

dependence from colonialism. In that period, the Arab League was timidly groping in the shadow of Western hegemony in the area. Britain contributed to establishing the Arab League in order to provide a collective institution for maintaining the status quo, although the other impulse for the establishment of the Arab League came from the Arab masses' demand for unity.

The Arab-Israeli war in 1948 was the first big test-and defeat- for the Arab League; it was clear then that this framework was incapable of rising to fulfill the Arab masses' aspirations.

In the late fifties and early sixties, several Arab countries experienced revolutions and coups, which increased the number of independent states. Nasser's Egypt was the focal point of the rising Arab national movement which comprised the mass movement and newly established nationalist regimes. The Arab League continued to exist, but Nasser's Egypt had greater political influence, and the Arab nationalist movement served as a pressure on the traditional regimes. This was a stage of Arab upsurge: The Suez Canal was nationalized; the subsequent tripartite aggression on Egypt was defeated; the Baghdad Pact was abrogated; and many Arab countries gained independence, including Sudan, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Kuwait, Somalia and Mauritania. Many foreign properties in the area were nationalized. Moreover, the issue of Arab unity was enthusiastically taken up for the first time, with the formation of the United Arab Republic in 1958, by Egypt and Syria (dissolved in 1961).

After the June 1967 defeat, the Nasserite project began to retreat. Although the 1973 war was a partial military victory for the Arab side, the seventies was the stage of decline for Arab officialdom. In 1975, the civil war broke out in Lebanon; the Camp David accords were negotiated and signed (1977-79); having separated Egypt from the Arab front, Israel took the opportunity to invade South Lebanon in 1978.

This decline continued into the eighties with the outbreak of the Gulf War, followed by the 1982 Israeli invasion and occupation of Lebanon. Despite the Egyptian regime's separate treaty with Israel, it was gradually reintegrated into the Arab arena in violation of the boycott decided in 1978.

One can see the deterioration more clearly when tracing the decisions of the Arab League. At the Khartoum Summit (August 1967), the Arabs raised the slogan: No compromise, no recognition, no negotiations (with Israel), despite the June defeat. At the last Arab Summit held in Casablanca (May 1989), there was a qualitatively dangerous change in the official Arab consensus: Egypt was officially readmitted to the Arab League, signifying the League's tacit acceptance of the Camp David formula. The usual espousal of slogans, that are never implemented, was replaced by calls for being «reasonable,» in addition to some feeble calls for uniting Arab efforts to fulfill the economic needs of some Arab countries.

REGIONAL BLOCS

From the late fifties until the early seventies, the Arab League existed in an atmosphere of unity. However, in the eighties, it began experiencing a state of regional polarization with the formation of three blocs: The Gulf Cooperation Council, formed in 1981, which groups Saudi Arabia, Kuwait,

Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman; the Arab Cooperation Council, formed in 1981, which groups Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and North Yemen; the Arab Maghreb Union, formed in 1989, which groups Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania.

These blocs are different from previous attempts at Arab unity which proclaimed the ultimate intention of merger of two or more countries. In contrast, the new blocs are an attempt to adjust to the new realities in the area, via coordination on the economic and political levels. Especially in the case of the newest one, the Arab Maghreb Union, the member states have pursued quite different policies in the past. All the blocs include regimes which have long allied with US policy in the area, but not all of them have resolved all the outstanding contradictions with imperialism, much less the Zionist state. All in all, this is a new experience in the Arab world; its future will be determined by how these blocs develop in terms of vital questions such as economic cooperation, presenting a united stand on the Arab-Zionist conflict and the Palestinian cause, and not least, addressing the need for democracy so that the Arab masses can contribute to the development of their society and national causes.

As of now, in view of the state of regional polarization, one can say that the results of the Casablanca Summit were not a surprise. In the summit, the downfall of the Arab national security doctrine was legalized with the readmission of the Egyptian regime, despite its treaty with the Zionist state and the US. This was a culmination of the accumulated intentions to end the unifying national trend, i.e., a culmination of the new Arab order. The character of this order is a group of regional entities that in theory could be merged into one unified entity, but which choose to remain separate. This means that each can choose its own defense and foreign policies, even if these are at the expense of another Arab state.

THE IMPERIALIST CHALLENGE

In the seventies, when the Arabs decided the oil embargo, Kissinger threatened to occupy the oil fields to prevent «Arab barbarism from controlling Western civilization.» At that time, Algerian President Boumedienne threatened the US that the Arabs would burn the oil fields if they sensed such a threat.

Also in the seventies, the US administration feared the series of successful revolutions that occurred in Ethiopia, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau, Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Iran, and then Zimbabwe in 1980. The Middle East was a main area of concern for US imperialism. Thus, as one part of its global offensive to counter these developments, the US gave Israel the green light to launch a broad military operation that would have regional repercussions - the 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

The Arab response at the Fez Summit (September 1982) was to continue to bet on the US. This was clear in the Fahd plan whereby the Arabs were satisfied with merely calling on the US to stop its unconditional support to Israel.

Today, there are two major trends in the Arab world. The advocates of the first trend are working for more integration into world capitalism, and more internationalization of the Arab economy; they see no future for the Arab world outside the sphere of world capitalism. The second trend, the Arab national movement which is not the focus of this article, ad-