

In the Service of Power: The Ideological Struggle in the Arab World During the Gulf Crisis

by
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"The Arab nation would not become the 'sick man' of this century."

Egyptian President Husni Mubarak¹

A salient feature of the post-1967 period in the Arab world was the decline in the role played by Arab intellectuals. This process was accompanied by what Fouad Ajami described as "a definite backlash against the written word."² One might assume that this phenomenon would also indicate the waning of ideology as a driving force in Arab politics. However, its centrality was still vividly displayed during the recent Gulf crisis (1990-91), when the Arab world witnessed, in addition to the actual fighting, a war-of-words between Saddam Hussein and his Arab opponents. While most studies hitherto published dealt with the political and military aspects of the Gulf crisis, this article attempts to shed light on a rather neglected aspect of the conflict: the ideological struggle between Arab states and leaders.³

IDEOLOGY AND ITS FUNCTIONS

The term "ideology" has more than one definition. David Easton defined it as "articulated sets of ideals, ends, and purposes, which help the members of the system to interpret the past, explain the present, and offer a vision for the future."⁴ A somewhat similar definition was suggested by Alexander George for political ideology: "a set of fundamental beliefs . . . that explains and justifies a preferred political order for society . . . and offers at least a sketchy notion of strategy . . . for its maintenance or attainment."⁵ These definitions substantiate Clifford Geertz's assertion that the term itself has been thoroughly ideologized. For, while it had once meant "a collection of political proposals, perhaps somewhat intellectualistic and impractical but at any rate idealistic," the term has now become "the integrated assertions, theories, and aims constituting a politico-social program."⁶ Using Geertz's terminology, John Thompson has recently suggested that ideology should be seen as "meaning in the service of power," and that to study ideology is "to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination."⁷

A coherent ideology may contain several components: first, a normative concept established by "the identification and justification of the preferred order;" second, an explanatory dimension offering "an authoritative diagnosis of the ills and evils of the present political order," and the identification of the enemy; third, a prescriptive dimension defining a program and a general strategy for its realization; and finally, a predictive dimension stating "the prospects for the eventual

realization of one's fundamental political values and ideological goals."⁸ Thus, ideology is a set of doctrines, beliefs and myths taken from the society's mythology and historiography.⁹ Having established its ideology, the regime uses propaganda — "the deliberately evoked and guided campaign to induce people to accept a given view"¹⁰ — in order to achieve its goals.

Ideology may have several functions in any given society. First, leaders use it to justify their actions and policies before and *ex post facto*.¹¹ Second, it is widely exploited as a legitimacy resource. Easton described this mode of ideology as "ethical principles that justify the way power is organized, used, and limited and that define the broad responsibilities expected of the participants in the particular political relationship."¹² Third, ideology helps to unify the nation by giving the masses a sense of direction.¹³ All in all, ideology is an instrument for "securing popular support for the regime and the ruling groups as representing the 'true' will of the people."¹⁴

The above-mentioned functions of ideology are part of what Geertz termed the "interest theory," whereby ideology is seen as a mask and a weapon, and the ideological pronouncements are analyzed within the context of a universal struggle for advantage and power. Karl Mannheim was the first to suggest that "the particular conception of ideology is implied when the term denotes that we are skeptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent. They are regarded as more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of a situation."¹⁵ Geertz, however, suggested another approach to the study of ideology, which he identified as "the strain theory." According to this theory, ideology functions both as a symptom of, and a remedy to, society's diseases, while its expressions are seen within the context of a "chronic effort to correct sociopsychological disequilibrium." Though the two theories are not necessarily contradictory, Geertz claimed, the second was "more penetrating, less concrete, [and] more comprehensive."¹⁶ While not dismissing the interest theory, he emphasized the significance of the first:

The view that social action is fundamentally an unending struggle for power leads to an unduly Machiavellian view of ideology as a form of higher cunning and, consequently, to a neglect of its broader, less dramatic social functions. The battlefield image of society as a clash of interests thinly disguised as a clash of principles turns attention away from the role that ideologies play in defining (or obscuring) social categories, stabilizing (or upsetting) social expectations, maintaining (or undermining) social norms, strengthening (or weakening) social consensus, relieving (or exacerbating) social tensions.¹⁷

Both the interest and the strain theories are applicable to the Arab world. While Arab leaders often use ideology as a legitimacy resource to enhance their position, the response of the masses to the use of ideology should be analyzed in the context of the "response to strain."¹⁸

IDEOLOGY IN THE ARAB WORLD

The propagation of ideology has played a significant role in Third World countries during the second half of this century. Ideology was a useful tool for societies that felt the need to change through modernization, and which aspired to transform their social and moral values.¹⁹ However, implanting new values in modernizing societies is problematic; “nowhere more so,” asserted Michael Hudson, “than in the Arab world where the religious character of society is so evident.”²⁰ In the case of the revolutionary Arab regimes, he added, the ruling élite attempts to harmonize “religion and nationalism, kinship group and political movement, the legacy of the past and the promise of the future, the sacred and the secular, and the consummatory and the instrumental.”²¹

In the absence of structural legitimacy in the Arab world, Hudson further argued, “ideological legitimacy assumes paramount importance almost by default.”²² In his opinion, “if one were to measure frequency of symbols . . . such as Islam, Palestine, democracy, liberation, and social justice, in the public speeches of Arab leaders, it would . . . dwarf the discussion of policy alternatives, projects, and day-to-day politics.”²³ According to his findings, all Arab regimes exploit ideology in their pursuit of legitimacy, but the revolutionary republics had magnified it into what David Apter called a “political religion.”²⁴ For those regimes, Apter explained, “the working out of an ideology is a way of indicating the moral superiority of new ideas.”²⁵

The Arab language plays a crucial role in shaping the nature of ideology in the Arab world. Arabic, as Hisham Sharabi correctly observed, became “a most effective instrument of influence and persuasion,” while the effect in public speeches is created “not so much by reasoning and explication as by repetition and intonation.”²⁶ Moreover, the development of a new language — “medial” Arabic — which was neither rigidly classical nor fully colloquial, had facilitated communication in the media. Sharabi attached great significance to the rise of the new revolutionary regime in Egypt (July 1952), which made use of a combined spoken dialect and “medial” Arabic:

This departure had tremendous impact on the masses who, addressed for the first time in their own spoken language, felt an unprecedented kinship with the new leadership. In this sense the revolution itself brought this new facility and ease to the Arabic language and enabled the rise of a truly mass press and popular literature. More important perhaps, it removed a profound psychological barrier separating the illiterate masses from the educated classes of society and created on the political plane a new sense of unity and belonging.²⁷

While intellectuals in the West have played a prominent role in shaping ideologies, in the developing countries the ruling elites usually have set the tone.²⁸ Thus, when analyzing ideology in the Arab world, special attention should be paid to political leaders’ statements since they tend to exert influence on the masses, and because they have almost exclusive control over the communication apparatus.²⁹

Egypt's successful use of ideology as a tool in its foreign policy led Arab leaders — like the Ba'th party leaders in Syria and Iraq — to imitate the Egyptian model. Like other Ba'thist revolutionaries, Saddam Hussein (who became the Iraqi president in 1979, but had been the regime's "strongman" long before that time) attached great significance to the role of ideology, though he himself carried "no ideological baggage."³⁰ Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi observed that for Hussein ideology "is purely a means for the promotion of the one and only goal:" reaching the country's top position and staying there.³¹ As a Ba'thist leader, Saddam Hussein attempted to buttress his legitimacy by promoting pan-Arab ideology (*qawmiyya*) and by portraying himself as a pan-Arab leader. At the same time, however, he attempted to create, sometimes to the extent of re-writing history, a new national Iraqi identity (*wataniyya*) based on the Mesopotamian past, that is, the ancient civilizations in the territory between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers.³²

Since Khomeini's revolution in 1979, the Ba'th secular-national ideology has been strongly challenged by the new Iranian Islamic regime. Attempting to counter this threat, Saddam Hussein placed more emphasis on Islam in his speeches, and depicted himself as a descendant of the Prophet and the fourth Caliph 'Ali.³³ Thus, by the end of the 1980s, Hussein's ideology became an eclectic amalgamation of Iraqi, pan-Arab and Islamic messages, intended to achieve a solid base of legitimacy in Iraq and throughout the Arab world.

In his quest for legitimacy during the Gulf crisis, the Iraqi leader employed all the ideological paraphernalia at his disposal. Though there was nothing innovative in his messages, the intensity and the volume of their use were indeed new. Hussein's exploitation of ideology should not lead us to regard it as a mere "jumble of rhetorical phrases and slogans," in Yehoshafat Harkabi's words.³⁴ Rather, his use of ideology and the war of words that followed it may reflect a deeper crisis in Arab thought and action.

Hussein employed five major themes which will be the focus of this article: Islam; pan-Arabism; imperialism and Zionism; social and economic justice; and the question of "historical rights." Each of these will be examined in turn. The article will then offer some general conclusions regarding the utility and effectiveness of ideology in the Gulf crisis.

ISLAMIC SYMBOLS

Three holy places for the Arabs and Muslims are occupied: Jerusalem, Mecca, and the Prophet Muhammad's tomb Is there anything that is more humiliating, unjust and aggressive than this to mobilize and reactivate the resources of Arabs and Muslims?

Saddam Hussein³⁵

Analyzing Saddam Hussein's pronouncements shows that the most sustained effort in his propaganda campaign was directed to mobilize Islamic public opinion by using Islamic messages and citing Qura'anic verses.³⁶ He presented

himself as a descendant of the Qurayshi tribe, maintaining that his family lineage went back to Hussein, the son of 'Ali, the Prophet's cousin and son-in-law.³⁷ This mode of legitimation, was intended to create "a sense of belonging to a community and to a history which transcends the experience of conflict, difference and division."³⁸ By using this strategy, the secular Iraqi leader attempted to project himself as a religious leader and thereby acquire the support of all Muslims, including the Iraqi Shi'ites, who consider 'Ali to be the Prophet's legitimate successor.

At the beginning of the crisis, Hussein called upon the Muslims, "the grandchildren of the first al-Qadisiyah, Yarmuk and Hittin (battles in Islamic history)," to declare *jihad* in order "to save Mecca and the tomb of the Prophet." He emphasized that the rulers of Najd and Hijaz (he refused to use the term 'Saudi Arabia,' thus implying his reluctance to recognize the Saudi state), had challenged God by placing the holy shrines "under foreign protection." Hence, it was the believers' duty to rise against the infidels and defend the holy places, which were "the captive of the spears of the Americans and Zionists." Iraq, Saddam concluded, would declare *jihad* without any hesitation or fear of the enemy.³⁹ The call for *jihad*, usually aimed at rescuing Jerusalem and Palestine, was now directed to the three holy shrines which were "under occupation."⁴⁰ Saddam's call was endorsed by an Islamic congress held in Iraq on 10 August, by the Iraqi National Assembly and by the Iraqi 'ulama. Significantly, the Grand Shi'i Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Kho'i issued a *fatwa* (a religious ruling opinion) forbidding "seeking support from heretics against Muslims."⁴¹ His repeated call for *jihad* was directed to all Muslims, because "the humiliation . . . is not only directed against 200 million Arabs . . . but also against 1 billion Muslims."⁴²

In contrast to his usual bellicose terminology, Hussein offered, in a symbolic gesture in honor of the Prophet's birthday anniversary in early October, a peaceful solution to the crisis.⁴³ He also reverted to the common comparison between Israel and the Crusader Kingdom, which furnished his argument with an historical depth. Thus, he tried to turn the Iraqi-Kuwaiti episode into another clash in the battle between the Christian-West and the Muslim-Arab-East.⁴⁴ As the UN deadline for Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait was approaching (15 January 1991), Saddam convened a gathering of the Popular Islamic Conference (PIC) on 9-11 January, which called on all Muslims to rise up in *jihad* should Iraq be attacked.⁴⁵ On 14 January, he ordered the redesigning of the Iraqi flag so as to include a drawing of the Islamic verse *allahu akbar*.⁴⁶ Two days later, he addressed a letter to President Bush, loaded with Islamic verses and messages, which declared Iraq's willingness and readiness to fight against the "atheist" enemy.⁴⁷

The invasion of Kuwait posed serious questions to 'ulama and ordinary Muslims alike: Was it permissible, according to the *Shari'a*, for one Muslim state to conquer another? Was it appropriate for a Muslim-Arab state to seek the support of an "infidel state" against another Muslim-Arab state? The Iraqi answer was that according to the *Shari'a*, a Muslim is not allowed to look for infidel assistance against other Muslims.⁴⁸ The invasion caused much confusion among 'ulama and

Islamic organizations, which responded according to their own state's interests and thus opened a "war of *fatwas*." The Saudi Council of Higher 'Ulama issued a *fatwa* supporting the presence of Arab, Islamic and "other friendly forces," and justifying Saudi Arabia's right to defend itself "by all possible means."⁴⁹ Moreover, an Islamic conference, convened in Mecca on 13 September, denounced the *fitna* (dissension) in the Gulf, called for Iraq's withdrawal, and reiterated the Saudi right to ask for foreign help.⁵⁰ Saudi Arabia also convened in Mecca a gathering of the PIC on the precise dates of the Iraqi PIC gathering, with the participation of Egypt's Shaykh al-Azhar and other prominent 'ulama. Not surprisingly, the Mecca conference criticized the Baghdad meeting and declared that the invasion of Kuwait "violated the very principles of Islam."⁵¹

The Egyptian regime also used the religious establishment to denounce the Iraqi invasion. Shaykh al-Azhar, Jadd al-Haqq 'Ali Jad al-Haqq, labeled Saddam "the Iraqi tyrant" (*baghi*) and brushed aside his Islamic pretensions as a cover for tyranny.⁵² The Egyptian *Mufti*, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, also issued a *fatwa* allowing believers to use arms against the Iraqi leader.⁵³ Some Islamic journals condemned Saddam Hussein, claiming that "never in the history of Islam and the Muslims had someone committed such an obscene crime." Hussein's behavior was equated with that of al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the ruthless Iraqi ruler during the Umayyid period.⁵⁴ The use of Islamic symbols was not solely confined to religious circles; in a speech delivered at *al-isra' wal-mi'raj* (commemorating Muhammad's midnight journey to the seventh heaven), Egyptian President Husni Mubarak claimed that Saddam's call for a *jihād* was illegitimate, because it was not a defensive war, preemptive war or liberation war, which were considered legitimate causes for a *jihād*.⁵⁵ The Egyptian press often termed Hussein "the Hulego of the Arabs," referring to the Mongol ruler who had destroyed Baghdad in 1258.⁵⁶ The famous Egyptian writer Naguib Mahfuz argued that the Iraqi invasion was "a crime of the *Jahiliyya*" (the pre-Islamic era of darkness), which reflected the ineptitude of Islamic education.⁵⁷ Even Syria, a country controlled by an Alawite minority accused of heresy, ridiculed Hussein's use of Islamic symbols.⁵⁸

Different responses came from Islamic movements in Jordan and in Algeria, as well as from organizations throughout the Islamic world, especially in India and Pakistan. The Jordanian media, constantly supporting Iraq, called the foreign troops "the new crusaders." The Jordanian minister for religious affairs stated that the *fatwa* of the Egyptian *Mufti* was "wicked, erroneous, and smacked of oil," and called "to expel the crusaders from the Arabian Peninsula."⁵⁹ In a communiqué issued at the end of a meeting between the Jordanian and Algerian parliamentary delegations, it was stated that the foreign intervention was "an unprecedented humiliation," and that "any attack against Iraq would be considered an attack against the entire Islamic and Arab nation."⁶⁰ A Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) official was even more outspoken, claiming that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was "a religious duty," since "there should be no borders within the [Islamic] nation." Moreover, he asserted that, as unity must be acquired by all means, Hussein should be approached

and asked "to unify the Islamic ranks just as Salah al-Din had done during the time of the crusaders."⁶¹ During the war, as masses demonstrated in favor of Iraq, a leader of the Islamic movement in Algeria, Shaykh 'Abdullah Jaballah, rejected the Egyptian *fatwa*, repeating the Iraqi version that a Muslim cannot be assisted by a heretic.⁶² It must be emphasized, however, that some of the Islamic fundamentalist organizations, including the Cairo-based Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian *Hamas*, displayed some "understandable hesitancy" in their position, as they were financially dependent upon Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states.⁶³ The position of *Hamas* was particularly ambivalent because Hussein was supported by its rival, the secular PLO.

PAN-ARAB TERMS

"This is the battle of the entire Arab nation. It is not the battle of the Iraqis alone. Iraq is only the scene of the battle."

Saddam Hussein⁶⁴

Despite the decline of pan-Arabism after 1967, Hudson has argued that all-Arab symbols and concerns remained central in "the legitimacy equation."⁶⁵ Indeed, Saddam Hussein made frequent use of pan-Arab messages, and he emphasized Iraq's historical duty in the Arab world. These themes became even more explicit during the Iran-Iraq war and the Gulf war. In the former, Hussein presented Iraq as the defender of the Arab world against the "foreign" Persians.⁶⁶ Likewise, the Iraqi march into Kuwait was portrayed as the first step on the road to Arab unity. The annexation was nothing but a "merger" with "the motherland," which had been completed according to the wishes of the local inhabitants. The merger was "a new historical juncture," and a new launching base for the Arabs on the road of "unity, progress and liberation, under the historic brave leader, Saddam Husayn, the symbol of the nation's might and glory."⁶⁷ In an open letter to the Egyptian president, Saddam reiterated that "the Arab nation is a single nation [and] that the Arab homeland from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf is a single homeland."⁶⁸ On another occasion, he claimed that "the Arabs now face the inevitable restoration of the historical role which God has wanted for them."⁶⁹ Taha Yassin Ramadan, Hussein's deputy, virtually admitted that Iraq conquered Kuwait; but in his opinion, it was a necessary step if the Arab nation wanted to eliminate a backward reality of schism and inability to cope with modern challenges. Furthermore, he saw the invasion as "a beginning of a national awakening in the Arab world."⁷⁰ Hussein indicated that while Iraq had undertaken the Kuwaiti venture alone, the liberation of "the land" (i.e. Saudi Arabia) from "foreign occupation" was an all-Arab mission.⁷¹ Thus, the Iraqi president tried to convince the Arab masses that the takeover was in accordance with the aims of pan-Arabism, associated in the Arab mind with Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and his movement.

His success in evoking the concept of Arab unity threatened to erode the legitimacy of the Arab states and to jeopardize their territorial integrity. In an emergency summit convened on 10 August in Cairo, the Egyptian president responded by offering his interpretation:

... [T]he concept of the [Arab] nation requires that we recognize first and foremost that all Arab countries occupy the same status in the general Arab framework. All Arab countries constitute equal links in the chain of the Arab family regardless of the dimensions of their human, material or military power, for the true power is that of the combined Arab nation and not that of one side or another, or the power of one state at the expense of another. Without agreement on this, we do not have the right to use the term Arab nation.⁷²

Mubarak indicated that if the goal of Arab unity was a precious objective, then it was desirable to define methods and guidelines which would serve as a basis for achieving the unity through gradual steps. "It is no longer permissible," continued the Egyptian president, "to achieve unity by force of arms, as was the case in the past." In his opinion, the principle of resorting to force within the Arab household "completely obliterates the concept of Arab solidarity and kills the idea of the common interests and destiny." Moreover, since regional politics cannot be divorced from global politics, the Arabs should be guided by the values of the international community, primarily "the abandonment of the use of force, rejection of aggression, respect for human rights, and commitment to legitimacy." With relation to the foreign troops, Mubarak emphasized that "the Arab umbrella" — the sending of Arab forces to the Gulf — constituted the best option for the Arab nation to emerge from the crisis intact.⁷³

The Egyptian press fiercely attacked Saddam's attempts to cover his personal ambitions with an Arab disguise. The editor of *al-Ahram*, Ibrahim Nafi', wrote that Iraq suddenly turned "from the state defending the eastern gate of the Arab nation, to a state which kills the Arab honor by attacking its neighbors."⁷⁴ Mustafa Amin wrote in *al-Akhbar* that Hussein's aspiration to become "the Arab Napoleon" (a term formerly used by king Sa'ud to depict 'Abd al-Nasir in the mid-1950s) would result in the devastation of Iraq in a defeat resembling "June 5th," thus inflicting shame and humiliation on the Arab nation.⁷⁵ Different terms were used in the Egyptian press to describe Saddam: "the Arab dictator," "the thief of Baghdad," or "the Hitler of the Arabs."⁷⁶ Both the Saudi and Syrian press ridiculed his attempt to unify the Arab world; in their opinion, the annexation of Kuwait weakened the Arab position, while Israel consolidated its ranks since its strength "emanates from Arab divisions."⁷⁷ An organ of the Saudi royal house also emphasized that "an occupation is an occupation whether an Arab or an Israeli."⁷⁸

The theme of "Arab unity by force" struck a responsive chord among the Jordanian and Palestinian publics, however. According to *al-Bayadir al-Siyasi*, published in East Jerusalem, the struggle was between "the historical Arab legitimacy" and "the Imperialist Arab legitimacy." The paper argued that Arab unity should be imposed by force, just like Bismarck unified Germany. Such unity would also solve the economic problems of the Arab world.⁷⁹ These ideas were also voiced during the Amman convention, held on 16-18 September 1990, by one hundred leaders and representatives of different movements and organizations throughout

the Arab world. The delegates finally declared, *inter-alia*, that the foreign intervention in the Gulf was intended "to block the historic movement towards [the realization of] Arab unity - a program [for] which Iraq has been intensely [working] in the aftermath of the Gulf War [the Iran-Iraq war]." ⁸⁰

IMPERIALISM, COLONIALISM AND THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE

We all remember how our [Arab] nation suffered from foreign occupation during the last decades, and how we struggled to liberate ourselves from its yoke. After all these years, and after this long battle should we come and say openly to the world that we can not solve our problems, thus give it the opportunity to impose its hegemony?

King Hussein⁸¹

Since the formation of the Arab states at the end of World War I, Arab leaders and intellectuals have claimed that the Arab world had been partitioned into separate artificial entities according to the political and economic interests of the Western powers. Saddam Hussein constantly invoked this theme in order to emphasize that Kuwait was established due to the interests of "Western imperialism." Moreover, he warned, behind the mask of "liberating Kuwait," the superpowers were eagerly waiting to resubjugate the Arab world.⁸² According to the Iraqi president, Zionist Israel, a stronghold of "Western imperialism" in the Middle East, had to be liberated if one wanted to evict "Western imperialism" from the area.⁸³ At the Arab summit, Ramadan claimed that British colonialism intentionally separated Kuwait from Iraq in order to prevent the latter from defending itself. He often repeated the terms "collusion," "aggression" and "conspiracy," referring to a tripartite plot between the United States, Israel and Kuwait against Iraq.⁸⁴ The Iraqi media also emphasized that the deployment of foreign troops at "Najd and Hijaz" was part of an "imperialist-Zionist conspiracy," assisted by "the betrayal of the two mosques" (thereby paraphrasing King Fahd's title as "defender of the two noble mosques").⁸⁵ Furthermore, President Hussein astutely linked the issue of Iraq's presence in Kuwait to the Israeli occupation of Arab lands, when he suggested that all questions of occupation should be resolved in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolutions.⁸⁶

On 3 August 1990, the emergency session of the Arab League denounced Iraq's invasion, called for its immediate and unconditional withdrawal, but rejected outside interference.⁸⁷ Feeling itself in imminent danger, Saudi Arabia decided to invite American troops to the Gulf, thus forcing the Arab leaders to take a stand. The Cairo summit agreed to dispatch Arab forces to the Gulf and implicitly recognized the Gulf states' right to seek foreign assistance.⁸⁸ However, even Arab leaders who agreed with the foreign presence felt obliged to mitigate the impression of having collaborated with the West against a "sister" Arab state. Undoubtedly, the hated

memories of Western colonialism in the Middle East greatly contributed to Saddam Hussein's ability to mobilize Arab leaders and masses. Egypt, for example, allegedly rejected an American request to place military forces on its territory.⁸⁹ Foreign Minister 'Ismat 'Abd al-Majid announced that the task of the Egyptian forces would be to deter an attack against the Saudi kingdom, and that they "will not have any relationship with the foreign troops."⁹⁰ The Egyptian press found similarities between the evacuation agreement signed by 'Abd al-Nasir with Britain in 1954 and the Saudi invitation of foreign forces.⁹¹ The apologetic attitude of the Egyptian establishment was manifested in an open letter from the editor of *al-Ahram* to Saddam Hussein, which stated, *inter alia*, that "Egypt would be the first . . . to demand the evacuation of the foreign forces when you [Saddam] pull out your forces from Kuwait."⁹²

The apologetic attitude was even more apparent in the Saudi stance; during the Cairo summit, King Fahd expressed his willingness to accept any assistance — foreign or Arab — to defend his kingdom. These forces, he added, would withdraw from the Gulf as soon as the crisis was over or upon Saudi request. The king emphasized that "no attack [on Iraq] would be made from Saudi territory," justifying his move by Hussein's untrustworthiness — after all he had promised Mubarak that Iraq would not invade Kuwait.⁹³ Syria adopted a more sophisticated position; President Asad claimed that while he categorically rejected the presence of foreign troops on Arab soil, the Iraqi invasion posed a more imminent threat to the Arab world. Once it was solved, he stressed, the question of foreign intervention also would wither away. In regard to the Palestine problem, Asad stated that, "the struggle for Palestine does not begin in Kuwait," and there "could not be a more far-fetched site from which to launch the battle for the liberation of Palestine."⁹⁴ Interestingly enough, Libyan President Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi adhered to the Syrian position.⁹⁵ Kuwait's position was firm and clear: in a speech to the summit, the Amir stated that if the conference failed to check Iraqi aggression, "our duty to our people, and our responsibility to God, would compel us to take whatever steps needed to liberate our country."⁹⁶ His foreign minister was even quoted as having said that Kuwait would be willing to cooperate with the devil in order to expel the aggressor.⁹⁷

The Iraqi stance concerning the "artificial" Arab states was supported by many Arab leaders and organizations. King Hussein of Jordan forcefully claimed that the underlying cause of the crisis was the question of borders, which divided the Arab homeland into separate entities.⁹⁸ At the end of the summit, Hussein clarified his view that "the Arabs reject the attempts to regain Western hegemony over the region and its resources," and that he refused to take part in the Arab force as long as Western troops were on Saudi soil.⁹⁹ Likewise, the Jordanian press portrayed the crisis as a pretext for the United States to invade the region — an event which would lead to a "new era of Western colonialism."¹⁰⁰ Amman hosted a gathering of leaders and representatives of Arab organizations with the aim of creating a unified movement against the foreign involvement. This move was intended to demonstrate

that the Gulf crisis was in fact a struggle over the question of "Arab sovereignty."¹⁰¹ The conference's communiqué stated that "the American-imperialist invasion was not a response to 2 August, but another link in the chain of the historic struggle between our Arab nation and the imperialist West which also included the creation of the racist Zionist state at the heart of our homeland."¹⁰² One of the resolutions was "to strike against American interests everywhere," especially if the United States attacked Iraq.¹⁰³

The PLO and the Islamic organizations were unified in their opposition to the American "invasion." PLO chairman Yasser 'Arafat saw the Western involvement as a new "crusade."¹⁰⁴ The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) condemned the American "military invasion into the Arab land."¹⁰⁵ The PFLP went even further and called for the escalation of the *intifada* as a response to "the conspiracy."¹⁰⁶ Other Arab leaders, including the presidents of Algeria, Sudan and Yemen denounced the presence of foreign troops in the Gulf, claiming that their goal was to defend Western interests in the region.¹⁰⁷ Even the Egyptian opposition, sharply divided on the Kuwaiti crisis, denounced the foreign presence and described the conflict as "a quarrel within the family."¹⁰⁸

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE: RICH AND POOR ARAB STATES

Kuwait's liberation and its merger with its mother Iraq, has become the battle of the Arabs as a whole. It is a battle of liberation from hunger and want, the battle of starting a decent, prosperous life without humiliation and servility.

Saddam Hussein¹⁰⁹

The main argument in this theme was the need to close the economic and social gap that existed between rich and poor states in the Arab world. An offshoot of the "imperialist" theme, this argument was used by both leaders and intellectuals against Western powers and their "local" lackeys, who created a deep gap between big-poor and small-rich countries while establishing the artificial Arab states. Saddam Hussein elaborated on this theme by claiming that the Western powers had intentionally set up the "dwarf oil states" in order to prevent the Arab nation from enjoying its vast oil resources. In his view all Arabs should enjoy this wealth and not only a "tyrannical elite," which invested, according to his figures, \$220 billion outside the Arab homeland. The "corrupted statelets," he continued, contaminated the elites of the big Arab countries, which in turn "spread the disease among the ranks of the majority."¹¹⁰ Saddam further declared that the Western powers added insult to injury by providing the oil wealth to a minority which lacked in "cultural depth," while "cultural depth and population density centered in a place remote from the sources of the new wealth."¹¹¹

The Iraqi leader accurately sensed that the Gulf states felt threatened by his policy, as they had formerly been intimidated by 'Abd al-Nasir who saw Gulf region

oil as a source of “pan-Arab wealth.” On 10 September, Hussein announced his willingness to provide free oil to Third World countries if they would be responsible for its shipping.¹¹² Undoubtedly, the Iraqi aim was to undermine the Western economic blockade; however, Hussein presented it as an Iraqi gesture intended to redistribute Arab wealth.

His declared willingness to redistribute Arab wealth did not deceive other Arab leaders. After all, Iraq had been as rich as Kuwait, but its revenues were spent during the Iran-Iraq war as a consequence of its “adventurist bankrupt policy.”¹¹³ However, Hussein’s call struck a responsive chord among the Arab masses who felt exploited throughout the Arab world. Indeed, few could deny that the gap between the haves and have-nots was constantly widening, and that most of the revenues of the rich Arab states were being invested in the West and not in the Arab world.¹¹⁴ Even so, the Egyptian establishment scorned the Iraqi claim; Mubarak, in a speech to the 3rd Armoured division leaving for the Gulf, stated that the “redistribution of wealth” was only an Iraqi ploy aimed at seizing the oil wells.¹¹⁵ The Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram* ironically asked how “the pillage of a whole state by an armed force” could lead to the redistribution of wealth.¹¹⁶ Egypt considered the Iraqi suggestion a “poor bribe” offered by someone who had never given anything for free.¹¹⁷ Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states vehemently criticized Iraq and its allies (especially the PLO) for their attitude, claiming that the latter showed no gratitude after they had been generously financed during the 1980s.¹¹⁸ Jordan was the only Arab state to publicly support Hussein’s initiative, perceiving it as a sincere manifestation of the Arab nation’s moral values.¹¹⁹

RE-WRITING HISTORY: THE CLAIM OF “HISTORICAL RIGHTS”

The small village which over the past two centuries was established on the shores of the Arabian Gulf and called Kuwait - an Iraqi word meaning ‘the small populated colony’ - was, during the 19th century and until before the outbreak of WWI, a district belonging to the al-Basra Governate and a part of Iraq in accordance with the administrative laws set by the Ottoman Empire at that time.¹²⁰

Saddam Hussein, like other Iraqi rulers that preceded him, believed that Kuwait was an integral part of Iraq, because it had allegedly been part of the Ottoman Vilayet (Province) of Basra, which had become part of the new Iraqi state in 1921. In a letter to the American and Soviet presidents, Tariq ‘Aziz added an annex which reviewed Iraq’s historical claim to Kuwait.¹²¹ In addition, Iraqi editorials often used platitudes like “the return of Kuwait to its motherland,” or “the branch returned to its root and the family is reunited,” stating that Iraq would not leave Kuwait “even if it were to fight a thousand years.”¹²² Furthermore, “historical” studies were published which validated Hussein’s assertion that Kuwait was indeed a part of Iraq, and that the Kuwaiti ruling family was not actually Arab. The Iraqi press announced the publication of books, such as: *The Iraqi Identity of Kuwait*; *The End of Partition: A Historical Study of the return of Kuwait district to Iraq*; and, *The Liquidated Regime of the House of Sabah*.¹²³

Hussein's attempt at re-writing Iraq's history is not new; his previous endeavors to associate modern Iraq with ancient Mesopotamian cultures was received with mixed emotions in Iraq.¹²⁴ However, in contrast to his partial success in using Islamic and Arab messages during the Gulf crisis, the "historical rights" claim failed to attract Arab support. The negative response did not necessarily emanate from the assumed falsity of the Iraqi claim,¹²⁵ but rather from its possible adverse ramifications upon the status-quo in the Arab world. The Egyptian press emphasized that if Iraq had enjoyed historical rights over Kuwait, then Egypt could demand Libya, Syria, Sudan and the Hijaz — all of which were under Egyptian rule during the reign of Muhammad 'Ali in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁶ Moreover, both the Egyptian and Saudi press frequently voiced their concern that the annexation of Kuwait on the illegal basis of "historical rights" would stiffen Israel's resolve to retain Judea and Samaria.¹²⁷

CONCLUSIONS

In his remarkable book on Arab politics, Michael Hudson concluded that ideology "has tended to wane with the slowing of revolutionary momentum."¹²⁸ Yet the recent Gulf crisis showed that ideology still plays a prominent role in Arab politics, especially among the so-called "revolutionary regimes." Saddam Hussein employed various themes which were all too familiar in Arab politics, but which could still stir Arab emotions. While the era of Arab "ideological politics" has indeed withered away, the use of ideology by Arab leaders in their pursuit of legitimacy and power still widely prevails.¹²⁹

Hussein's success, limited as it was, revealed that most of the issues he had raised — Islam, Arab unity, social justice, the struggle against imperialism (linked to Zionist Israel), and the question of the Arab historical boundaries — found a receptive audience and were useful enough in mobilizing Arab public opinion. By using this eclectic amalgamation of ideas, Saddam was able to accommodate the message to the audience. In other words, Saddam's conquest of Kuwait, as Fouad Ajami acutely observed, "offered something for nearly all the frustrated masses."¹³⁰

The use of ideology by Arab leaders during the Gulf crisis was neither sincere nor coherent. Moreover, the ideology — whether used by Hussein or his opponents — never became an operative reality, for the messages were not translated into an active program; thus, the words were doomed to remain a collection of ideas recorded, or written on paper. However, the significance of the ideological struggle lies in the fact that it conveyed how easily ideology could be manipulated in order to mobilize the Arab "street" and certain leaders and organizations. One must conclude, therefore, that during the Gulf crisis ideology served to justify decisions (usually *ex post facto*); to acquire legitimacy, power and prestige; and to unify the nation.

The ideological struggle during the Gulf crisis can be analyzed on two levels: it may be seen as part of the old Arab quest for power and domination, reminiscent of rivalries between 'Abd al-Nasir and his Arab opponents during the 1950s and the

1960s; but it may also reflect the psychological pressures, preoccupations and aspirations that exist in the Arab society. Geertz claimed that during the decolonization era, Third World countries suffered from a “pervasive sense of disorientation:”

The attainment of independence, the overthrow of established ruling classes, the popularization of legitimacy, the rationalization of public administration, the rise of modern elites, the spread of literacy and mass communications, and the propulsion . . . of inexperienced governments into the midst of a precarious international order . . . all make for a pervasive sense of disorientation . . . The search for a new symbolic framework in terms of which to formulate, think about, and react to political problems, whether in the form of nationalism, Marxism, liberalism, populism, racism, Caesarism, ecclesiasticism, or some variety of reconstructed traditionalism (**or, most commonly, a confused melange of several of these**) [emphasis added] is therefore tremendously intense.¹³¹

Based on Geertz’s description, the “confused melange” of Arab symbols and motifs during the Gulf crisis may be interpreted as an Arab search for a new symbolic framework. Such interpretation should be substantiated by further study of recent writings by Arab intellectuals.

The reaction of Arab states to the Gulf crisis revealed that the support of, or opposition to, Iraq’s policy was mainly divided according to state interests. Yet, beyond the state’s interests, the crisis led to the crystallization of two schools of thought: the Iraqi school derived its strength from religious and secular messages of the Islamic-Arab ethos, while expressing disappointment and frustration with the West; the Egyptian school recognized the different state interests, defined a new meaning of Arab solidarity, and called for pragmatism and cooperation with the West in order to solve the economic and social problems of the Arab world. During the Arab summit in Cairo President Mubarak asserted that “the Arab nation would not become the ‘sick man’ of this century.”¹³² This metaphor reflected the roots of the Arab dilemma; drawn from the Ottoman heritage, when the Empire had been called “the sick man on the Bosphorus,” it anticipates a better future for the Arabs tied, by one way or the other, with the West. It is most tempting to predict that the Egyptian school of thought will be victorious. However, such an observation would surely be premature at this stage.

Endnotes

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10. *Ibid.* p. 66, note 9.
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13. Organski, *World Politics*, p. 188.
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16. Geertz, "Ideology," p. 52.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
18. Gabriel Ben-Dor, "Stateness and Ideology in Contemporary Middle Eastern Politics," *The Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, 9, no. 3 (1987), p. 11.
19. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes*, p. 51.
20. Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 21.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
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25. *Ibid.*, p. 314.
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27. *Ibid.*, p. 94.
28. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes*, p. 52.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
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34. Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes*, p. 52.
35. Iraqi News Agency (INA), 3-5 November 1990.
36. O. Bengio, *Saddam Speaks on the Gulf Crisis: A Collection of Documents* (Tel Aviv: 1992), p. 31.
37. Radio Baghdad, 23 August, 1990, *FBIS*, 24 August 1990; *al-Dustur*, 20 September 1990.
38. Thompson, *Ideology and Modern Culture*, pp. 91-2.
39. Radio Baghdad, 10, 11 August 1990, *FBIS*, 11, 13 August 1990.
40. *INA*, 3, 22 November, 15 December, *FBIS*, 5, 23 November, 17 December 1990.
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42. Radio Baghdad, 8 September 1990, quoted in Bengio, *Saddam Speaks*, pp. 144-50.
43. Radio Baghdad, 2 October 1990, *FBIS*, 3 October 1990.
44. *Ha'aretz*, 2 September 1990.
45. M. Kramer, *MECS*, 15 (1991), pp. 172-73.
46. *Al-Thawra* (Iraq), 11, 15 January 1991. See also M. Litvak, *MECS*, 15 (1991), p. 419.
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49. For the text of the *Fatwa*, see Radio Riyadh, 13 August 1990, *FBIS*, 14 August 1990. See also Fouad Ajami, "The Summoning," *Foreign Affairs*, 72, no. 4 (September/October 1993), p. 8.
50. For the text, see *al-Riyadh*, 14 September 1990.
51. Kramer, *MECS*, 15 (1991), p. 173.
52. *Al-Ahram*, 20 August 1990. See also Ajami, "The Summoning," p. 8.
53. *Al-Akhbar*, 20 August; *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 August 1990.
54. *Al-Liwa' al-Islami*, 8, 18, 23, 31, August 1990.
55. See Mubarak's speech, quoted in *Sawt al-Arab*, 11 February 1991.
56. *Al-Ahrrar*, 3 September 1990.
57. Naguib Mahfuz, quoted in *al-Nur*, 22 August 1990.
58. See, for example, Radio Damascus, 29 November 1990, *FBIS*, 4 December 1990.
59. *Al-Dustur*, 18 September 1990; *al-Ra'i*, 30 November 1990; *Financial Times*, 22 August 1990; *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 August 1990.
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63. James Piscatori, "Religion and Realpolitik: Islamic Responses to the Gulf War," in James Piscatori, ed., *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 11. See also the other articles in this volume for an analysis of different Islamic movements; and, Kramer, *MECS*, 15 (1991), pp. 172-81.

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65. Hudson, *Arab Politics*, p. 393.
66. Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology*, pp. 139-40.
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68. Radio Baghdad, 23 August 1990, *FBIS*, 24 August 1990.
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70. *Ha'aretz*, 2 September 1990.
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72. Radio Cairo, 10 August 1990, *FBIS*, 13 August 1990.
73. *Ibid.*
74. Ibrahim Nafi', quoted in *al-Ahram*, 17, 24, August 1990.
75. Mustafa Amin, quoted in *al-Akhbar*, 10 August 1990.
76. *al-Jumhuriyya*, 12 August; *al-Wafd*, 13, 15 August 1990.
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78. *'Ukaz*, 22 September 1990.
79. *Al-Bayadir al-Siyyasi*, 25 August 1990.
80. See the text of the JANDA conference's communique in Radio Baghdad, 19 September 1990, *FBIS*, 20 September 1990.
81. King Hussein's speech at the Cairo summit, 10 August 1990.
82. *Al-Jumhuriyya* (Iraq), 7 August 1990; Radio Baghdad, 7 August 1990, *FBIS*, 8 August 1990. See also Saddam Hussein's address, quoted in Radio Baghdad, 25 December 1990, *FBIS*, 27 December 1990.
83. *Ha'aretz*, 25 September, 3 November 1990; Radio Baghdad, 17, 25 December 1990, *FBIS*, 18, 27 December 1990.
84. *INA*, 10 August 1990, *FBIS*, 13 September 1990.
85. *INA*, 11, 25 September 1990, *FBIS*, 12, 26 September 1990.
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87. *Middle East News Agency (MENA)*, 3 August 1990, *FBIS*, 6 August 1990.
88. Lesch, "Reactions to the Gulf Crisis," p. 37. For the text, see *MENA*, 10 August 1990, *FBIS*, 13 August 1990.
89. Radio Monte Carlo, 14 August 1990, *FBIS*, 15 August 1990.
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94. Radio Damascus, 15 September, 29 November 1990, *FBIS*, 18 September, 4 December 1990. See also the remarks made by the Syrian foreign minister, Radio Monte Carlo, 30 December 1990, *FBIS*, 31 December 1990.
95. *Libyan News Agency (JANA)*, 14 November 1990, *FBIS*, 16 November 1990.
96. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 12 August 1990.
97. *Al-Ahram*, 3 September 1990.

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98. This theme was frequently repeated in King Hussein's speeches. See, for example, Radio Amman, 9 December 1990, *FBIS*, 10 December 1990.
99. *Ha'aretz*, 13 August. See also Radio Amman, 9 December 1990, *FBIS*, 10 December 1990.
100. *Al-Dustur*, 18 September 1990.
101. On the JANDA (The Jordanian-Arab National Democratic Alliance) conference, see *Jordan Times*, 12 September 1990.
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103. Radio Baghdad, 19 September 1990, *FBIS*, 20 September 1990.
104. *Ha'aretz*, 4 September 1990.
105. On the DFLP attitude and its internal disputes, see *INA*, 9 August, 17 September 1990, *FBIS*, 15 August, 18 September 1990; *Ha'aretz*, 27 August 1990, 27 January 1991; *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 September 1990.
106. On the PFLP's attitude, see *Palestine Voice*, 27 August 1990, *FBIS*, 28 August 1990. See also George Habash's interviews, *al-Dustur*, 15 September 1990; *INA*, 2 December 1990, *FBIS*, 4 December 1990.
107. See, for example, the Yemenite President's interviews, *al-Ahali*, *FBIS*, 20 September 1990; Radio Sana'a, 27 September 1990, *FBIS*, 28 September 1990.
108. *Al-Sha'b* (Egypt), 14, 21, August 1990. For more details on the Egyptian opposition, see *al-Yawm al-Sabi'* (Paris), 27 August 1990; *al-Ahrrar*, 3 September 1990, *FBIS*, 12 September 1990.
109. Radio Baghdad, 10 August 1990, *FBIS*, 13 August 1990.
110. Radio Baghdad, 23 August, 29 November 1990, *FBIS*, 24 August, 30 November 1990; *New York Times*, 16 September 1990; *INA*, 3 November 1990, *FBIS*, 5 November 1990.
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112. Radio Cairo, 10 September 1990, *FBIS*, 12 September 1990.
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114. For a serious discussion of this point, see M. H. Kerr and El Sayed Yassin, eds., *Rich and Poor States in the Middle East: Egypt and the New Arab Order* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1982). See also, Samir Rajab, *al-Masa'*, 18 August 1990; *al-Akhbar*, 10 August 1990.
115. MENA, 27 September 1990, *FBIS*, 28 September 1990.
116. Ibrahim Nafi', quoted in *al-Ahram*, 24 August 1990.
117. Radio Cairo, 10 September, 1990, *FBIS*, 12 September 1990.
118. According to *al-Siyasi* (Kuwait, 5 August 1990), Iraq received financial support in the sum of \$30-50 billion during the Iran-Iraq war. See also *'Ukaz*, 12 August 1990; *al-Qabas al-Dawli*, 17-18 August 1990. On the Syrian position, see Radio Damascus, 27 November 1990, *FBIS*, 4 December 1990.
119. *Al-Ra'i*, 5, 9 September 1990.
120. *Al-Thawra* (Iraq), 10 September 1990.
121. *Ibid.* See also *INA*, 15 December 1990, *FBIS*, 17 September 1990.
122. *Ibid.*, 8 August; *INA*, 26 September 1990, *FBIS*, 28 September, 10 December 1990, *FBIS*, 11 December 1990.
123. *Ibid.*, 3 September 1990; *al-Dustur*, 8 September 1990.
124. Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology*, pp. 97-111.
125. Uriel Dann, "The Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait: Historical Observations," *Data and Analysis* (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center for Middle East and African Studies, August 1990).
126. *Al-Masa'*, 15 August 1990; *Rose al-Yusuf*, 3 September 1990.

127. *October*, 19 August 1990; *al-Ahram*, 24 August 1990; *Rose al-Yusuf*, 3 September 1990. See the Saudi position, *al-Riyadh*, 24 August 1990.
128. Hudson, *Arab Politics*, pp. 124, 401.
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130. Fouad Ajami, "The Summer of Arab Discontent," *Foreign Affairs*, 69, no. 5 (Winter 1990/91), p. 3.
131. Geertz, "Ideology," p. 65.
132. See note 1.