



ARAB NATIONALISM AND NASSERISM IN PERSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Arab nationalism, is not an isolated phenomenon but an integral part of the ancient as well as contemporary civilizational history. Arab nationalism has been influenced by crosscurrents of Arab history and culture, Islam, Turkish nationalism and Western political liberal and romantic ideas. An appraisal of the concept of nationalism is better facilitated by comprehending the notions of “nation” and nation-state” which originated in the West and have been communicated upon and elaborated by many Western scholars. As the Europeans had succeeded in asserting their authority over many parts of the globe, including the Arab and Middle Eastern parts, the European order that ensued introduced a system structured and subdivided into primary units organized as nation states.¹

The notion of nationalism is generally regarded as a phenomenon of European origin having its roots in the emergence of modern nation-state in Europe.² The European system of nation – state has been internationalized and even non – Western people have also come to proclaim their territorial entities as nations.³ Until recently, the concept of nationalism was used to be construed in historical perspective than in explanation.⁴ There was lack of comparative studies and explanations of this concept of nationalism.⁵

Most of the countries of the Third World which are broadly identified as nation-states in the Western sense of the item, in reality lack the very substance of the term “nation”. This calls for a more sound theory, than what has thus far been advanced, of the nation state as an institutional and “legal transplant”.⁶ In current research in social sciences, there is a growing support for combining history, sociology and international relations in an interdisciplinary way to explain the concepts of nationalism and nation – building.⁷ In order to have a better understanding of Arab nationalism it is equally important to ascertain the linkages between Islam and Arab nationalism on one hand and the developments that led to the devolution and growth of Arab nationalism on the other.

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Islam and Arab Nationalism

Islam is more fundamental and ancient to the Arab World than the concept of the modern Arab nationalism, in spite of the Arabs as *Umma* –nationalism- is pre-Islam. There have arisen tensions, from time to time between the universalism of Islam and the particularities of Arab nationalism or Pan Arabism. According to Theda Skocpol, contemporary history is characterized by a dimension of ‘world time’ revealed by some aspects of modernization which “have been unique processes affecting the

World as a whole.”⁸ From this perspective, nationalism, in the Third World as well as Arab World alike, as an instrumentally of nation – building and citizenship is related to ‘world time’.

Professor Carl Brown has branded nationalism in “the Middle East” as a “virus”⁹ coming from the West. There is no denying the fact that the current concepts of national and citizenship are borrowed from the West. Nationalism is not merely an ideology, as Skocpol has opined that “nation – states are, more fundamentally, organizations geared to maintain control of home territories and populations and to undertake actual or potential military competition with the other states in the international system.”¹⁰ This amply demonstrates that nationalism as an ideology of the nation-state is not merely a transmitted idea, let alone a “virus” but rather is ingrained in existing institutional, both economic and military, state structures on world wide scale.

According to Theda Skocpol, there are two different kinds of international context, namely, on the one hand...the structures of world capitalist economy and the international states system... And on the other hand...changes and transmission in world time which affect...the overall world context”¹¹ It is worth mentioning here in this context that any appraisal of political Islam as an ideological challenge to the present nation-states in the Middle East as “transplants” from the West cannot and should not be facilitated without taking those structural contexts into account.

Philip Khoury has tried to demonstrate as to how ideological challenge of political Islam is under laid by a structural crisis of the secular state in the Arab World.¹² Resurgence of political Islam as an ideology and the concomitant ideological revival of Islam’s universalism proved instrumental in pushing nationalism on the backburner. Another factor that has contributed to the retreat of Arab nationalism has been the emergence of multiple varieties of

-what called today- Islamic “fundamentalism” and neo-“fundamentalism”, which view Islam as being incompatible with nationalism.

Muslim scholars like A.M. Garisha and M.S. Zaybaq have pointed towards a “hidden hand” that caused the abolition of the Islamic caliphate while aiming at “achieving the separation between religion and the state through the means of nationalism.”¹³ The mechanism or instrumentality of

nationalism which culminated in the separation between religion and state is seen by these Islamic scholars as an articulation of an anti-Islamic spirit which could be traced back to crusaders and also indirectly to Zionism.¹⁴ The advent of Islamic revolution in Iran in February 1979 and subsequently its fall out on exporting Iranian brand of Islam, Iran – Iraq war (1980-88) and 2nd Gulf War (1990-91) have been other significant developments warranting the need for redefining Arab – Islamic views on nationalism.

In 1981, Beirut-based *Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-Arabiyya* (Center for Arab Unity Studies), organized a Conference on *al-Qaummiyya al-Arabiyya wa – al-Islam* (Arab Nationalism and Islam) in which many prominent scholars participated. The main three papers presented in this conference rendered support to the idea that most pan-Arab nationalists had abandoned their secular views, however, without abandoning Arabism.¹⁵ Thus, a new emphasis on linkages between Arabism and Islam was emerging.

During early 1970s, Ahmad Muhammad Jamal, an Islamic scholar from Saudi Arabia, who had claimed Arabic familiarity with '*asabiyya*', reportedly an authentic pattern of nationalism claimed that the Arabs knew about nationalism long before the historical phenomenon related to this ideology occurred in Europe. Jamal argued that God had conferred the honor upon the Arabs by choosing one of them to be His messenger and Prophet to humanity for the revelation of Islam. Thus, "the Arabs are the guides of the World and the leaders of the people and the successors of the Holy Prophet. This virtue of the Arabs and their glory are inexorably related to Islam."¹⁶ This interpretation seems to have enabled Islam acquire on Arabo-centric focus while being reconciled with Arab nationalism.

A nation – state is regarded as the political form for organizing political entities in the contemporary international system of states. According to Anthony Giddens, the system of nation – states encompassing the globe in a network of national communities had developed from a state system that originated in Europe. He further emphasised that "two processes have, above all, been responsible for producing these extraordinary changes, the global consolidation of industrial capitalism and the global ascendancy of the nation – state."¹⁷ The notion of nationalism is dependent on the idea of sovereignty as the organizational principle for the nation – state. The globalization of this principle on the pretext of real existing structures in the international system, entails – what Hinsley calls – "the recognition that in the normal circumstances of relations between... states the sovereignty of a state in theory as the idea of nation was exported from Europe to the Arab Middle East and those who adhere to this argument are viewed as modernists while those disagree with it are considered as traditionalists."¹⁸ While contesting the argument that nationalism was imported from Europe, many Arab scholars insist on the authenticity of Arab nationalism as an *Umma Sarmadiyya* (eternal nation) as old as history itself.¹⁹ Abdel-Rahman al-Bazzaz states: "Arab nationalism... requires a belief in the distinct Arab

nation and in its immutable features...Arab nationalism does not need to be defined..."²⁰

Nationalism is not merely an ideology but an articulation related to the real setting of the modern international system. It pertains to the nation-state as an organizational unit of this global system. The Peace of Westphalia treaty (1648) inaugurated the historical process of the system of sovereign states. In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the emergence of nation states was almost a new phenomenon which emphasized the need for redefining and restructuring the sovereign states modeled on the French nation – state.²¹ According to Charles Tilly, during the next three hundred years after the Treaty of Westphalia “the Europeans and their descendants managed to impose that system on the entire world. The recent wave of decolonization has almost completed the mapping of the globe into that system.”²²

The notion of nationalism cannot be studied in isolation but only in the context of world – historical process. Accordingly, Arab nationalism is an integral part of the world - historical process. Besides, the idea of *al-Umma al-Arabiya al-Sarmadiyya* or “an eternal Arab nation” pertaining to Islam as a religion for the Arabs is an ideological reading of modernity into the Islamic notion of *Umma* or Community. According to Hamid Enayat: “In defining its relationship with Islam, Arab nationalism often ends where it started; with the glorification of Arabism as a commanding value in Islam.”²³ Thus the study of Arab nationalism cannot be confined to the study of ideologies but to be studied in full gamut.

Arab Nationalism under Ottoman Empire

The expansion of the Ottoman Empire from the sixteenth century onward had brought Arab territories under its control. The process of globalization of the international system that was set in motion during the second half of the nineteenth century²⁴ contributed to the deepening of the Islamic Caliphate under the Turks²⁵ and attendant dismantling of the Ottoman Empire as well as the subsequent emergence of the Arab nation – state. In the face of humiliating defeats and subsequent treaties of Carlowitz (1699) and Passarowitz (1718), the Ottoman defeats had acquired “formal expression and recognition.”²⁶ The Ottoman’s military defeats made military reforms inevitable and which could be introduced effectively through modern education and training based on a European model.²⁷

In their enthusiasm spurred by the reform movements under Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Western – educated intellectuals tried to impose a Western pattern of secular political classification and organization on the religious community of Islam²⁸ The dynastic Ottoman Empire legitimized by the Universalism of Islam found in

Westernized nation-state system a serious threat to its legitimacy. The Arab territories, which constituted a part of the Ottoman Empire, were also integrated into the emerging nation-states system in the world – historical context. The mere fact that nation – state system originated in Europe does not detract from the virtual reality that this system is currently the real organizational principle throughout the globe. And the Arab world is no exception to it.

With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, the Arab territories did not automatically become independent but were subjected to subsequent period of colonial rule under the Western powers. The process of decolonization that ensued in the aftermath of the end of Second World War resulted in the emergence of numerous Arab nation – countries. These Arab nation – countries are characterized by homogeneity in terms of widely shared cultural and religious values, common language and literature. The Arab nation-countries lag behind in social mobilization processes, which characterize the modern nation – states of Europe. In this regard, Michael Hudson has observed that, “In a political culture, noted for effectively and the persisting salience of ...primordial identification, Arabism must coexist or compete with certain other practical but intensely held corporate identifications... it is too easy to assume that modernization is performing an assimilationist melting pot functions in the area”.²⁹

Viewed in broader perspective, Arab nationalism is confronted with attitudes and actions of two contending groups – integrationists and disintegrationists. The integrationists, also known as Pan Arabists aspire to go beyond the existing boundaries of nation – countries. On the other hand the disintegrationist group is represented by ethnic minorities like Kurds in Iraq and Syria, and Dinka in Sudan, who reject being a part of the existing nation – state and aim at separating from it.³⁰ Interestingly, both groups share identical features. For Hedley Bull, integrationists and disintegrationists “are alike intellectually imprisoned by the theory of the state system, and are in most cases as committed to it as the agents of sovereign states.”³¹ There seems no exaggeration in surmising that even Islamic scholars like Garisha and Zaybaq who view the emergence of the ideology of nationalism based on the notion of nation – state as “a conspiracy against Islam” are also intellectually inclined toward the theory of nation – states.

Genesis of Arab Nationalism

Translation of the French term *la nation* in modern Arabic as *Umma* has been a source of great confusion because the meaning of this Arabic term dates back to the revelations of the *Holy Quran*. The Prophet Mohammed -peace on him- had blessed the unification of different rival Arab

tribes within the fold of an Islamic *Umma*, which was not confined to the Arabs. W.M. Watt regards the unification of the Arab tribes in one *umma* to be the greatest achievement of Islam.³² The objective of Islam, as revealed in the *Holy Quran* is to spread Islam and make it the religion of humankind. This vests Islam with the characteristic of universalism and the very term *Umma* does not refer to a specific community. Every Muslim belongs to the Islamic *Umma* irrespective of his or her ethnicity or geographic location. Thus, *Umma* is the universal community of believers and not a civic community related to a particular society in the modern sense.

Application of the notion of *la nation* to Arabic speaking Muslims and blending of the same term with *Umma* enabled Arab nationalists to imbibe a new understanding in their own culture. Among the earliest proponents of Arab nationalism were both Arab Muslims and Arab Christians especially when Arab territories formed part of the Ottoman Empire during the later part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century many Arab scholars had shown keen interest in Europe and its culture. The Arab interaction with European language and culture during the latter part of *nahda* or renaissance that proved instrumental in spurring cultural activities, a sort of Arab cultural nationalism mostly articulated by Arab Christians was taking place. Concomitantly, Muslim Arab officers in the Ottoman army were engaged in organizing secret societies with the objective of politicizing early Arab cultural nationalism.³³

The gradual process of political awakening among the Arab nationalists during the beginning years of the twentieth century coincided with the rise of young Turks in Turkey. The Arab nationalists, still part of the Ottoman Empire, were not politically strong enough to seek separation from the Ottomans. The Arab nationalists demands did not go beyond the case for local and cultural autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. The Young Turks were proponents of Turkish nationalism, which aimed at Turkicizing the non-Turkish parts of the Empire. This led to widening of chasm between the Arab nationalists and the Young Turks.³⁴ The Arab nationalists articulated their disenchantment with the Turks through the Arab revolt of 1916 during the First World War.

This phase of evolutionary Arab nationalism gave rise to the new concept of *al-Umma al-Arabiya* or the Arab Nation which included both Christian and Muslim Arabs into one nation but excluded the non-Arab Muslims like Turks and Iranians. This period saw the formation of organizations like *Hizb al-Ia – Markaziyya* (Decentralization Party), *Al-Muntada Al-Adabi* (Literary Club), *Al-Ahd* (Pact Society), and the Young Arab Society. These organizations formed in Arab territories, then under Ottomans, operated clandestinely. With limited membership, these organizations had little public or political support, as were based on no well-defined doctrine but only general ideas and emotions.

Arab Revolt and Its Aftermath

When the First World War broke out in 1914, the Arab territories still constituted the part of Ottoman Empire. In the wake of the ongoing war, the Arab nationalists were left with two options: to cast their lot with the Turks on the hope of attaining autonomy and some self-government as an ultimate reward, or to support the Allies in the hope of acquiring completed, independence. Turkish ruthlessness in dealing with Arab nationalists soon drove the latter into anti-Turkish camp. Once the Ottomans joined the Central powers in the war, Britain along with other Allied powers saw the advantages of enlisting Arab support.

Allied power's war aims in Arab territories, as explicitly expressed from time to time in a number of official declarations and pronouncements, *inter alia* referred to:

....Guaranteeing their liberation and the development of their civilization, to establish national governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and the free choice of the native population; to recognize Arab independence as soon as effectively established; and to ensure impartial and equal justice to all, to facilitate the economic development of the country...to foster the development of education...".³⁵

Among the Allied powers, Britain was more vocal about eliciting Arab support. Britain, while perceiving the advantages of an Arab revolt which could weaken Turkey militarily by depriving it of Arab manpower, also saw prospects of using Arab forces to augment the Allied armies in the Arab Homeland. Arabs on their part, saw in war an opportunity to rid themselves of Turkish domination and regain their political independence.

Sherif Hussein of Mecca who emerged as the spokesman of the Arab cause, approached Sir Henry McMahon, then British High Commissioner in Cairo, on 14 July 1915, offering Arab support in the war against Turkey if Britain would in return, pledge its support of Arab independence. The Arab demands and British concessions were contained in an exchange of ten letters between Sherif Hussein and Sir Henry McMahon.³⁶ In his first note of 14 July 1915, Sherif Hussein, while presenting main Arab demands, requested British recognition of Arab independence in an area bounded on the north by a line from Mersin – Adana to the Persian frontier, on the east by Persian and Arabian Gulf, on the south by the Indian Ocean and on the west by the Red Sea and Mediterranean sea.

In his letters of 24 October and 13 December 1915, Sir Henry McMahon agreed to recognize and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the frontiers proposed by Sherif Hussein with the exception of Palestine. Other districts of Mersin, and Alexandria and portions

of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo, all of these lying to the north of Palestine were also excluded. Britain also reserved some areas for its ally France. While rejecting these modifications to his original plan, Sherif Hussein agreed not to press these matters until the end of the war.

Before the ink could be allowed to dry on the British pledge of Arab independence, the French and British governments entered into a secret Sykes Picot Agreement³⁷ on May 1916, which divided the Arab region of the fertile crescent into British and French administered areas as well as zones of influence and provided for the internationalization of Palestine. This agreement clearly violated the pledge made by Sir Henry McMahon to Sherif Hussein. However, Sherif Hussein did not learn of this secret agreement until a year and a half later when Russia's new government, after the Bolshevik revolution, published this and other secret war agreements in December 1917.

Relying on British assurances on the strength of the McMahon's pledge to Sherif Hussein, the Arab revolt began on 5 June 1916. While the Arabs did not play a large role in the overall war picture, their revolt was of great military value because it diverted a substantial number of Turkish reinforce means and supplies to the Hazaj, protected the right flank of the British armies as they advanced through Palestine and prevented the proclamation of a *Jihad* or holy war by the Ottoman Sultan from having any serious consequences in Allied – controlled areas. As the effects of revolt spread northward, the whole countryside began to rise against the Turks; thus aiding the advancing Allied forces.³⁸

Even after the publication of Balfour Declaration³⁹ on 2 November 1917, which provided for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, Sherif Hussein's confidence in the British remained unshaken. In the meanwhile, the Jewish organizations had also become active in mobilizing support for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. On 16 June 1918 in response to a formal inquiry by seven Arab spokesmen from various parts of the Ottoman Empire, then living in Cairo, the British Government publicly reiterated its assurance to the Arabs that it would abide by the earlier pledges. With regard to Arab territories, including Palestine that had already been liberated by the Allied forces, the British policy would be that the future government of those territories should be based upon the principles of the consent of the concerned. The British declaration made to the seven Arab spokesmen contained neither territorial reservations nor any other limitation based on the Sykes – Picot Arguments or Balfour Declaration. At the same time the British Government did not bother to refute the surmise of the Arab spokesmen that Britain was “not free to dispose of Palestine without regard for the wishes and interests of the inhabitants of Palestine.”⁴⁰

The then American President Wilson's famous Fourteen Points declaration of 8 January 1918 which *inter alia* declared: "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous developments..."⁴¹ Such and other related developments further strengthened the hopes of the Arabs that they would be able to achieve their nationalist goals in Palestine as elsewhere. Such statements and promises made to the Arabs prompted a British Royal Commission to admit in 1930 that "the real impression left upon the Arabs generally was that the British were going to set up an independent Arab state which would include Palestine."⁴² Either due to failure on their part or due to deliberate attempt, the inability of the British to publish until 1939 the full correspondence with the Arabs during the First World War, helped to conceal the strongest evidence providing some support for Arab claims; seriously jeopardized the presentation of the Arab case in Britain and before the world for many critical years. According to Fred Khouri, "The Arabs themselves also shared the responsibility for the suppression of these important documents by their failure to publish them in English and other major languages in order to explain and justify their own cause effectively in the international propaganda campaign that was to develop over Palestine."⁴³

After the conclusion of the First World War, the Arab territories that constituted the part of erstwhile Ottoman Empire were liberated to come under the mandatory rule of Britain and France. The British mandate over Palestine permitted Jewish settlements by overt and covert means especially during 1930s. The induction of Jews into Palestine added another dimension to Arab's struggle for independence. From the Ottomans, there had emerged Britain and France as mandatory authorities against whom the Arabs had to struggle for independence. In Palestine was added a new element of Zionism which posed a challenge to Arab nationalism. The mandatory authority's policy of 'divide and rule' coupled with Arab's tribal cleavages, rivalries, inter and intra-tribal factionalism and absence of a nodal Arab political agency to provide effective leadership proved instrumental in shattering the dream of a unified Arab territorial entity and paved way for smaller Arab nation states which emerged as virtual ground realities after the end of the Second World War.

The unilateral establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948 was a significant development that triggered a sort of "unending" war between Arabs and Israel. The first Arab – Israel war (1948-49) united most of the Arab countries against Israel and support for the people of Palestine became the main bulwark of Arab nationalism.

The Arab revolt of 1916 was the first organized political action by Arab nationalists. After the First World War, the Arab nationalists got disenchanted with Britain and its allies for not fulfilling their promises of an Arab nation. Concomitantly the Arabs had not abandoned the hopes for an Arab nation.

However, there was a shift in the concept of an Arab nation that was no longer based on the French model of *La Nation* but based on the German perception of a nation as a cultural entity, *Gemeinschaft*, based on common history and language. As Arab territories were still under mandatory authorities between the 1920s and 1940s, the Arab nationalists could conceive of an Arab nation as an organic entity and not as a political community based on free will.

Egypt and Arab Nationalism Prior to Nasser

The Egyptian revolution on 23 July 1952, which paved the way for the emergence of Gamal Abdul Nasser as a leader, was a turning point in the history of Arab Nationalism. Many Arab scholars have referred to the 1952 Egyptian revolution as a revolution designed to put an end to the local Egyptian nationalism on the one hand and to the pan-Arabism of the kings, on the other.⁴⁴ Viewed in a broader perspective, the history of Arab nationalism between 1920 to 1952 was a royal history of kings struggling for broadening their power base internally and externally for political survival. The Egyptian revolution of 1952 symbolized an expression of the shift from 'kings to the people' as a focus of legitimacy.

Egyptian state and society during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries had begun to develop into an almost independent nation-state while most of other Arab countries remained divided into provinces under the direct rule of the Ottoman Empire. Egyptian territory was united and fairly well defined. Developments like Napoleon and his soldiers' sojourn in Egypt (1798-1801), reforms of King Muhammad Ali (1805-1848), influx of many Europeans throughout the nineteenth century, construction of the Suez Canal by 1869 and British control over it from 1882 to 1956 had a long-lasting impact on Egyptian society and on the way of thinking of Egyptian leaders.⁴⁵

The impact of intellectual and social changes in Egypt was limited primarily to the upper-middle and upper classes living in urban areas and having been educated in westernized schools in Egypt. The idea of nationalism in Egypt had started gaining ground during King Muhammad Ali's rule (1805-1848) and the strongest voices in this movement were those of Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and his followers, most notably Muhammad Abduh who argued both for progressive reform through education and for popular government. Their ideas filtered down through Egyptian society and even the peasants. Through newspapers and books these reformers not only questioned the traditional authority of Islamic leaders but also suggested that the individual had a responsibility for the conditions of the world in which he lived. By so doing these reformers laid the intellectual foundation on which the edifice of revolution could be erected.⁴⁶

By the closing decades of the nineteenth century, resentment against the British presence in Egypt started gathering momentum. The Europeans

started nursing apprehensions that Egypt's growing nationalism would not only free Egypt from European control but also undermine their financial interests as well. The British invasion of Egypt in 1882 and subsequent occupation had resulted in concentration of real powers in British hands. In 1914 Egypt became a British protectorate and in March 1922, Britain unilaterally terminated the protectorate. Though Egypt became a monarchy under King Ahmed Fund, the Britain continued to wield its hold over Egypt by virtue of Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 until the obligation of this treaty in 1956.⁴⁷

The banner of Egyptian nationalism was kept a-float by the Wafd Party which during its existence of three decades (1922-1952) won every free election but remained at logger's head with the king invariably. The Wafd under the leadership first, of Zaghlul and after his death in 1927, under Mustafa al – Nahas, served Egyptian nationalism and also articulated interests of the people for representative governments.⁴⁸ Thus, the teachings of Jamal – al-Din Afghani and his followers had overtones of Arab nationalism but during the first half of the twentieth century, the Egyptian nationalism was more preoccupied with freedom from alien control and installation of popular representative government.

Egypt under Nasser

After the July 1952 Revolution, the Revolutionary command Council (RCC) with General Naguib at the helm of affairs, had assumed power in Cairo. Soon after the Revolution, Nasser Wrote:

The masses did come. But how different is fiction from facts...they came struggling in scattered groups. The Holy March to the great Goal was halted...It was only then that I realized, with an embittered heart torn with grief, that the vanguard's [RCC] need of discipline did not end at that hour...we were in need of discipline but found nothing but anarchy. We were in need of unity, but found nothing but disunity. We were in need of work, but found nothing but indolence and inactivity. Hence the Motto of Revolution – Discipline, Unity and Work.⁴⁹

The Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), soon after assuming power, enacted land reform laws, acquired land for redistribution among peasants, reduced land rents and increased wages of agricultural labor. These measures were adhered to gain popularity among the masses and to weaken the political power of the land – owning class.⁵⁰ The Constitution of 1923 which had been in vogue was abrogated and direct rule thus passed on to the RCC. The simmering differences between General Naguib and Nasser, who was also the member of ruling RCC, had come to the fore by February 1954 on matters of policy and procedures. Nasser finally emerged triumphant on 29 March 1954 as Egypt's new strongman.

After stripping Naguib of all real power, Nasser took action against remnants of the traditional parties, which could challenge his authority. In January 1956, a new Constitution was promulgated and in June the same year Nasser was elected as President of Egypt. In February 1958, Egyptian – Syrian Union was proclaimed and christened as United Arab Republic (UAR) with Nasser as its President. Following the dissolution of the UAR in September 1961, Nasser founded a new political party known as Arab Socialist Union (ASU), and formulated a “National Charter” both for the party as well as the nation.

Nasser remained at the helm of Egyptian Affairs from 1954 to 1970 and during this period his domestic and external policies won him admirers as well as detractors. At the domestic level, Nasser sought to strike a balance between trends and fractions – animated by rivalries with personal and ideological and political trends. He placed emphasis on social reforms, economic development and upon the doctrine of Arab socialism.

At the international level, he paid special attention to enhance Egypt’s inter-Arab and international statues. He often described Egypt’s position at the center of three circles – Arab, Islamic and African, Nasser’s opposition to Baghdad Pact, interactive relationship with Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen, support for the cause of Palestine and reiteration of Arab unity endeared him as the front – ranking Arab leader of his times. As a sequel to Egypt’s military debacle during the 1967 Arab Israel war, Nasser’s popularity nose-dived. His pragmatic endeavors during 1967-70 period to forge Arab unity proved instrumental in resurrecting his image as a popular leader.

Nationalization of Suez Canal 1956, his advocacy of the policy of non-alignment, fostering close relations with nonaligned countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, opposition to colonialism, and support for national liberation movements, emphasis on peaceful coexistence and world peace etc. were such measures that won Nasser international recognition.

Nasser’s ideas, as contained in his speeches and writing have been given the connotation of “Nasserism”. An attempt is made in this article to briefly analyze main postulates of Nasserism *via-a-vis* Arab nationalism. The analysis begins with a brief appraisal of Nasserism.

Nasserism

The term ‘Nasserism’ gained currency in usage to denote the relationship between Nasser’s ideas and Egypt’s internal and external politics. However, the term ‘Nasserism’ seemed to be a somewhat erroneous eponym, which had come into vogue because of frequent usage of the term by contemporary writers and commentators of the revolutionary process in Egypt. Until the end of 1956, Nasser’s perspective on politics had become pragmatic. Creation of a viable political order and honorable sustenance of

the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) in power were the paramount concerns of Nasser. There are no indications to point towards Nasser's inclinations to build an ideology at that juncture. According to Leonard Binder, until the Suez crisis, the Egyptian leader was more concerned with "domestic security of his regime of moderate revolution."⁵¹

In the post-Suez crisis period, Egypt's increasing interaction at the political level with international community in general and neighboring Arab countries in particular was based on certain ideological tenets. The application of these tenets to Egypt's domestic and foreign affairs was branded as 'Nasserism' by observers and commentators. Nasser's public utterances displayed a considerable degree of pragmatism and flexibility. And there was no indication of 'Nasserism' being articulated as political creed or concrete dogma. According to Tareq Ismail, Nasser's thought, the basis of Nasserism, was to a large extent typical of Middle Eastern political thought and his role was simply that "of the first effective articulator of policy with this general set of attitudes."⁵² In 1955, Nasser himself denied that he was in any sense of the term a philosopher or a historian, but merely the latest in the series of leaders "of an inevitable movement."⁵³ Thus many experts and scholars treat the usage of the term 'Nasserism' as misleading because of the fact that the movement was neither original nor exclusive only with the Nasser. The term 'Nasserism' is used here to represent Nasser's philosophy and ideas with regard to Arab world in particular.

Postulates of Nasserism

Nasserism, embodying a set of principles, generated a movement, which was real and volatile. According to Ismail, it spread throughout the Arab world "as a new nationalism to upset the *status quo* and threaten the balance of power not only in the immediate area but in the world as well."⁵⁴ Pragmatic approach of Nasser to the policies he pursued entailed few principles and their application varied as and when new situations arose. Viewed in a broader perspective, opposition to imperialism and colonialism, Pan – Arabian and social democracy were the main cardinal goals which Nasser consistently tried to apply to domestic and foreign policy and these can be counted as main postulates of Nasserism.

(i)Opposition to Imperialism and Colonialism

Opposition to imperialism and colonialism formed the bedrock of Nasserism. The rejection of any forms of foreign interference or influence in the Arab countries was a basic tenet of Egyptian revolution. When Baghdad Pact, between Iraq and Turkey for mutual cooperation was concluded in February 1955 and joined later by Britain, Iran and Pakistan, Nasser considered the pact as a method of protecting Israel and isolating Egypt. On 8 March 1955, he stated: "As long as the Egypt is the shield of Arabism in its fight with Zionism, complete victory for western policies requires first of all, the isolation of Egypt from the Arab sisters."⁵⁴ Another apprehension was

that of other Arab states such as Syria and Jordan joining the Baghdad Pact and that the Fertile Crescent concept, which both Egypt and Saudi Arabia opposed, could be obtained by a backdoor method that could result in Egypt's isolation.⁵⁵

Nasser's campaign against the Baghdad Pact and the Western powers catapulted him as an Arab nationalist leader and inaugurated his Arab offensive which continued with evolving motives and goals, and with peaceful interludes, until the spring of 1967. In order to strengthen the Egyptian armed force with latest weapons, Nasser entered into an arms deal with Czechoslovakia in September 1955. This act of Nasser not only gained him support inside Egypt but also showed his ability to defy the West openly and proved his independence from it, as no leader prior to Nasser had done it. Through his speeches, Nasser tried to allay the fears that arms deal would impinge upon Egypt's policy of nonalignment. He said: "I want arms to buy not arms by which I could be bought," and "The Soviet arms in the hands of the Arabs become Arab arms".

Nasser's move of nationalization of the Suez Canal company in July 1956 was another bold and sensational act in the direction of Egypt's independent policy. By the end of October 1956, Israeli army attacked through the Sinai and Gaza Strip while the French and British paratroopers landed in the Suez Canal Zone. The ensuing exchange of hostilities caused severe damage and Egypt suffered military defeat. However, the United Nations and other channels, brought fourth the ending of hostilities and eventual withdrawal of invading forces.⁵⁶

The Suez crisis affirmed the independence of Egyptian foreign policy and made Nasser a world figure. It also consolidated his prestige and leadership among the Arabs, who regarded him as the defender of their dignity and the man whose policy of independence "raised the Arabs several levels upwards among the other nations."⁵⁷ The Suez crisis had confirmed Nasser's apprehensions of Western imperialism. The French and British invasion and the connivance of Israel confirmed Nasser's suspicious of western intentions. France and Britain were regarded as the arch imperialists and Israel as the outpost of imperialism in the "Middle East".

In the aftermath of the Suez crisis, Egypt established its credentials as a sovereign state which could no longer be regarded as a tutelage of the British and subject to the whims of great powers. No longer subject to western dictates and apparently outside the vicious sphere of western influence, Nasser had made Egypt free and independent in Foreign policy. As Desmond Stewart then Editor of prestigious international English magazine Life put it: "To a people long used to leader taking their orders from foreign embassies, it is pleasure in itself to have a leader on whose word foreign embassies now hang."⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, Nasser had emerged as the symbol of freedom from Western influence and of the ability to enhance the Arab image and prestige.

Nasser also opposed the colonial policies of Western powers in North and Sub-Saharan Africa, where he extended support to the national aspirations against colonial powers. At that crucial juncture Nasser was drawn towards the tenets of nonalignment which were enunciated at the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian nations in May 1955. Nasser not only attended the Bandung Conference but also befriended countries of Asia and Africa by pursuing independent foreign policy opposed to colonialism. He along with Joseph Broz Tito of Yugoslavia and Jawaharlal Nehru of India played key role in organizing first summit Conference of non-aligned countries in Belgrade in 1961. In 1964, the second summit Conference of nonaligned countries was held in Cairo. In this way he established Egypt as a leading nation in the Third World. He was reckoned as one of the great leaders of the Third World like Nehru and Tito

(ii) Nasser's Pan – Arabism:

Nasser described people as the ultimate arbiters in deciding the destiny of Arab nation. In December 1960 he stated: "The destiny of the Arab people is no longer decided at foreign embassies nor by foreign powers in conjunction with imperial stooges; it is decided by the ordinary people."⁵⁹ Despite the fact that British and French influence in Egypt had been removed considerably, opposition to imperialism still constituted the main plank of Nasser's speeches. Nasser's frequent allusion to imperialism was allegedly designed to divert people's attention to imaginary enemies and accuse the rival Arab leaders of connivance with "the imperialists". According to Keith Wheelock, the campaign was a fight against "a paper tiger in which the regime created the imperialist adversaries and then proceeded to destroy them."⁶⁰

The United Arab Republic (UAR), which came into being by virtue of Union between Egypt and Syria, was expected to be a first step in Pan – Arab unity. The Egyptian-Syrian Union lasted from February 1958 to September 1961. This entailed the integration of political, social and economic systems. The two countries were bestowed with dissimilar traditions and cultures. Their integration called for merger of respective institutions, which could respond to emerging requirements. Nasser's perception of Egyptian society had evolved out of his experience of the revolution. He had imbibed certain ideas about revolution which he felt could be applied to all modernizing societies.⁶¹

On the contrary, in 1958 Syria had a number of well-organized political parties, the Socialist Arab Ba`ath Party (SABP) being one of the largest. The Syrian society was endowed with an oligarchic economic system. The post-revolutionary Egyptian government was organized on a strong centralized pattern as compared to the Syrian government, which was based on *laissez – faire* pattern. The private sector in Syria was politically more influential whereas post-revolutionary Egypt allowed no or little room for the

private sector.⁶² Nasser's approach and method in Syria was an attempt to transplant the principles of Egyptian revolution. However, this approach was proved unsuitable for Syria.

Nasser's over-emphasis on imposing Egyptian political and economic models on Syria, started sending warning signals to the Syria leadership. During the 1960 elections, the Arab Ba`ath Party's leaders, in spite of their winning a significant number of seats in this election, were worried about the future of the Ba`ath Party as a vital and viable national movement. Besides Nasser had proceeded with the program of nationalization of industry in Egypt during (1958-61) and in mid-1961 identical laws were imposed in Syria as well for inaugurating the process of nationalization. The land reform laws introduced in 1959-60 period had already affected the landowners who still enjoyed political clout. The nationalization move had brought commercial and industrial capitalists together to join hands with the landowning class and majority of the Socialist Arab Ba`ath Party leadership in opposition to Nasser. Subsequent to the 28 September 1961 *coup* in Syria, the latter broke away from the union with Egypt.⁶³ This served a severe blow to Nasser's pan-Arab unity efforts.

Despite Syria's secession from union with Egypt, Nasser continued to use the title, United Arab Republic for Egypt to indicate his continued hope of eventual Arab unity. However, some of his ideas about the conditions conducive for a union of Arab countries had undergone transformation. The National Charter adopted in May 1962 at Cairo *inter alia* dealing with the question of Arab unity expressed the hope of eventual unity based on the unity of objectives of the popular bases, in the Arab world. This showed the shift of emphasis from foreign imperialism to internal reactionary forces. The regimes in contemporary monarchies were termed as "reactionary" with whom Egypt was not going to continue its solidarity. The new slogan "unity of objectives" replaced the old formula of "unity of ranks".

A new term "the liberated Arab countries" was coined by Nasser to identify those countries that were under revolutionary military rule and were socialist or on their way to become socialist. In February 1963, Nasser embarked on the movement for "unity, freedom and socialism". During March – April 1963, negotiations were held between Egypt, Syria and Iraq for forming a federation. Although on the one hand, Nasser was skeptical about the then ruling Ba`athists in Syria and Iraq, and on the other the Ba`athists insisted on a collective leadership for the prospective federation, and on maintaining the preeminence of SABP in Syria and Iraq. Protracted negotiations and bargaining culminated in the signing of a Charter of the federation on 17 April 1963⁶⁴ but it was never implemented because of mutual suspicious and distrust.

Irrespective of the fact that by early 1964 the Arab unity of ranks had been shattered and the unity of objectives was yet to be achieved, Nasser still held the belief that "the Egyptian revolution is for all the Arabs, not for Egypt alone." An article published in *Al-Ahram* on 14 April 1964 stated that

Egypt acted in two capacities, “as a state and as a revolution”, and as a revolution it had the right to be in contact with the different popular forces and movements in the Arab countries.⁶⁵ Subsequently in the middle of 1964, Nasser concluded agreements with Iraq (26 May 1964) and Yemen (13 June 1964) which provided for coordinating their political and other policies as a step toward “unity”. Though the objective of unity did not materialize yet the agreements were intended to demonstrate that Egypt under Nasser still had Arab allies.

From early 1964 until the end of 1965, the “summit spirit” dominated Arab political scenario. In view of Israeli move to divert the water of river Jordan to Negav and ongoing fluid situation in Yemen, Nasser convened a summit conference of Arab heads of state, which met in Cairo in January 1964. A second summit conference met in early September 1964 in Alexandria while the third summit conference was held in Casablanca in September 1965. During the first two summits, Nasser exercised his influence to stop the use of force against Israel and the Arab action was limited to the diversion of the headwaters of the Jordan River in the territories of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. At the Casablanca summit conference, “a solidarity charter” was agreed upon among the participating Arab countries to clear the atmosphere and stop radio and press propaganda against each other.⁶⁶

The Arab countries could be categorized into two groups – *Maghreb* or African countries and *Mashraq* or Asian countries. Though Egypt lies in North Africa, it was more closely aligned with the Asian Arabs under Nasser. Apart from history, geography has also played a role in this regard. The deserts of western Egypt and Libya considerably separate Egypt from the North African countries. Besides the Arab countries of the east, like Egypt, border on or are in close contiguity, to Israel, which constituted a direct threat to them. However, Nasser in pursuit of his policy of pan Arabism tried to forge relations with countries of *Maghreb* as well as *Mashreq*.

In the Maghreb-at that time Nasser’s relations with king Muhammad of Morocco were cordial but after the Algerian independence in July 1962 the situation changed. Nasser’s support for Algeria against Morocco widened rift between Egyptian and Morocco. The pattern of relationship between Egypt and Tunisia remained almost uneasy. During Tunisian independence movement, Egypt support was forthcoming. In the post-Independence period, there occurred clash of personalities between President Bourguiba of Tunisia and Egyptian President Nasser. The reconciliation brought between the two leaders in 1961 proved short – lived when in 1965 President Bourguiba asked for a settlement with Israel on uncompromising terms.

Nasser’s relations with Algeria remained almost cordial. Egyptian support to Algeria against Morocco in 1963 remained the watershed. However, after the fall of Ben Bella, the new incumbent Boumediene was less pro-Nasser. The relations between Algeria and Egypt continued to be friendly and cordial.

The Arab countries of *Mashreq* share geographical, historical and cultural bonds with Egypt. The *Mashreq* provided a fertile ground for Nasser's concept of Pan – Arabism. As early as in 1954, Nasser had stated thus:

For some reason it seems to me that within the Arab circle there is a role wandering aimlessly in search of a hero. And I do not know why it seems to me that this role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country and is beckoning to us to move to take up its lines, to put on its costume, since no one else is qualified to play it.⁶⁷

Nasser's nationalist ideas and pan – Arab aspirations found ready reception with the people of *Mashreq*. They rallied to his clarion calls even against their rulers in Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Lebanon. These countries experienced mass demonstrations and riots engendered by propaganda through Cairo Radio.

Nasser's concept of pan – Arabism also entailed Arab socialism or social democracy. As the then editor of *AL-Ahram*, Haikal wrote in January 1963, that the competition of the political and social revolution in any Arab country should precede any thinking about unity in any way.⁶⁸ Nasser's experience with the failure of Egypt – Syria Union had convinced him that social revolution was essential before Arab unity could become a reality.⁶⁹ Nasser observed in 1962 that the development of the action for unity toward its ultimate and comprehensive objective "must be accompanied by practical efforts to fill the economic and social gaps stemming from the difference in the stages of development of the various peoples of the Arab nation."⁷⁰ At that stage, Nasser seemed to be convinced that no precise form of revolution could be imposed on Arab countries.

(iii) Socialism:

Nasser's ideas and perceptions about socialism were manifest in Arab Socialist Union (ASU). In May 1962, a National Congress of Socialist forces was convened in Cairo to endorse the National Charter that incorporated the socialist doctrines set forth in the context of a Socialist interpretation of Egyptian history and contemporary Arab affairs. The Charter had contemplated the prospective formation of an Arab Socialist Union, as the political vehicle of the revolution that would "constitute the authority... [of] people and the driving force behind ...the Revolution and the guardian of the values of true democracy."⁷¹

Nasser's penchant for forming ASU had become more intense after the fiasco of Egyptian – Syria Union. As part of a completely remodeled system of government, Nasser contemplated a new mass organization, which would be immune to any sort of subversion. It was a three – pronged approach starting with a National Congress of Popular Powers envisaging principles of corporate representation. It was to be followed by a written charter embodying the ideals of the revolution and the path of the future. Finally the

Arab Socialist Union was to be created. The ASU provided a channel for the expression of public support for the regime and hitherto directing the popular powers into useful channels for development. Nasser wanted to make ASU as an organization, which could reach down to the grass roots of society and serve as a mobilizing medium of the masses.

Nasser also wanted ASU to become an embodiment of the principles of social democracy. With a view to instill the revolutionary spirit in the masses and to act as the prime motivating force to mobilize the people, The ASU asserted its control over the trade unions, student's organizations and other popular groups. In its endeavor to inculcate revolutionary ideals in the younger generation and to provide a perpetual source of "revolutionary vanguards", the ASU created in October 1965 the Socialist Youth Organization which could provide loyal, active followers of the regime.⁷²

Commitment to socialism formed the main basis of Egyptian economic policy along with development and planning under Nasser. The goal of economic development being central to economic policy, the Egyptian government proceeded in its efforts to encourage development along with comprehensive and authoritative planning. Having started from the vague goals of economic development, the Egyptian government under Nasser had arrived at the firm and well-articulated commitment to socialism, as evident from 1964 constitution.

Commitment to a comprehensive planning and control, as envisaged in the 1964 Egyptian Constitution, was one of the key concepts in the government's campaign for economic development. After the five-year plan (1960-65), Egypt embarked on a seven-Year Plan (1965-72). With the growing governmental intervention in the economy, Nasser was expected to have a "command economy" by 1970. Hagen had expressed the view that in 1964 Egypt had a higher ratio of government consumption to gross domestic product than only non-Communist nation.⁷³

Nasser's distrust of traditional forces in the society had convinced him of the urgency of developing the economy as rapidly as possible on socialistic lines. By increasing government ownership of the industry and services and the organization of the agriculture into cooperatives under government supervision of a both production and marketing purposes, the Egyptian government was able to exert influence, when and, as it deemed necessary. Nasser's commitment to socialism reflected an out growth of the idea of a participant society in which all share equally in the labor and in the rewards. However, Nasser's vision of socialism remained more of a dream.

Conclusion

Nasser's most remarkable achievement was to place Egypt in the main stream of Arab nationalism and to assume the leadership of the Arab nationalist movement. He had become darling of the Arab progressive and

liberation movements. He had tried to give a fresh impetus to Arab nationalism but was handicapped first by the failure of Egypt – Syria Union and then by the Egyptian debacle in the 1967 Arab-Israel War. But the fact remained that Nasser as a leader commanded more respect and following than Nasserism as an ideology in the Arab world.

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