome the above mentioned problems. Some policies will be suggested to enable the...
Arab countries to deal more effectively with diversity.

2. METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESIS

Among the problems facing the researchers who study the nature of the Arab Unity, cooperation and summit conferences, is the problem of obtaining proper and accurate information leading to scientific conclusions. Needless to say that obtaining specific information about political participation in the Arab World is a difficult task (posing hindrances on the way of the scientific researcher). In addition, most of the official information made available to the researcher is hard to believe or trust or to consider as a proper scientific guide.

Such belief has been acquired by all those undertaking research as a result of their knowledge of the nature and circumstances through which power is seized in the Arab World.

Most of the political regimes of the Arab countries emerged, not through the natural constitutional development but rather, most oftenly, by imposition or copying another way of ruling from outside the region, not to mention the violence and force used by the powers supporting those who have contributed in bringing them to power. All that have led to the deformation or misguiding or even prevention from obtaining appropriate information that may assist any researcher using the necessary scientific analysis.

Nevertheless, trying to review the nature of cooperation, unity and summits’ decisions involved in the socio-political and economic life of the Arab World, the research will depend on the available information, we may reach to some conclusions by following up the development in the Arab World, review some of the writings about the subject as well as the personal experience of the researcher.

Our examination of the diversity and development in the Arab world shows that there has been some development involvement in it. But the question this research is trying to answer focuses on the extent and form of political cooperation and unity as well as the constraints, which limit appropriate and effective development, independence and the achievement of national security.

The hypothesis of this research is that: the Arab World was and is still divided into twenty two countries. This diversity has political, economic and social implications, particularly for the Arab World or the Arab countries, being part of the Third World countries, subject to those likely impacts.

3. THE PERCEPTION OF STATE SUBSTITUTIVE CAPACITY

Before dealing with the alternatives, which seem essential to develop the states’ capacity and ability through the development of the national comprehensive development to achieve independence and national security, we would like to say that the rate capacity is not static, one-time, and one-direction. It should be viewed rather as a dynamic ongoing and feedback relationship. It moves to the point where it can increase or decrease according to the ability, willingness and activity shown by states and communities to reinforce its status, and work to improve and maintain it (Copline, 1971). This would be achieved through creation (Rotow, 1960). The only one who could do this role is man (Mohammad, 1988). In addition to what has been mentioned, we can say that the level of knowledge that prevails through the countries shows us that capacity is changeable (Mohammad, 1988). This refers to cultural growth that plays a basic role in technological and scientific progress (Morgenthou and Thompson, 1982). Whereas technology plays an important role in taming nature, and creating the possibilities that provide the political, military and economic means (Singer, 1987), that countries need for restrain and being effective in the international relations (Couloumbis and Wolfe, 1982).

Not only the development of total capacity is concerned with the concept of resources, it also means the necessity of having free-will availability to be able to make any particular behavior for its importance, and abandon it either to affect one side or to evade the effect that results from any other side (Couloumbis and Wolfe, 1982).

This distinction does not prevent absorbing integration between the two levels in relation to explaining international capacity, whereas there are two levels. The first one is concerned identifying the basic factors for forming capacity. And the second one is related to the ability of those who are responsible for decision-making to recruit the materialistic factors for the state to enable it to interact with the environment around and to affect the international policy with its decisions (Mohammad, 1988).

Controlling the followed strategies together with the objectives and possibilities of a state, and caring of a
state’s role or a political leadership in manipulating possibilities, changing, developing and investing them according to the intelligence of those who are responsible for the management of international affairs, personal experience of the political leadership or of the decision-making sides in the states and in the international environment and their relation to changing capacity in the states; and the rank of the states in the international system are all factors that affect (positively and negatively) changing or substituting capacities in the states from a weak status to a better one. This could be summarized in the following formula: 

\[
\text{Capacity} = \text{The basic factors of capacity} \times \text{Possibility of recruiting resources} \times \text{Strategy} \times \text{General environment.}
\]

These variables that constitute the capacity formula are not static for the reason that the states’ objectives and strategies are not solid. Nevertheless, they are able to change; local resources on the other hand are developing because of their linkage with the work practiced by man to exploit nature according to the benefits adopted by him (Mohammad, 1988).

In the following section the research will explain the situation in the Arab World.

4. THE ARAB WORLD: GENERAL POINT OF VIEW

The Arabs emerged with a state on the world historical stage in the 7th century with the Prophet Mohammed and the rise of Islam. The Arabs are those who speak Arabic as their native tongue and who identify themselves as Arabs. The Arab identity is based on common history, language and characteristics (Aloush, 1986).

The Arab World as a region is the area that extends from the Arabian Gulf in the east to Morocco in the west, embraces a portion of Africa, Asia, the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. The Arab World is divided into two areas: the Eastern region, which consists the Arab-Asian countries, the so called Al-Mashreq Al-Arabi, and the Western region, Al-Maghreb Al-Arabi, which consists of the Arab North African countries (Helal, 1988).

In fact, for a variety of reasons, westerners including Americans, often assume that there is a deep division between Arabs and Islamic culture, on one hand, and American–European and Christian culture on the other hand. Even some scholars and well educated people assume these divisions. Western civilization is said to be based on the Judeo–Christian tradition.

Islam as a religion recognizes the Jewdism and Christianity as religions and Arab Christians and Jews have always been an integral part of the Arab World. For example, the collaboration of the three religions in Southern Spain (Andulusia) between the 8th and 15th century that produced many of the scientific and cultural achievements that were transmitted to Europe and helped in laying the foundations of the Renaissance. In fact, the Arabic language was the language of science at that time in that area (Hailat and Nahar, 2003).

This is not to say that there were no conflicts between Westerners and Arabs. In fact, the more recent history provides the existence of such conflicts all over the world even among nations with the same religion. The conflicts between Arabs and Westerners started seriously during the world war I when Britain and France took over the Arab world after defeating the Ottoman empire and divided it under the Sykes - Picot agreement in 1916, and the promise given by Belfour declaration in 1917 to create a Jewish state in Palestine (Polk, 1980).

Though Europeans contributed to the development of states, of economies and education in many of these countries, the main legacy of colonialism is resentment against the Western rule and power.

5. THE ARAB WORLD TODAY

The Arab World has all the elements of power with its variables. Some of these national resources are available such as oil, population, strategic positions… etc, while the other elements need more observation, studying and care (Nahar, 1993). The Arab countries tried through the Arab League as well as Arab Summits to achieve cooperation and development. One of the main issues around which the members of the Arab League have rallied is that of development. This issue, over the lifetime of the Arab League has featured in every meeting and gathering, and in the literature of the League. It was only natural to have this focus on socio-economic and political development because all members of this league were underdeveloped and unless independence secures some form of better living, the process of independence itself cannot be secured and maintained. Therefore, development and cooperation became a matter of survival for Arab countries.
In spite of the above mentioned meetings as well as summits, the Arab countries are still facing internal and external problems. The Arab World was affected by internal and external variables which created different social trends and beliefs during the social development process in the communities (Hasseeb, 1988; Al-Jaber, 1985).

Externally, the Arab World was effected through its international relations with the developed countries, by not obtaining its comprehensive national independence nor had it achieved national unity and security, but rather, the Arab countries obtained their superficial independence and remained living in dependency, separation, and the Arab world was divided into more than twenty countries (Yassen, 1982).

These circumstances created three types of regimes. A family type regime, the so-called revolutionary regimes, and the poorly copied “democratic” regimes. In all of these regimes, rulers keep authority to themselves in the name of religion, revolution or democracy. When parties or the parliaments are found in those regimes, they are almost unreal and become away of applying the phenomenon of one elector to the residency in order to ensure ineffectiveness of foundations and absence of political participation in those regimes. Syria and Egypt are a good example for that.

It can be said that Arab political regimes did not come as a result of a process of democracy. Almost, they came as poor copies of foreign regimes, and the formation of ruler regimes with colonial background such as the British regime, French colonialism and US involvement, which in most cases are accompanied by using force to hold authority (Nahar, 2004).

On the economic side, the Arab World was divided by colonial powers to countries with small populations and rich in oil such as the Gulf states while other countries have a large population with no oil (with some natural resources) such as Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Morocco. In both cases they have produced poor and powerless countries. As a result, the people of these countries feel that they are not secure and there is a conspiracy against them, which produces sometimes unexpected reactions (Nahar, 2004).

It seems that the Arab Countries have their own structural problems which need to be tackled in their own terms, whether because of the exploitation of the old colonial rulers or not (Hussein, 1984). There is a need for cooperation on one hand between the developed world and the Arab World with an open, though suspicious, mind being kept by the latter, and on the other hand, among the Arab Countries themselves to overcome their own difficulties together. The developed world of course has also an interest in what is happening. In such a framework, there is an important role for the Arab World in forming the bridge for this cooperation.

With reference to the internal and external factors which impede the development and security in the Arab World, one cannot specify typical underdeveloped and developing Arab Countries in the Arab World because the differences among more than twenty countries are too wide. But the more underdeveloped a country in the Arab World is, the more likely it is to have low output, per capita (G.N.P), heavy reliance on agriculture, low literacy rates and life expectancy and early marriage. Birth rates and death rates in some Arab Countries mean that a large proportion of children and fewer women are in the earning labor force (Mohammad, 1988). One cannot quantify the economic costs of such divisions, but it is certain that they seriously impede development and affect national security.

The external factors that could be added to the previous ones could be embodied in the effect of the great forces on the independent development of the Arab countries whether it was in the past, during the ancient period of colonization, or in the present. The effect of these great forces is achieved through controlling the economic world system, external trade, technology export, external support… etc (Abed-Allah, 1987-1988).

These factors provide the great forces with new colonial means by which they control the Arab countries and put them in their satellites (Sai’d, 1984).

Dependency here doesn’t mean will-less submit to foreign interests or forced performance, within plans and policies that stop the growth and development in these countries (satellites) (Frank, 1971). It is an internal structural state (i.e. inside the Arab society) that comes out from factors, policies, institutions and local forces in the underdeveloped countries. The social classes in these countries which are the result, if the state of dependency performs voluntary works for the benefit of the developed countries through a group of tasks: (Nairn, 1982). First: its linkage will be the center with commercial, diplomatic and cultural relations. Second: the control of state institutions by these social classes and the creation of new laws and decisions that maintain the dependency existence. Third: the attempt of these social classes to make the role of the other national social classes marginal
in the different sectors of the society and to put it away from real participation. All these were done to conform with the suitable circumstances to increase foreign investments in the countries. This leads to more power and more foreign interference in the internal affairs of the state whether this was done directly or indirectly.

It is also known that the Arab World’s natural resources have been and are still dominated by the multinational corporations. Also, there are countries enjoying good returns from exporting their one or more raw materials; for example, the oil producing countries, and there are other countries which receive less returns than those of the oil exporting countries which already have the financial ability to provide the required investment.

In some countries, exportable resources do not exist or exist in only small quantities. They have to go through a period of authority in imports, i.e. cutting down of imports of consumer goods. These countries sometimes need foreign aid to provide part of the needed investment, which is a great risk of their independence. Because aid is often used as a weapon of the foreign policy of the “donor” country (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies).

This discussion is to show that these are certain Arab countries that don’t possess large economic resources that support their developmental plans. Therefore, they are in need to borrow or receive financial support from other developed countries to execute some developmental plans (Center for Contemporary Arab Studies). This has a great effect, which threatens the political independence and national security of those countries. Therefore, Arab World must recognize such aims and weapons, and must keep itself free of the “donor” country’s influence.

Also, after getting foreign aid, the problem, which has sometimes faced and still faces the Arab Countries, is how to allocate investments so as to secure socio-economic and political development.

6. ALTERNATIVES

To overcome the internal and external factors that stand as obstacles in the way of development, independence and security in the Arab World, certain elements are necessary to be available. The Arab World needs vision, perception and action about its problems, and needs to create interaction and integration of these elements, because they interact with each other dialectically, actively and accurately.

The first element that includes the availability of national thought or what is known as vision, should be aware of the counteractive factors that stand in the way of independent development for the countries whether these factors are active or passive.

In other words, there is a necessity to build up a special national thought for the Arab society which represents an outcome of the national society, awareness of dependency risks, its disadvantages and objectives. This kind of recognition for the national leadership that is characterized by national thought should be accompanied, interacted and linked with the element of action in its objectives and content (International IDEA).

The second element that includes the behavior and the action linked to the first element, takes a variety of forms in its performance. On one side, there is a necessity to draw accurate national developmental plans that fit with the needs of development in the Arab World and aim at restructuring the social classes that spring out of the state of dependency. Also, Arab countries should keep away from being in the satellite of certain schools that are strange to their national traditions, with the necessity to make use of the experiences of the other countries. The country that has a national thought, should try to depend on its national, social, political and economic capacities.

It is of utmost importance to have a clear role in the application of the independent development plans, and to interfere with or supervise the different development sectors such as designing developmental plans, providing the necessary tools and supervision for these plans, establishing organizations that work by the national scientific competence, controlling or supervising the country’s external trade, the banks and the prices, private sectors by giving opportunities to public participation to take part in developing and building a national capacity development (Yassen, 1994). All this will put the countries in the way of independent national development and keep them away from the state of dependency and its risks.

Also, to overcome this problem, the following suggestions are proposed:

- First, adopting strategic plans for investment, taking into account the different developmental fields such as agricultural investment for the purpose of increasing food production, providing opportunities for work and the investment of some industrial goods directly (Al-Azee, 1987). These investments are essential because they raise the population standards of living, save the country from importing invested resources from foreign countries, and
help the national economy with the expenses that could be saved and keep it away from political and economic dependency (Abdallah, 1987-1988).

Secondly, presenting some theories and means by which capitals or external supports could be employed. Economists in the developed world, for instance have proposed two basic methods to employ capital in developmental projects (Nahar, 1984).

They are the balanced and the unbalanced theories of development (Nahar, 1984). The first theory dealt with the state’s interference in the economic activities through the country’s economic plan. For this purpose, Rosenstein Roden (1943) has proposed a system to balance the effect of the prices’ system (Moridi, 1976). The other theory approves the idea of the employment of the large governmental capitals in the basic economic fields and permits the use of prices for the employment and the investment of capitals in different projects. The owners of these theories have proposed three choices for the underdeveloped countries who like to develop their national capacities (Moridi, 1976).

- Direct employment of capitals in productive projects. b - The employment of capitals in the late industrial stages. C- The employment of capitals in different social services and projects.

This policy aimed at offering facilities and services which lead in one way or another to employments in the industrial productive means. These facilities and services are usually prepared by the central government or the general management (Sayeg, 1987). We can conclude that the relation to these theories that the choice of which one is preferable has to be left to the leaders of Arab Countries according to their local conditions. But in choosing, they need to be constantly aware of the need to avoid economic dependence on more powerful developed or developing countries.

The last proposition implies the following suggestions: a- To make use of the developmental experiences of some countries and to take what is suitable from these experiences. In other words, there is a necessity to create models and interaction between traditionalism and modernity. This means the adoption of a national perspective aiming at developing an independent national development. Therefore, we suggest for the Arab countries to study the history and the developmental plans of the developed countries, to make use of these experiences by choosing developmental methods suitable to make use of to develop the independent national development.

The national development in the U.S.A., U.K, France, Japan and China for instance is based on a group of elements that are still suitable, as models, to make use of some of its methods at the present (Kunio, 1979). b- The necessity of the Arab countries to be aware of the dangerous and important role of the external trade and its effect on independent development. It is economically well-known that there is a large gap in experience between the developed and Arab countries where the developed countries control the world market. Therefore, it is necessary for the Arab countries to pay attention to this dangerous point, with the need to arrange with the other underdeveloped countries to lessen the gap between them or even to end it if possible. This could be done by means of the national and international organizations or by any way that is suitable to be used.

To do that, the Arab countries should take what they find appropriate from both capitalism and socialism and also, they must cooperate with each other, taking into account each others’ experiences in achieving their development.

What I mean by taking what is appropriate from both systems is that America, Britain, Western Europe, Japan, Russia and communist China have experienced the national incomes that development and industrialization engender. What can the Arab World countries learn from the economic history of the developed economics that might help them to understand what development is at present underway in the Arab World? For example, the Japanese development was based on many components which could still serve as a model for today’s Arab Countries (Nahar, 1984). Among these components are: Widespread agricultural improvement; a light rate of capital investment (financed principally from domestic profits and taxation); the rapid growth of export industries and a consequent ability to import advanced technology; a highly literate and skilled population capable of technological ingenuity and finally, a capable political leadership committed to development and industrialization. It also created a modern taxation system and initiated sweeping social changes to accommodate commercial and industrial needs… etc. (Dalton, 1979).

Another example from which the Arab World could profit is China. The Chinese government adopted its own principles to achieve development such as nationalism to keep China away from interference and exploitation by foreigners, and socialism was adopted to bring about
reforms and a better life, especially for the millions of Chinese peasants (Watson, 1981).

7. CONCLUSION

To conclude, from this discussion about the diversity and its effectiveness on the substituting capacity of the Arab World, it can be said that the Arab countries that wish to reach this state of capacity are in need for national thought, awareness of developmental risks, awareness of dependency and at the same time awareness of the advantages of independent development. After this awareness, there is a necessity for the Arab leadership to aim at achieving independent national development because this leads to strengthening capacity and leads to independent external behavior and to nation’s security.

This action is achieved by taking into consideration a collection of internal procedures such as designing developed independent developmental plans and building up a social basis. Awareness of the implementation of these plans and depending on self abilities aim at achieving national independence. The Arabs need to use national strategies by which objectives could be controlled in accordance with their abilities and the successful means to reach nation’s security.

One can say that these internal and regional differences notwithstanding Arab national sentiment remains powerful. Whether or not Arab states ever achieve political unity, Arabs will always be united in pride in their history, their language and their contributions to the development of the human spirit.

At the same time, cultural and intercultural dialogue are in neither a cure-all nor a substitute for taking cooperation further in other fields. But by setting the human dimension at the center as the cement of bonds between the Arabs and other countries in the World, they will enhance that such cooperation will be conducted for the sake of all.

In particular, this will ensure that the time of misunderstanding and negative stereotype can ultimately be ceased among all people of good will in the Arab World and the other part of the world. The Arabs need to have good and normal relations with the West and America at all levels. Such relations could be of benefit for all of them. The Arab world shouldn’t be judged by one or two radical groups. To achieve that, the Arabs and the other part of the world need to know each other as on the human level, to exchange programs, and to know the area of the Arab World not from the mass media only but through some visits and fact finding. On the other hand, the Arabs need the other parts of the World to help in solving the problems in the Middle East. In fact, they can together minimize the level of radicalism, violence, and live in peace.

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* أنثى الأمس

لCRYPTO

قرن، وقرن، وقرن، وقرن... وتنتهي الأمة العربية على إنها، فدائمًا، تتمثل العربية الوحدة الفكرية والعمانية.

و في الفكر هذه ظهرت سوية حدة على العربية والقراءة، بوضوح، وضمانات، وضمان، في وعائت العشرين القرنين، إعاً على بنية الفكر العربي، والثقافة، واللغة، والتاريخ، والسياسة، والاقتصادية، والإمكانيات، وتوجه، ودائمًا، إلى تحدي، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، والتغير، والتغير الجغرافي واللغوي والديني.

و في الأستان العرب جعل الأمة العربية لǎت، وتحقيق، وتمكن، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، والتجربة، والتجربة، والعمل، والعمل، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، والتجربة، والتجربة، والعمل، والعمل، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، والعمل، والعمل، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، ودائمًا، إلى التحدي، والعمل، والعمل.

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