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- The First Anniversary of the New World Order
- Arms Control and the Middle East
- Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa in the Light of the New World Order
- Prospects for a Lasting Peace in the Middle East
- The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern Countries: Change and Continuity
- Regional Relations in the Middle East: A View for the 1990s
- Political Change in the Arab World: Contemporary Political Islam: Its Causes and Political Involvements
- Oil Market Developments
- Government Budgets and Economic Outlook in the GCC Countries
- Opec and the New Challenges

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REGIONAL RELATIONS IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A VIEW FOR THE 1990s

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Any study of regional relations, in the so-called *Middle East* area, faces difficulties. The Middle East is one of the most turbulent and unstable areas in the world. Moreover, the study of this area demonstrates a sharp conceptual dispute. The paramount component of this dispute lies in the long debate over the concept of *Middle East* vis à vis the *Arab world*, as it pertains to the regional system of the area.

This dispute is by no means one over which is the better or most suitable expression. Rather, it reflects a political and intellectual difference over the framework of regional relations which encompasses an Arab framework, or a structure that extends to include neighboring countries, mainly Iran, Turkey and Israel.

One might agree with the Arab researchers' criticism of the *Middle East* concept, and the grounds upon which the *Arab system* is based. However, important changes have taken place, thus making it difficult to adopt the exclusive concept of the *Arab regional system* when studying current and future regional relations.

The concept, *Arab system*, was previously useful as an analytical tool, although it excluded non-Arab states, which have greatly influenced the region through serious interactions with the members of the *Arab system*. Such interactions were of a conflicting nature in most cases, despite the presence of some cooperation, even in the case of Israel.

I. Changes Push Toward New Relations

There are three main changes, each representing the result of protracted interactions over a long period of time. However, specific events during the last two years have crystallized these changes.

Two are regional changes: (1) the crisis of the *Arab system*, its climax being the Gulf crisis of 1990-91, and (2) the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict which has been qualitatively changed by the peace process of 1991.

The third change which is international in nature is the end of the Cold War and the bipolar system, the climax of which is the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

1. The Crisis of the Arab System

The *Arab system* has suffered, since its foundation, from an essential structural imbalance and ineffectiveness. This is due to the contradiction between *Arabism*, as a call for unity, and the reality of the system, based on the nation-state. This has been clearly reflected in Arab speeches of the 1950s and 1960s which were full of exchange between *Arab comprehensive unity* and *joint Arab action*. The effectiveness of the system was deeply undermined by this contradiction, especially in an area where ideology plays a crucial role, that is the Middle East.

Even in the late 1960s, when the call for unity declined, the impotence of the system was already well established, thus impeding the development of stable relations among members of the system. Notably, this impotence was clear to many parties, but they differed over the appropriate, and -- more importantly -- the possible means of confronting it. The radical reform approach was not accepted by decision-makers, and it remained confined to academic circles. Indifference and fear of reform prevailed in decision-making circles. Hence, only partial reforms -- such as the amendment of the Arab League Charter and statute -- were introduced. Even this approach which became relatively more organized after 1980 was too slow and cumbersome. Thus, the *purification of the Arab atmosphere* was the prevailing reform approach. It was confined to providing the minimum level of conciliation necessary to a partial reform. Consequently, this approach merely put an end to deterioration represented in the accumulation of conflict, the aggravation of violence, and the stagnation of institutional works.

Within this context, despite the achievements accomplished during the struggle for independence, the system's performance revealed several basic deficiencies.

There was a lack of an effective regional security system despite repeated talk about *Arab national security*. The system was incapable of developing effective security mechanisms in the face of the foreign threats. Furthermore, there was no consensus on the realization of such threats. In spite of the fact that Israel was collectively recognized as the main source of threat, all joint security arrangements: the Joint Arab Defense Pact, the Arab League Military Council and the Arab Unified Command failed to face it. The ambitious aim of "Liberating Palestine" was doomed, just as was the less ambitious goal of "liberating the territories occupied in 1967".

However, agreement that Israel was the main source of the threat covered differences on security priorities on the part of the members of the system. Some states were faced by more serious threats from within the system or from other regional powers. The Cold War had also affected coalition-building of the members of the system, resulting in a quasi-Arab Cold War.

There was also a lack of effective mechanisms to settle inter-Arab conflicts. The Arab system had witnessed several inter-Arab disputes and failed to eliminate them.

Obviously, such disputes were abated or partially settled. The role of the Arab League was highly limited. And although such conflicts did not lead to military confrontations in most cases, they always led to interference in other countries' internal affairs, and attempts to topple regimes.

The system proved to be incapable of solving border disputes, which were the source of several inter-Arab conflicts. Most of the Arab borders were created according to the settlements of World War I, after the decline of the Ottoman Empire. However, border disputes produced different effects on inter-Arab relations. The most important of these problems are those disputes between Iraq and Kuwait; Saudi Arabia and Yemen; Southern Yemen (known today as Unified Yemen) and Oman; Qatar and Bahrain; Egypt and Sudan; Egypt and Libya; Algeria and Morocco.

The system also proved to be incapable of developing joint economic interests and interactions. In spite of numerous projects and studies on Arab economic integration, economic relations remain modest. Arab economic organizations have failed to achieve progress. Moreover, the two main projects in this respect: the 1950s agreement on commercial exchange, and the 1960s agreement on an Arab joint market were doomed.

Inter-Arab commercial relations have never exceeded six percent of the total commercial relations of these countries. The giant surplus of oil revenues moved to the West.

The nature of the political system is overwhelmingly authoritarian. Until the mid-1970s, when some regimes opted for calculated democracy, they actually had been far removed from political participation. The system's foreign policy decision-making has been characterized by personalization and the interaction between personal and political relations. Consequently, coalitions suffered from instability and frequent changes.

All these factors have contributed to the aggravation of the system's inability to produce stable regional relations. Instead, relations seemed vague and lacking strategic perception. The main institution of the system, namely the Arab League, in turn, has suffered from all these factors. The member-states have adhered to the League's Charter, as long as it serves their own changing interests. While the very state that demands an adherence to the charter, flagrantly violates it when the charter contradicts its own interests.

This situation was followed by the Gulf crisis which personified the system's crisis and proved its inviability, thus opening doors to new regional relations which surpass the Arab realm. The crisis caused the deepest Arab division by creating two bitterly-opposed camps. Furthermore, the division has extended to include the

popular level, and has created new coalitions, enhancing the roles for Turkey and Iran. While on other hand, the crisis has created a common interest for Egypt, Syria, the Gulf States and Israel against the pro-Iraq camp.

Thus, it has become clear that the crisis has inevitably brought about a new regional order. Even those who expected the survival of the Arab system argued that it would have a new form. For example, the Damascus Declaration of March 1991 called for the establishment of a "new Arab system to enhance joint Arab action". Although the essence of this declaration soon faded, all participants continue to consider it to be the seed of a new Arab system.

Yet, repercussions from the Gulf War have reinforced the argument that the new regional relations should surpass the Arab framework, especially in view of two other changes.

2. The Arab-Israeli Peace Process

The Arab-Israeli conflict has contributed to the maintenance of the deficient Arab system because it has impeded Arab-Israeli cooperative interaction. The cooperative interaction between Egypt and Israel after the 1979 Treaty remained highly limited because the treaty was not a part of a wider peace process.

In spite of the continuous peace efforts throughout the 1980s, the Gulf crisis provided a better opportunity for a wider Arab-Israeli peace process. The crisis has had a large impact on the very nature of the conflict. Also it has highlighted the prelude of a qualitative change in the conflict's nature and has intensified developments in this direction. Two developments are important in this respect.

The first development is the end of the age of comprehensive Arab-Israeli wars. This is evident in the change of the content of the conflict from an Arab-Israeli conflict to a number of disputes which are still interrelated. Today, there is the Israeli-Palestinian dispute over the 1976 Occupied Territories or rather over a part of them, and not over historic Palestine. There are also the Israeli-Syrian dispute over the Golan Heights, the Israeli-Lebanese dispute over the southern borders of Lebanon, and Israeli-Egyptian differences over the new peace negotiations and the settlement of the other issues of the conflict. We must also note the Jordanian-Israeli disputes over the Palestinian problem, and over borders and water. The significance of the Gulf War lies in the fact that Iraq failed to gain the support of the "confrontation" Arab states to drag Israel into war.

The Iraqi Scud missiles, and the position of these states on this issue signalled the end of the age of comprehensive Arab-Israeli wars. This was not confined to Egypt and Syria, but it also included Jordan which sided with Iraq. The Jordanian

government dared not to vow to support Iraq, if faced by an Israeli attack. It merely declared a state of mobilization to defend Jordan--and not Iraq--against any Israeli aggression.

The new Lebanese legitimate authority vigorously stood against Palestinian attempts to establish a pro-Iraq front in southern Lebanon. Moreover, it deployed the army in the southern areas which provided a clear signal to Israel that any Palestinian or Lebanese attacks from these areas can no longer take place.

All this reinforces the fact since the late 1970s the Arab-Israeli conflict has lost its historical substance because the conflict between Arabs and Israel no longer underpins other regional conflicts. It has been practically proved that there could be common interests between some Arabs and Israel, in the face of other Arab countries. During the Gulf crisis, the conflict between the Gulf-Syrian-Egyptian coalition and Iraq was rather sharper than that between it and Israel. Despite the deep concern of these states of potential Israeli involvement, it was obviously clear that even in this case, their positions would not change. In his speech before Congress on March 6, 1991, President Bush hinted at this fact: "Thanks to the Gulf crisis, Israel and many Arab states have found themselves facing the same aggressor."

These developments imply that any military confrontation between Israel and an Arab country can no longer be converted into a comprehensive war between the Arabs and Israel. However, this result was not suddenly created by the Gulf War because it existed to a certain degree in previous times. The Arab failure to take part in the war launched by Israel against Lebanon and PLO in summer 1982 is but one example. In spite of the presence of a considerable part of the Syrian army in Lebanon at the time, Syria preferred not to be involved in the dispute. Moreover, when it was obliged to take part, Syria exerted its best efforts to halt the impending battle at a time when the aggressors were in their way to Beirut. Meanwhile, other Arab countries merely issued denunciation statements. The Gulf War, however, intensified this development. Most likely, the possibility of another armed dispute is rather remote. Jordan has declared its adherence to guaranteeing the security of Israel's borders and Lebanon followed suit. On the other hand, the strategic balance espoused by Syria seems inapplicable with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the Syrian policy. It has become incumbent upon Damascus - in order to maintain its regional role - to seriously enhance its Western relations, pursue rapprochement with Egypt and take part in the peace process. In the meanwhile, the Iraqi defeat has ruled out pre-war expectations that Iraq might constitute a real threat to Israel or that Iraq might be subject to an Israeli military strike.

The second development is the relative decline of Israel's strategic importance. The Gulf War erupted at a time of uncertainty about the Israel's future position in U.S. strategy, the end of the Cold War, and the removal of the Soviet threat

to Western interests in the region. The Gulf War proved Israel's limited capability to protect Western interests in the region. This is by no means due to the inter-Arab nature of the Gulf crisis. Considering the magnitude of the military force mobilized to confront Iraq only confirms the fact that Israel was incapable of defeating Iraq in an American-Iraqi confrontation. Thus, Israel failed to help the United States in such a grave crisis which directly touched American vital interests. On the contrary, it constituted an additional burden. Washington exerted much effort to urge Israel not to take part in the crisis, as well as not to react against Iraqi missiles, and also to protect Israel from such missiles. One of the main reasons for this additional burden is the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, the United States has focused on dealing with factors which impede a peaceful solution.

While on the other hand, the crisis weakened the Palestinian position (after siding with Iraq) so that the PLO was unable to object to the initiation of the peace process, in which it was not a formal participant.

In this context, all Arab parties were unable to hinder the peace process, the success of which will ultimately lead to the emergence of new regional relationships.

3. The New International Situation

There is general consensus on the close relationship between the international and regional systems which are therefore, called "subordinate international systems". A region does not live in isolation. Therefore, current international conditions -- after the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union -- necessarily affect the nature of regional relations in the Middle East of the 1990s.

The regional states are increasingly willing to consider new conditions. The notion of "adjustment" to these changes has become commonplace. This implies a willingness to adapt to new regional relations imposed by the new international situation. The repercussions of the Gulf War have re-demonstrated the irrefutable importance of the area to the major powers, and the indispensability of congruity between the new regional relations and the New World Order. Practically, this means different international roles in drawing a new map of the region, where institutions and relations will be in further conformity with the New World Order. It is no longer acceptable that such a highly important region will be left to produce major problems for the world. This explains the immediate initiation of the peace process after the Gulf War, and the insistence on destroying the remnants of the Iraqi military might. The stability of the region necessitates the elimination of the power of a regional actor, the policies of which are unpredictable. Moreover, it is no longer possible to tolerate the changeable and unstable regional coalitions and policies.

In this context, international ambition, as for the future regional relations in the Middle East, differs from one power to another. However, the minimum acceptable range is to eliminate the impact of regional problems on the international situation. Sir Antony Barsons, the former British Ambassador to United Nations, expressed this view. "The Middle East shall remain the area foreordained to chaos, as it has always been since the decay of the Ottoman Empire. All that the world can do is just to limit the virulence and try to solve problems whenever they emerge". The maximum, however, is to establish more stable regional relations, in conformity with the New World Order. Several American statesmen have expressed their keenness to establish a pattern of relations capable of bringing peace, avoiding tension, settling disputes through peaceful means, and developing effective economic cooperation. The key to this ambition was expressed by Secretary of State James Baker. "Modern history has proved that a single country could not maintain a long-term imposition of will on other countries or shape the Middle East on its own."

II. The Future of Regional Relations in the Middle East

Obviously clear, the main features of the new regional relations in the Middle East are the involvement of Israel and the increased role of Turkey and Iran. Yet, the development of relations in terms of a new regional system including these three countries, together with the Arab states or a group of them (the Mashreq, the Gulf and Egypt) depends on the following three factors: (1) the extent of Israel's involvement, (2) the Turkish strategic option and a further change in Iran's policy, and (3) the willingness of major Arab states to build strong relations with these three countries.

1. The Extent of Israel's Involvement

The extent of Israel's involvement determines its role in the region if the peace process attains a partial or comprehensive settlement.

Presumably, Israeli involvement is to take one of two forms: maximal or minimal. At first sight, it seems most likely that Israel's involvement shall be minimal if it attains a partial settlement (most probably with Jordan and the Palestinians) or maximal if it achieves a comprehensive settlement. Nonetheless, the situation is more complicated for two reasons.

First, a partial settlement implies full Palestinian autonomy, and a peace treaty with Jordan pending Palestinian-Jordanian federalism. This is to result in a network of new regional relations that include other regional actors. Such a network will be wider in the case of successful Lebanese-Israeli negotiations, even if Syrian-Israeli negotiations stalemate.

Second, it is not true that the achievement of a comprehensive peace will inevitably lead to automatic maximization of Israeli involvement in the region. Some major Arab states may prefer to develop a ceiling for this involvement for the sake of their own interests.

However, the international factor, especially the United States, might promote this Israeli involvement. Nevertheless, it is still uncertain whether this factor will exist, especially if the United States views the total involvement of Israel leading to effective economic integration, thus increasing the relative independence of the region. Such a development would imply the enhancement of the Middle East as a regional power on the international level, thus impeding American hegemony. This might be of further significance if such a hegemony is indispensable in the international balance of power.

Therefore, the extent of Israel's involvement shall depend on several conditions. There is a minimal and a maximal level of involvement, according to which role Israel plays. The difference between the two levels is both quantitative and qualitative. For example with regard to strategic security, minimal involvement is represented in defensive security arrangements included in the bilateral agreements between Israel and the Arab states. Thus, these arrangements are to be mainly bilateral, like those between Egypt and Israel on Sinai. International parties may take part in guaranteeing these arrangements.

The maximal level means a regional arrangement, based on results of the peace process. This implies the probability of developing regulations for mutual security such as non-aggression treaties, measures to avoid aggression, and the agreement on a common definition of security threats in the region.

This may be further represented in the formation of a regional security organization, and the development of military cooperation through joint agencies. Therefore, the maximal level may eventually mean a military alliance which includes Arab states, Israel and perhaps Turkey. When a state is subject to a threat, responsibilities of other regional states (members of the system) may range from assistance and organized military cooperation to the establishment of a joint military command. This clearly buries the concept of *Arab national security*, and officially repeals the *Joint Arab Defense Treaty*.

The above-mentioned examples demonstrate the effect of the extent of Israel's involvement in future regional relations.

However, it is also necessary to distinguish between the two levels of involvement on the economic level. At the minimal level, economic relations shall be confined to mutual demands.

As for the maximal level, it is presumed that preferential arrangements in the fields of investment, technology transfer and trade shall take place.

Free trade zones, customs unions and common markets are also expected. A Benelux-union is already under consideration by the Israelis and Palestinians. Thus, it is expected that in case of the maximal Israeli involvement, intensive economic relations in the Arab Mashreq area shall take place. Moreover, the Mashreq may become the center of wider interactions which include Egypt, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf countries. The key to developing the "Mashreq" as a center for interaction are the incumbent intensive economic relations between Israel and the Palestinian and Lebanese occupied lands. The settlement of the conflict shall lead to the intensification -- and not to the diminuation -- of these relations. The distribution of work is easier to adopt in the Mashreq area because it is a historically natural unit. In the case of a comprehensive peace, it may become an investment center, especially if international finance, offered as an incentive for peace, is focused there.

2. The Role of Turkey and Iran

Factors determining the roles played Turkey and Iran are different. In the arena of new regional relations, Turkey is to be a main actor from the very beginning. However, the involvement of Turkey in these relations, especially concerning security, depends on its strategic option. The identity and role of Turkey in the area and the world is a politically and philosophically controversial issue, among Turks. There are two options in this respect: Eastern and European. President Ozal has opted for the European choice, seeking Turkey's integration in the European world, and the enhancement of its role in NATO. Yet, this attitude has been met by a European reluctance, thus reinforcing the position of the other trend. In the latest parliamentary elections of October 1991, the tally of the fundamentalist and nationalist parties registered 17% of the votes, reflecting the failure of Ozal's European policy. It is most likely that this policy will fail to achieve the aim of joining the European Community. On the other hand, the decay of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union dwindles the strategic importance of Turkey's role in the NATO.

However, the European-oriented policy of Ozal does not exclusively rule out Eastern orientation. Turkey built a coalition with Iran and Pakistan and is open to other Asian countries. Turkish keenness to take best advantage of its strategic location, makes it inevitable for the Turks to constantly consider the Middle East as an area of concern. Moreover, the dissolution of the Soviet Union imposes new pressures, difficult to be faced only by the European-oriented policy. The most important of these pressures are the ethnic and nationalist movements in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union.

Thus, however the strategic option might be, Turkey does not have the luxury of setting out apart from the new Middle East regional relations especially concerning economics. Turkey has a vital interest in economic cooperation, because it needs to maintain and expand markets, especially in the Gulf which absorbed 14% of its total exports (worth \$ 1.6 billion in 1989). Most of Turkey's oil imports come from the area. Also, it insists on having a major role in water cooperative projects. Moreover, Turkey looks forward to making Istanbul the financial and banking capital of the Middle East. Turkey capitalizes on the relative progress of its banking system, and its facilities offered to foreign investment.

Hence, Turkey is a major actor in the regional relations, notwithstanding the extent of its involvement in strategic and security matters. However, this is not the case with Iran, which is still unqualified for wide participation in regional interactions, despite the efforts of the incumbent Iranian regime to improve the image of Iran as a non-revolutionary state. Two main factors restrict Iran's regional role.

First, is its maintenance of its antagonistic position against Israel, and the rejection of the peace process which is the substantial element in the new regional relations. Iran has embraced the Arab opponents of the peace process.

Second, a considerable rift exists between Iran and some major Arab states. Therefore, Iran's serious involvement in new regional relations depends mainly on the capability of the incumbent regime to pursue more practical policies, which are likely to take place at a slow pace. The antagonistic position against Israel was closely relative to the Iranian-aspired role during the last decade, in collaboration with some Arab actors, mainly Syria. However, conditions have now changed. Syria has already joined the peace process, and the Iranian-backed Lebanese fundamentalists are in an unenviable position after the establishment of a Syrian-backed-central Lebanese government. On the other hand, the hostage problem has almost come to an end, and new variables make it indispensable for Iran to improve relations with the West.

Hence, Iran will certainly take part in new relations, but slowly and gradually. Iran's role in future security arrangements in the Gulf area can never be neglected. Also, its growing relation with the Arab Gulf states is an important access to a further regional role. Despite their apprehensions about Iranian policies, Gulf states have no choice but to develop or "enhance" relations with Iran. "Enhancement of relations" was the term used in the joint communiqué issued after the ministerial meeting of Arab Gulf states with Iran in New York in late September, 1991.

3. Major Arab States and New Relations

The main purpose of this part is to determine the position of major Arab states like Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia toward establishing serious cooperative relations with Israel, Turkey and Iran.

Two main problems emerge.

The first concerns the problem of leadership which constitutes a main issue in Arab politics. There is a general consensus that Egypt assumed the leadership of the Arab system until the early 1970s. The decade of the seventies witnessed a leadership competition between Egypt and other states. However, when Egypt signed the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, it became isolated and consequently competition took place among other countries.

In spite of the fact that the environment set by new regional relations shall be different from that of the previous Arab system, still some Arab countries are skeptically reserved about increased roles for Israel and Turkey.

Apprehensions about Israel are based on the wide technological gap that exists between these countries and Israel; the latter is qualified to become the technological and industrialized major center in the area. In actuality there are Israeli schemes to build regional cooperation, in which Israel takes part through technology, and the Arabs through money and labor.

However, these apprehensions are exaggerated in view of the ailing Israeli economy, especially Jewish immigration which reached 370,000 in 1990/1991. According to the Israeli Central Bank, the necessary finance for absorbing immigrants is estimated to be \$ 50 to 60 billion during a five-year period beginning in 1992. Direct foreign investment has hardly reached \$ 200 million, at a time when unemployment has peaked to 12% and the inflation rate has reached 20%.

Although the achievement of peace shall bring better opportunities for the growth of the Israeli economy, the same is expected for Syria and Egypt. Nonetheless, peaceful relations will add to Israel's advantage opportunities for the opening up of Arab markets. Moreover, it will allow Israel to develop relations with major international corporations which are committed to the "Boycott Policy", such as the Japanese corporations.

Yet, peace is expected to create new domestic problems in Israel. The absence of the "Arab" threat will contribute to the aggravation of domestic Israeli tensions.

Apprehension about Turkey is more important to Arab states which are keen to maintain their "cornerstone" position in the American strategy, especially Egypt. Some scholars believe that Turkey is in the best position to play this role because it is free from the restrictions imposed on Arab countries based on their Arab commitments. However, these commitments will probably diminish with new relations and conditions. But, Turkey is to maintain its strategic importance because it borders four countries where potential problems may take place: Iraq, Iran, Syria and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Moreover, Turkey is the most willing, when compared to major Arab countries, to offer military facilities to the United States. Yet on the other hand, Turkey suffers

from the struggle between its European and Eastern identities, and its escalating domestic tension, most importantly, its ethnic tensions with the Kurds.

Apprehensions about Iran's role are less severe than those about Turkey and Israel. Iran will not be completely involved in the new relations until the pragmatization of its foreign policy is finalized. However, the traditional competition between Arab and the Iranian influence is expected to exist.

The second problem is the popular antagonism between the Arabs and Israelis. It is difficult to believe that historical hatred and negative stereotypes will vanish automatically once peace is achieved. It is a deeply-rooted hatred, always intensified by religious and nationalist extremism, which depends on popular and active social and political forces.

In Israel, these forces managed to besiege the pro-peace movements in the 1980s. On the other hand, the "intifada" has allowed the Israeli extremists to further influence public opinion. Furthermore, the increasing certainty of a better future after the waves of Jewish immigration creates public opinion reluctant to accept a radical conciliation with the Arabs.

On the part of the Arabs, forces and movements which deny the very existence of Israel intensify the atmosphere of antagonism. Activities of these forces create an Arab populist mood against serious relations with Israel which puts pressure on Arab governments. In this context, political parties, associations and syndicates in Arab multi-party systems, Jordan and Egypt, compete in expressing hatred towards Israel without any distinction between different Israeli trends. After the initiation of the present peace process, the Jordanian Journalists' Association dismissed a journalist for being interviewed by the Israeli Television. Moreover, the behaviour of the Arab media delegates in Madrid raised bitter Israeli resentment, thus intensifying the attitudes of rejecting peace with Arabs.

Such a problem should not be underestimated because it constitutes a real obstacle on the the road towards building new regional relations. These relations will never be a fact unless carried out through people.

One of the substantial problems emanating from the latter situation is the relationship between the future of democracy and of peace in the Middle East. It is clear that the Arab and Israeli communities adopt more stubborn stances against peace as compared to their governments. This dilemma is of paramount importance because democracy is by no means less important than to the region.

It is ridiculous to reach a situation where we should choose between the two, especially in view of the fact that the absence of democracy was a main factor which contributed to the ineffectiveness of the Arab system.

The future absence of democracy shall negatively affect any new regional relations and offer Israel--and to a lesser degree--Turkey a relative advantage.

Conclusion

Accordingly, it is concluded that future Arab-Israeli relations constitute the cornerstone of new regional relations in the Middle East. Therefore, the multilateral negotiations underway are to be the forum in which these relations will be shaped despite the absence of Iran. Such negotiations are expected to be highly complicated, as the priorities of each state for new regional relations will be highlighted. For example, Israel gives highest priority to economic cooperation and distribution of water resources. Meanwhile, some Arab states consider arms control as their top priority. On this latter issue, Israel will probably focus on traditional weapons, while Arab states might find it of more concern to focus on the nuclear weapons, in order to eliminate Israel's advantage. However, Israel shall avoid giving priority to mass-destruction weapons, although several Arab states maintain chemical weapons.

Therefore, the progress of the negotiations greatly depends on reaching a reasonable balance between the issues of economic cooperation and arms control. Notably, wide international participation in the negotiations will presumably promote economic cooperation, and this is why the European Community, Japan and Canada take part.

These countries are presumed to provide the financial incentive for such cooperation. Furthermore, international involvement in the issue of economic cooperation is considerably more effective than in the issue of arms control, where interests of major powers and arms dealers impede the imposition of a real ban on arms exports to the Middle East.

On the other hand, the most appropriate means to achieve arms reduction in the area is controversial. Some people dismiss the European model arguing that it was designed for a specific area, and is not necessarily applicable to others. Therefore, practical and procedural problems facing economic cooperation are actually smaller than those facing arms control.

The establishment of stable regional relations necessitates an effective tackling of the issue of arms control. Otherwise, new relations shall certainly face great difficulties, thus negatively affecting the future of economic cooperation. A resilient and stable cooperation can never be attained without developing a security framework, suitable to all parties, and directing a considerable part of military spending to regional development.