Final Paper (Question 1)

In 1967, tensions between Israel and her neighbours were on a meteoric rise. After multiple border conflicts and military buildups, war seemed inevitable and attitudes toward conflict were extremely divergent: while the Arabs, especially the Egyptians, expected (and demanded) a quick and easy victory, the Israelis genuinely feared for the very survival of their state. The ensuing war lasted only six days and sent a shockwave across the Arab world. The messianic Gamal Abdel Nasser, who had played such a significant role in rousing pan-Arab sentiment against Israel, resigned from the Egyptian presidency. Egypt, Jordan, and Syria were once again (partially) under foreign occupation after decades of pursuing modernity and building up their strength.[1] The entire territory occupied by Israel was a tiny fraction of the Mashriq, but the impact of the war completely changed the trajectory of the entire Arab world. The humiliating defeat of the Arabs at the hands of Israel in 1967 confirmed Israel's existence and dealt an irreparable blow to modern Arab nationalism, especially pan-Arabism, catalysing the rise of political Islam and the shift towards peaceful negotiations; despite these changes, it was ultimately the continued Arab insistence on economic sovereignty which would favour them in the more diplomatic decades to come.

The most obvious change after 1967, though not in all cases permanent, was Israel's massively expanded borders. Israel's newly occupied territories—Gaza, Sinai, Cisjordan, and the Golan—were never previously allocated to Israel in previous partition plans, and neither Sinai nor the Golan were ever claimed by Israel. These border changes, however, had severe geopolitical effects. The capture of Gaza and Sinai, previously administered by Egypt, dealt a severe blow to Nasser's prestige and also resulted in the closure of the Suez Canal. The Golan was a strategic heights overlooking northern Israel and its capture had much to do with

[1] *Nasser's Republic: The Making of Modern Egypt*, directed by Michal Goldman (New York: Icarus Films, 2016).

Syrian artillery in the area. Cisjordan specifically was an especially painful loss, however. It was the heartland of any potential Palestinian state and had previously been fully integrated into Jordan—one example of pan-Arabism in practice—and so its loss was traumatic to all states espousing the pan-Arab cause. That Israel was capable of such a military feat, and, six years later, still capable of defending it, was astonishing. Israelis celebrated not just the survival of their state, but their military dominance, and this was to become a major impetus for increased Zionist migration. In addition, the overconfidence that Israelis had in their military would be disastrous on Yom Kippur, six years later – an event which would convince Israelis that domination of the Arabs was not sustainable. Similarly, 1967 began to shift Palestinian nationalism from the emancipation of all-Palestine to merely the pre-1967 borders. The Arab states were beginning to seek negotiations with Israel on equal terms, with several even choosing to eventually recognise it; Israel's place in the Mashriq was permanent, for better or for worse. Rightist Likud, which came into power in 1977 and was led by 1948 veteran Menachem Begin, sought peaceful solutions to the conflict even as it continued to build strategically placed settlements aimed at separating Palestinian settlements and protecting Israeli frontiers. Palestinians continued to violently oppose Israel's continued occupation of Gaza and Cisjordan, notably with international terrorism, but there was impetus for change: Palestinians began to recognise Israel as a permanent fixture of the region, just as the other Arabs had, and leftist Israelis were unhappy with the funding and preferential treatment given to the ultra-Orthodox settlers. With the failure of the First Intifada came the beginning of negotiations—on the basis of mutual recognition between Israel and Palestine—and it seemed that the 1990s would be a time of hope and peace.

The defeat of pan-Arabism in 1967 was crushing and, although not final, led to it losing legitimacy as a political force and the division of the Arabs in geopolitics. Egypt's traumatic defeat in the Six-Day War dealt a severe blow to Nasser and Egypt's credibility as

leaders of the Arab world, ushering in the end of Nasserism and permanently changing regional geopolitics. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, was convinced that Nasserism had failed and turned against many of its tenets: pan-Arabism, socialism, anti-imperialism, and authoritarianism. Sadat prepared for another war with Israel, but Egypt became the first Arab state to officially make peace with Israel after regaining Sinai, apparently betraying the pan-Arab cause. Economic controls were dismantled to the disappointment of the subaltern, which idolised Nasser for his interest in the lower classes, and which, along with the end of Egyptian-Soviet military ties, brought Egypt closer to the US, drawing widespread for apparently betraying anti-imperialism. Egypt's shift away from Nasser's leftism was only possible because Nasserism died on the battlefields of 1967: the change the Nasser was supposed to bring to Egypt was illusive; his army proved as ineffective as King Farouk's in 1948.[2] The end of Nasserism brought impetus for political change: for Sadat, this meant pro-American liberalism, although for many others, such as the newly freed Muslim Brotherhood members, this meant Islamism. In Egypt, and indeed across the entire Arab world, the apparent failure of Nasser's modernity encouraged the growth of radical Islamism, which had been suppressed for the sake of state-building. Sayyid Qutb, who promoted the killing of supposed false Muslims, was executed under Nasser, but his ideas grew ever more popular under the alleged apostate Sadat. Sadat, unlike Nasser, was not legitimised as a messianic saviour of all Egyptians, especially of the poor, who benefited from Islamist charities and socialist price controls, and, most unforgivably, had made peace with the Zionist enemy. In 1981, radical Islamists inspired by Qutb assassinated Sadat, proving their strength as a movement but without successfully seizing power in any state in the region. For the time being, Sadat's liberal model (for some definitions of the word) would survive, but so would radical Islamism, growing ever stronger and biding its time.

[2] *Nasser's Republic*.

The other surrounding states lost faith in Arab unity after 1967 in large part due to conflicts associated with their absorption of Palestinian refugees. The traumatic loss of Cisjordan led to a massive exodus of refugees and militants into Transjordan, from where Palestinian militants launched attacks into Israel. Jordan's tiny population meant that the absorption of these potentially rebellious and disloyal subjects represented a severe destabilising and delegitimising factor for the Hashemite regime, which went to war with the Palestinian militants in 1970. Before Black September, Jordan was the "Palestinian" state, as it was the only state which granted citizenship to the Palestinians; after the civil war, the Hashemites could no longer even pretend to be protectors of the Palestinians. In part due to these circumstances and in part due to pressure from the US, Jordan would renounce her claim to Cisjordan and be the second state to make peace with Israel, breaking from the pan-Arab cause as Egypt had. The Palestinian militants were deported to Lebanon, from where they again launched attacks into Israel, contributing to the gradual shift in political power from the Lebanese nationalist Christians (formerly a majority) to the pro-Palestinian Muslims (currently a majority). The intervention of Syria against the Palestinians in 1976, far more than the sectarian conflict unfolding in Lebanon, was what truly divorced the Arab states. Israel's victory in 1967 was a traumatic experience, to be sure, but for an Arab state to invade another explicitly for the purpose of killing Palestinians in the name of pan-Arabsim was absolutely intolerable. Syria's rival in Iraq, already incensed with the Syrian Baathists for breaking from secular pan-Arab Baathism by promoting the Alawites in all sectors of society, saw further betrayal in Syria's promotion of her national security over Palestinian statehood.[3] It is of course reasonable to fear any encroaching armed actors; states are, after all, defined by their monopoly over violence. Iraq, unlike Israel's neighbours, however, never faced such an issue, being so far away from the regional bogeyman, and was never at threat of Palestinian

[3] Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 270-273.

insurrection or Israeli occupation. Pan-Arabism was politically convenient in stirring national passions, but it was also institutionally disastrous in challenging state authority and inviting Israeli retaliation. The remaining Arab states split, staying united in regional organisations where convenient, but they had abandoned the pan-Arab cause. And when, merely four years later, Iraq invaded Iran in the name of pan-Arab unity, nobody heeded his call.[4]

Although Arab society changed greatly due to 1967, the hearts of the conflict, independence and dignity, remained the same, even the means of achieving them: economic sovereignty. The Arab states, armed by the USSR, remained conventionally weaker than Israel, armed by the US. Though reforms, especially under Sadat in Egypt, led to appreciable improvements in army quality, changing attitudes towards Israel ensured that the Arab states remained militarily weaker than Israel after 1967. As a result, economic and diplomatic respect had been, and remained, some of the most important features of the Arab fight for sovereignty. The West, which needed oil in large volumes, had to contend with OPEC, an organisation created to compete with the West on equal terms. OPEC and its member states' power was proven effective in the negotiations leading up to oil nationalisation in Algeria, Iraq, and elsewhere—a triumph of economic nationalism (a reprise of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal)—as well as, more notably, in the energy crisis of the 1970s. Multiple Western states, including the US and the UK, experienced significant stagflation (a term coined specifically for this event) due to an Arab oil embargo, a hitherto impossible situation that completely shattered the perception of Western superiority. While ultimately the West managed to push down oil prices with energy diversification and decreased oil consumption, the Arab petrostates proved to be capable of leveraging their immense oil reserves as a source of economic independence and power projection.[5] The Arabs had finally brought the West to the negotiating table, and it vindicated their military failures.

[4] Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, 275, 279.
[5] Giuliano Garavini, *The Rise and Fall of OPEC in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 203-205.

UN membership, coveted as it was, tangibly meant little until the Arab oil embargo. All of the then-independent Arab states were UN members prior to 1967, but the UN was understandably considered a Western-dominated institution, especially with the entry of Israel into the body, although it ostensibly remained a forum for global diplomacy as equals. There were few diplomatic successes for the Arab states prior to 1967—the Arabs did not, for example, support the 1947 partition plan—but with the end of the Yom Kippur War and the Arab oil embargo came the actual beginning of an Arab-Israeli peace process, based on 1967's UNSC Resolution 242, and observer status for Palestine. These successes were real, based not upon the strength that the Arabs had shown on the battlefield, but rather on the global market. While the Arab states were by no means self-sufficient, with many remaining much poorer than the industrialised West and oil being an unreliable income flow, the diplomatic victories after 1967 confirmed the importance of economic sovereignty and vindicated the usage of economic nationalism as a negotiation tool with the West.

In 1978, Israeli and Egyptian negotiators arrived in Camp David carrying the suspicions of their peoples with them. The Israelis returned home with peace in the south and the Egyptians returned home with Sinai, but nobody was fully satisfied. Despite widespread condemnation of Sadat's peace initiative, the collapse of pan-Arabism after 1967 prevented a true united front against Israel from forming, while the Yom Kippur War and the Arab oil embargo convinced Israel that it could not dominate its neighbours forever. The Arabs had won a rare diplomatic victory, solidifying their national sovereignty, and for a moment it looked as if regional peace was attainable. However, the Islamists, newly freed from the shackles of Nasserism, shouted apostate at secular nationalism and the Zionist threat; the threat of Palestinian militias had been replaced by Hamas and Hezbollah, while Palestinian refugees clamoured for the right to return even as Israel funded ever-more settlements across Cisjordan and Gaza. Attitudes had shifted towards peace, but not enough had changed. In

1993, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators arrived in Oslo carrying the hopes of their peoples with them. Unfortunately, their hopes were betrayed.

Bibliography

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