PAPERS ON LEBANON

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LEBANON AND THE MIDDLE EASTERN QUESTION

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I T is often said that no lasting political settlement in Lebanon can be achieved except in connection with a general Middle Eastern settlement. Regardless of whether or not, or to what degree, this proposition proves to be correct, it would be useful to determine what it actually means. Clearly, the proposition reflects a special vision of the regional politics; and even if it ultimately proves incorrect as a judgement, the vision on which it is based may be valid. In any case, it deserves to be carefully examined.

Originally, what was meant by a general Middle Eastern settlement was the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which the Arabs identify more specifically as being the Palestinian question. But today the Gulf conflict involving the Iraq-Iran war and its regional and international ramifications is also indicated. Moreover, there are the numerous conflicts within the

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Arab ranks which further complicate and confuse the picture: for example, the quarrels between Syria and Egypt; Syria and Iraq; Libya and Egypt; Syria and the official leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). What is the organic connection between the civil war in Lebanon and these regional issues which give rise to the theory that the resolution of the internal problems of Lebanon can only be achieved as part of a regional package deal?

Certainly, what has been going on in Lebanon since 1975 has been essentially a civil war involving a quarrel among Lebanese nationals—more clearly so since 1982, when the Palestinian dimension to the hostilities was reduced to virtual eradication. Just as certainly, Arab and non-Arab regional parties have been embroiled in the Lebanese quarrel from the very start and continue to be, so much so that neutral and even belligerent parties in Lebanon often refuse to recognize the situation in the country as being principally an internal conflict, insisting instead that what Lebanon has actually had on hand for well over a decade have been, more than anything else, 'wars of others' (as the expression goes) fought on its soil and at its exclusive expense by deluded or paid Lebanese proxies.

If these 'wars of others' have no particular bearing on Lebanon, why did they come to be fought out on the Lebanese national territory rather than somewhere else? More importantly, why do the different internal parties to the conflict in Lebanon persist in articulating their different positions with respect to the quarrels among them in regional as well as in national terms? Before one can address oneself to this matter, the fundamentals of the case must be examined, one by one, and each at its own level, within both the regional and the Lebanese contexts. To avoid confusion and concentrate on the essence, the broader international dimensions, real or imagined, of these

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regional fundamentals are better disregarded for the purpose of the present analysis.

<p style="text-align:center">I</p>

The Lebanese Scene

First, we have the political nature of Lebanon to consider. As it stands today, this country with its jigsaw population of Muslim and Christian sects—the Christian and Muslim sides being roughly equal in effective power if not in numbers—was first constituted as a territorial state in 1920. It was given its present boundaries by France in agreement with Britain, by mandate of what was then the League of Nations. The project for this Lebanese state, however, was originally envisaged by the Christians of the country—more specifically, by those of the Maronite sect who acquired and still retain the paramount political control of the Lebanese system. The Muslim communities were never really consulted about the Lebanese state project before it was transformed into a reality and imposed upon them; and for a long time after, these communities refused to accord the country their willing allegiance.

When it became increasingly clear that Lebanon was there to stay, the Muslim sector of the population, by and large, grudgingly agreed to accept the country as a functioning state, but not as the nation-state which the Christians wanted it to be. The Muslim argument was that the Lebanese were not historically a nation by themselves, as the Christian political establishment claimed they were, but part of a greater Arab nation, their territory being historically part of Arab Syria. Moreover, the Muslim side in Lebanon continued to resent the Christian control of the Lebanese political system, which prompted it to obstruct the policies of the state at every turning

point, compromising the independence of these policies to the advantage of external Arab parties, normally with external Arab support which was spontaneous or solicited.

On the more positive side, the Islamic communities in the country pressed for a greater share in political decision-making commensurate with their numerical importance which was steadily on the increase—if for nothing else, because of the higher rate of emigration among the Christians, and the higher birth rate among the Muslims, especially those of the Shi'i sect. The Christians, more particularly the Maronites, were not prepared to yield to this Muslim demand, partly because they were determined to retain the paramount powers and prerogatives which they had, and would not willingly relinquish any of them; partly because they genuinely feared that the conditional rather than absolute Islamic loyalty to Lebanon could not be trusted at the higher levels of decision-making.

The matter boiled down to this: the Christians in the Arab world at large were no more than dispersed minorities in overwhelmingly Islamic surroundings. Those of Lebanon, no matter the question of relative numbers, enjoyed the special advantage of having a state under their control to guarantee what they regarded as their political dignity and security; therefore, from the very beginning, they were highly vigilant with respect to the sovereignty and independence of the Lebanese state from the rest of the Arab world. The Muslims in Lebanon, as in the rest of the Arab world, understood the nature of this special Christian Lebanese position, but would not readily admit to its validity; they normally argued against their better knowledge and judgement that the fears of their Christian compatriots were imagined rather than real. On the other hand, the Islamic Lebanese communities had justified grievances against the established political system in the country to which the Christians would not make the minimum of the

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required accommodation. This Muslim-Christian quarrel lies at the root of the Lebanese national conflict, and therefore of the civil war in the country which remains unresolved until the present moment. However, it also explains something else with respect to Lebanon.

Because the Lebanese population happens to be divided, socially and politically, between equally forceful Christian and Muslim sides disagreeing on fundamental issues and, because each side includes a variety of sects representing different shades of the opposed political opinions, strong state control in the country was impossible to develop. As a result, the Lebanese state could only function as a democracy—more correctly, as a democratic management of a perennial conflict situation. Thus Lebanon, in the Arab world, remained an open society: one may say by default, but an open society nonetheless. In Lebanon, as in no other Arab country, all national and regional issues, no matter how delicate or sensitive, invariably percolated to the surface and assumed their true proportions, to become subjects of open and often violent debate in an atmosphere of uncontrolled expression where no words needed to be minced. Because this was not possible elsewhere in the Arab world, the Lebanese forum could not be restricted to free debate over national issues. Stage by stage, it was transformed into a focus for regional disputes which could not be openly debated or fought out on their proper homeground.

II

The Regional Scene

At this point, the second question arises: what were the regional disputes about? Also, to what extent was Lebanon a party to them?

When Lebanon was first constituted as a territorial state in

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1920, its territory was put together from fragments of what were formerly Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. The same was true of other countries constituted from formerly Ottoman Arab territory during the same period: most particularly with respect to Syria, Palestine, Transjordan (today Jordan) and Iraq. No less than Lebanon, all these countries as they stand today were artificially created by France or Britain as the mandatary powers in charge of the region after the First World War. The only difference was that Lebanon was created by France in consultation with the Christian sector of the local population. In the other cases, neither the local Arab population as a whole nor any particular sector of it was consulted. Where Palestine was concerned, the project for the country was originally envisaged in co-ordination with an external party which had special political ambitions with respect to this particular territory: the World Zionist movement which regarded Palestine as the Biblical Eretz Israel, or 'land of Israel', and sought the establishment of a Jewish nation-state there.

In its time, the Ottoman Empire represented the historical and universal state of Islam. It was an Islamic state of the Sunni tradition; and the Sunni majority among the Muslim Arabs accorded it their loyalty on this basis. The non-Sunni Islamic communities—Shi'i or Druze in the case of Lebanon—did not articulate special positions on the issue; likewise, the Christian Arabs initially accepted the Islamic Ottoman state as a fact of life with which they had no choice but to cope. In the nineteenth century, however, as the winds of change began to blow on the area from Europe, these Christian Arabs started to articulate a sense of Arab nationality within the context of the territory where they happened to exist; most of all, in the Syrian provinces of the Empire. As the social change in the area began to affect the Muslims, the Islamic communities of the Arab world began to gain consciousness of their Arabism too, in

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co-ordination with their Christian fellow-Arabs, and also independently.

From the very beginning, however, there was a difference between the manner in which the Christian and Muslim Arabs conceived of Arabism. To the Christians, it involved a consciousness of a purely secular national identity which was separate and distinct from Islam as the traditional basis of Arab political life. To the Muslims, it was a consciousness of national identity which, no matter how secular in theory, remained somehow confused with Islam.

When the Ottoman Empire was finally dismembered, and the Islamic state ceased to exist, pan-Arabism rapidly replaced pan-Islamism as the prime political loyalty commanding Muslim as well as Christian allegiance among the Arabs, the Maronites in Lebanon being the principal exception. But as this pan-Arabism reached the level of the Muslim masses, it developed an increased Islamic religious colouring which some Christian Arabs could understand and tolerate, while others were unable to do so without reserve. In the open society of Lebanon, and only there, this Christian reserve against the developing Islamic nuances of pan-Arabism was not kept under cover but came into the open, rallying around the Maronite political position which was opposed to pan-Arabism from the very beginning. More and more, the Christians among the Lebanese asserted a special national allegiance for the Lebanese state as distinct from the Islamically-coloured pan-Arab national allegiance which had come to prevail elsewhere in the Arab world, and to which the Islamic communities in Lebanon subscribed with particular enthusiasm. The harder the Christians pressed their point on this matter, the harder the Muslims and Druzes retaliated in kind; and the reverse was equally true.

Beginning in 1920, the pan-Arab platform—in the region at large as in Lebanon—preached the rejection of the artificial

division of the Arab world into states which had not existed independently of one another before, and pressed for different programmes of Arab unity: larger and more 'natural' divisions of the area, among them a greater Syria to include Lebanon, Transjordan and Palestine, within the broader framework of an Arab empire or confederation. In the mood of the period, it was commonly imagined that the artificial boundaries which the imperialist powers had imposed on the Arab world would vanish by themselves the moment Arab independence was achieved, to give way to the ideal of political unity the Arabs naturally aspired to. It was in keeping with this pan-Arab vision of things to come that the Muslim opposition in Lebanon rejected the legitimacy of the Lebanese state with particular fervour, and with external Arab sympathy and support, clashing with the prevailing Christian Lebanese attitude over the issue.

When the moment of independence did come, however, the boundaries which the imperialist powers had drawn on the map of the Arab world failed to vanish. Political inertia and the growth of vested interests had already hardened their lines, apparently to the point of no return. One after another, the former mandated territories of the area emerged as Arab sovereign states, acting and interacting with one another, and with outside parties, in this capacity. Yet, at the popular level, the pan-Arab nationalist imperative remained on the scene, and the sovereign Arab states had somehow to accommodate their policies to its theoretical tenets, yet keep these tenets at the same time in line with their individual interests, which were more often than not divergent. At its idealistic best, pan-Arabism could easily have served as a basis for co-operation between the sovereign states in a community of Arab fellowship, where interests which these states genuinely held in common could be pursued in co-ordination among them, and divergent interests

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could be reconciled by rational give-and-take in an atmosphere of good will.

It was ostensibly for this purpose that the League of Arab States, better known as the Arab League, was instituted in 1945. In practice, however, pan-Arabism was frequently misused, both inside and outside the framework of the Arab League, as it readily provided free licence for ambitious Arab states or regimes to impinge on the sovereign prerogatives of other states or regimes and destabilize them in favour of their own special policies, whatever they were. In some cases, there were no real state interests to be served by such impingements, which reduced them to moves in a game: one in which different Arab parties tested their strength in trying to victimize others and watch them squirm. Lebanon as a sovereign state was a victim of such games which involved trespasses on its sovereignty in a particular way, because the pan-Arab Islamic opposition in the country welcomed and often invited external Arab interventions in Lebanese affairs in the name of the pan-Arab ideal.

In the light of this, and disregarding the aspects of inter-Arab politics which have involved little more than wanton gamesmanship, we may say that political allegiance in the Arab world, from the moment of independence to the present, has had to fumble its way between two obligations: one to the interests of the sovereign territorial state; the other to the imperative of pan-Arabism. These two obligations, by themselves, did not necessarily contradict one another, and could have easily worked in harmony had they been geared in this direction. Operationally, however, they were geared in the opposite direction. This was because some Arab leaderships and parties exploited the prevailing pan-Arab sentiment in their own countries and in the Arab world in general to achieve devious ends which were only meaningful in terms of the interests of particular sovereign states or regimes, or which were simply

destructive games. The leaderships and parties in question risked being seriously embarrassed by what they persisted in doing; and to guard against such risk, they had to resort to the suppression of the freedom of thought and expression in the countries which they controlled or came to control. It was only in the open society of Lebanon that the true nature of their diverse policies could be exposed, as frequently happened. Consequently, they directed much of their energy to the destabilization of Lebanon, making considerable investments in the pan-Arab platform of the Muslim opposition in the country for that purpose. While their grievances in Lebanon continued unredressed, the Muslims and Druzes in Lebanon were normally more than willing to co-operate in the national destabilization.

III

The Palestinian Question

At this juncture, we can turn to the third of the fundamentals of the regional question which demand consideration: the one relating to the Palestinians. In inter-Arab politics, the question of Palestine has always had its place officially in the forefront, even in cases where commitment to it has not been as serious as declared. This question relates to one Arab people, the Palestinians, who remain different from others because they lack statehood. While some Palestinians continue to live on parts of their original native land, without exercising any political control over this territory, others, following the creation of Israel in 1948, and increasingly since, have been dispersed in different Arab countries, one of them being Lebanon. Here is a rapid historical review of the Palestinian case, to the extent that it is directly relevant to the present analysis.

Under the British Mandate, between 1920 and 1948, the

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Jewish Agency in Palestine made systematic preparations for the establishment of a Jewish state in the country, while the Arabs of the country did not make similar arrangements of their own. In keeping with the pan-Arab ideal as accepted in that period, the Palestinian Arabs did not consider it proper to accept the territorial identity they had come to have, so they regarded their cause against the Jewish claim to their country as a pan-Arab national cause in which fellow Arabs of other countries had the right and obligation to an equal say. As a result, when the moment of independence came in 1948, the Jews were able immediately to proclaim their state of Israel on part of the Palestinian territory, while the Palestinian Arabs were unable to proclaim a state for themselves on the remaining parts. Had they even tried, they would have probably failed because of international obstruction. Neither Britain at the time nor the United States wished them to succeed.

Of the parts of Palestine which were not taken by Israel, the territory called the West Bank was annexed to Transjordan (now renamed Jordan), while the Gaza Strip went to Egypt as an administered territory. This arrangement was formalized by the armistices which brought the first Arab-Israeli war to an end in 1949, and was only interrupted by the occupation of the Gaza Strip in the second Arab-Israeli war in 1956, which at the time was not permitted to last. In the third Arab-Israeli war of 1967, however, both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were occupied by Israel; and until now Israel refuses to relinquish them either by alleging that they legitimately belong to the historical Eretz Israel, or else on the grounds that their partial—not total—relinquishment must be negotiated as part of a general Arab-Israeli peace settlement.

Until 1967, the stateless Palestinians remained free-lance Arabs, trusting their cause to pan-Arab management through the Egyptian-dominated Arab League, even after the organization

of the PLO under Arab League sponsorship in 1965. Meanwhile, their cause was exploited by different Arab parties as part of the stock-in-trade of the regional politics. After 1967, however, with nothing left for them in their original homeland to lose, the Palestinians finally succeeded in taking matters into their own hands. Two decades of shared adversity, and countless humiliations inflicted on them by fellow Arabs in the various host countries, had forged among them a sense of particularist solidarity the like of which did not exist among the nationals of any of the sovereign Arab states as a body, except in the few Arab countries of long historical standing such as Egypt. The same experience of shared adversity had further taught the Palestinians to conceive of their identity in secular terms overriding Christian-Muslim religious differences. The Palestinians, in short, had finally become a people with a separate and distinct sense of identity, rather than remaining free-lance Arabs as they had been until then. Lacking the territory to enable them to organize themselves as a sovereign Palestinian state, the only course open for them, under the official umbrella of the PLO, was to organize themselves as a sovereign revolution.

The avowed aim of the Palestinian revolution was to liberate Palestine, and different Palestinian parties, after 1967, proclaimed different views as to how this national liberation could best be achieved. In the Arab world, however, the new turn in the Palestinian activity, though publicly applauded, was secretly viewed with grave concern. No less than the Lebanese, and more particularly the Christian Lebanese, the Palestinians as a people stood socially and culturally in the vanguard of the Arab world. They counted on a highly developed, enterprising and articulate middle class, based in different Arab countries, to provide leadership and infrastructure for their movement. On the other hand, there were the masses in the refugee camps

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ready to be mobilized for political and military action. In addition, concerned Arab parties were quick to notice the following.

Firstly, at a time when the legitimacy of separate sovereign statehood in the Arab world was still theoretically in question, so that the existing Arab states normally felt compelled to justify their different particularist policies and games in pan-Arab terms, the Palestinian revolution felt free to act as it pleased on whatever Arab territory it chose to operate because it enjoyed complete legitimacy at two levels: the Palestinian for the Palestinian people, and the pan-Arab for the Arabs at large.

Secondly, as a result, the Palestinian revolution, more than any other Arab political agency before it, could freely impinge on the sovereign prerogatives of established Arab states by mobilizing pan-Arab opinion on their territories in its favour and for its support, often to force the strongest among them to comply with its demands. At the same time, these same Arab states could be denied the right to any decisive say in the affairs of the Palestinian revolution on the grounds that this revolution was a completely sovereign and independent Palestinian concern.

In short, the Palestinian revolution was in a position to use pan-Arabism to destabilize established Arab states whenever it considered it in its interest to do so, while remaining immune to destabilization by virtue of its double legitimacy. For a time, the sovereign regimes were forced to pay this super-sovereign revolution lip service and go through the motions of giving it all the support and privileges it demanded. At the same time, they recognized it as a serious danger to be marked for complete containment or preferably destruction at the first opportunity when this could be achieved with a reasonable degree of safety.

Paradoxically, this placed the Palestinian revolution in the same position as Lebanon—the Arab country this revolution

was most successful in destabilizing. The same Arab parties which were bent on destroying Lebanon as an open society which threatened the success of their policies were the parties which were bent on destroying the Palestinian revolution as the ultimate embodiment of the serious pan-Arab imperative which compromised their more down-to-earth interests and spoilt their traditional games. At the same time, the open society of Lebanon provided the ideal platform for the Palestinian revolution, and the base from which it could operate politically and militarily with the minimum of restrictions. Moreover, the Muslim-Christian tension in Lebanon supplied an indigenous revolutionary situation in the country which the Palestinians could freely exploit. By this means, the Palestinian revolution could easily establish itself in Lebanon as a state within the state, with massive Muslim Lebanese support. As this happened,, it facilitated the containment of the Palestinian revolution or its liquidation in other Arab countries. Also, it placed the revolution and the offending open society of Lebanon in the same corner, pending the propitious moment where both of them could be destroyed together.

There was, however, another side to the issue. As the Palestinian revolution pressed pan-Arabism to serve its particularist cause beyond the point where pan-Arabism could deliver or was prepared to do so, strong popular reactions against Palestinianism began to set in. This first happened in Jordan, as early as 1970. There, the Palestinian revolution, supported by the local Palestinians whose numbers had recently been swollen by a massive influx of refugees from the Israeli-occupied West Bank, achieved a rapid initial success in destabilizing the regime. By so doing, however, it provoked the emergence of a particularly staunch and dead-serious state-patriotism among the Transjordanians who immediately rallied around the threatened regime to help it crush the revolution on

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its territory. In one way or another, the same thing happened sooner or later in every other part of the Arab world where the Palestinians pressed their particularist cause in pan-Arab terms beyond the critical point. In each case, a strong sense of state-nationality emerged in response to the Palestinian challenge, or sharply reasserted itself in the cases where it was already there.

In Lebanon, the Palestinians were able to enjoy the most prolonged success by pitting their Palestinian particularism in the name of pan-Arab legitimacy against the Lebanese particularism of the Christians, with seemingly undivided support from the Muslim sector of the population. Ultimately, however, a point was reached where the Muslim allies of the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon, though organized, armed and trained under its leadership, were no longer prepared to deliver. By imperceptible stages, the revolt of the Muslim Lebanese communities against the established political system in the country parted company with the Palestinian revolution and began to articulate a particularism of its own which defined its objectives mainly if not exclusively in terms of Lebanon. One may simply say at this point that the Muslims in Lebanon were awakened to a consciousness of their Lebanism because of the high-handedness with which the Palestinians normally treated their Arab political allies. But there was more to the matter than this—a factor operating at a more subtle level. As in all other cases, the fact that the Palestinians, as the prime carriers of a pan-Arab cause, felt no inhibition about speaking and acting as Palestinians first, gave full pan-Arab permission, so to speak, for the Muslims of Lebanon, as for the Transjordanians and others before them, to do the same.

In 1982, the Palestinian revolution in Lebanon was destroyed by Israel in connivance with the Christian side in the Lebanese civil war. Since then, it has ceased to be a revolution distracted

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from its legitimate aims by the diffuse politics of the Arab world. This has enabled it to re-emerge in time as a concentrated revolution, smaller but with an improved potential, on the territory where it rightly belongs. Frustrated with the Arab world, the Palestinians finally came to realize that they had mainly their own particularism and solidarity as Palestinians to count on to redeem whatever they could of a national cause which was essentially their own. Meanwhile, in its pan-Arab phase, their revolution had brought about a direct and open confrontation in the Arab world between the reality of sovereign state interests on the one hand, and obligations to pan-Arabism on the other hand, preparing the way for a clearer definition of these two factors in the regional politics. What this could mean in the long run remains to be seen.

IV

Islamic Fundamentalism and the Iraq-Iran War

The issue between pan-Arabism and Arab state sovereignty continues to simmer today in the crucible of the unresolved Lebanese conflict. With the total collapse of Lebanese state control after 1984, Lebanon has only been destroyed in the sense that it has become what one may call a non-country, but this makes it all the more an open forum where the most sensitive questions relating to the area can be freely debated and, literally, fought out. Meanwhile, a new regional issue has been thrown into the Lebanese crucible or arena: the wave of Islamic fundamentalism unleashed in 1979 by the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

Islamic fundamentalism, in a way, is not new to the Arab world, where Sunni fundamentalist parties such as the Muslim Brothers have been prominent and active for decades. The novelty in the present wave of fundamentalism is that its

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leadership is Iranian rather than Arab, and Shi'i rather than Sunni Muslim. On its original Iranian homeground, this new Islamic fundamentalism is not in conflict with Iranian national allegiance and state sovereignty at the practical level, because Iran is a historical society and nation-state which is Iranian and at the same time Shi'i Muslim in character. In the Arab world, however, Islamic fundamentalism has always clashed with pan-Arabism in one direction, and with the Arab state sovereignties in another. In its highly militant new form, as unleashed and energized by Iran, this fundamentalism now confuses issues at other levels as well, as it pits Shi'i Arabs against Sunni Arabs, and fundamentalist Muslims of both sects against others whose concept of Islam is more conventional, liberal or evolved, or who are actually secular in outlook.

What brought the political implications of this new fundamentalism immediately into focus throughout the region was the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war. In the first phase of this war, Iraq attacked Iran to pre-empt what everyone in the region expected could happen: the use of the Shi'i Arabs in Iraq—and subsequently in the Arabian Gulf countries—to destabilize the standing regimes in favour of the Iranian interest. Then the tables were turned and Iran began to attack Iraq, with the declared determination to overthrow the established Iraqi regime, presumably to replace it with an Islamic republic of the Iranian type, or some other arrangement favourable to Iran. Regardless of how the war will end, it has involved or precipitated the following: a conflict between two sovereign states, one Arab, the other non-Arab; a conflict between two Islamic states, one subscribing to religious fundamentalism, the other to secular Arab nationalism; a confrontation between Arabs and Iranians; a confrontation between the Shi'i Islam of Iran and the Sunni Islam predominant in the Arab world.

As Iran continues to fight Iraq, it finds support in the Arab

world among regimes which have outstanding quarrels with Iraq; Shi'i Muslim Arabs whose religious sympathies for Iran are stronger than their sense of Arabism; Sunni fundamentalists whose hostility against the secular nationalism represented by Iraq is stronger than their religious reserve against the Shi'i Islam of Iran; also, non-fundamentalist elements among the Arabs who maintain that pan-Islamic solidarity may well succeed in redeeming the trampled dignity of the Arab people—as in the case of Palestine—where pan-Arabism has failed. Most Arab regimes recognize the aggressive policies of the Islamic republic in Iran as a threat to Arab state sovereignty and interests, and the main body of public opinion in the Arab world takes the same attitude either on pan-Arab or on Sunni religious grounds. One Arab state, which is Jordan, has followed a consistent policy of active support of Iraq against Iran from the very beginning. Another, which is Egypt, has consistently expressed unreserved support for Iraq. The Gulf states, whose stability and interests are most directly exposed to the Iranian threat, provide the Iraqi war effort with financial support, but few among them—as among other Arab states—are willing to become involved in direct political measures against Iran, let alone military measures. The most the Arab regimes have been collectively prepared to do is deplore the determination of Iran to persist in aggression against Iraq, and plead for a cessation of the continuing hostilities in the name of Islamic brotherhood. Beneath the Arab inaction on the surface, however, one can clearly discern a mood of grave concern at the official as well as the popular levels, such as has never existed before—a sense, for the first time, that there is much more than a political game at stake.

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V

Lebanon as the Test Case

For a model of how the fundamental issues involved in the Iraq-Iran conflict affect the region, one must turn to Lebanon. Here, the success of the Iranian Islamic revolution rapidly unleashed a surge of Shi'i activism and Sunni Muslim fundamentalism. The first split the Islamic ranks in the ongoing Lebanese conflict along sectarian lines, producing outbreaks of violence between the militias of the different Islamic sects which overshadowed the original Islamic-Christian character of the Lebanese conflict in certain respects. The second united conventional Islamic opinion, among Shi'is and Sunnis alike, as also among the Druzes, against the fundamentalist front. What happened, in greater detail, was the following:

Firstly, the surge of fundamentalist activism among the Shi'is frightened the Sunnis, making them increasingly anxious to patch up differences with the Christian side by willing compromise.

Secondly, Islamic fundamentalism threatened to disrupt the evolved way of life to which a large sector of the Islamic population of the country, among the Shi'is as among the Sunnis, had grown accustomed, or which they were more strongly—perhaps far more strongly—inclined to accept and adopt rather than reject. This made conventional Islamic opinion in Lebanon define its position with respect to fundamentalism in an open, clear-cut manner as nowhere else in the Arab world.

Thirdly, because Islamic fundamentalism challenges the validity of pan-Arabism in the name of pan-Islamism, conventional Islamic opinion in Lebanon has reacted by strongly reasserting its moral commitment to pan-Arabism.

Fourthly, because Islamic fundamentalism denies the

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legitimacy of Lebanese state sovereignty in principle, while Shi'i political activism makes its acceptance of the political legitimacy of Lebanon conditional on terms which would radically change the character of the state, conventional Islamic Lebanese opinion, among Shi'is and Sunnis alike, has rallied around the standard and emblems of Lebanese state sovereignty as at no time before.

At another level, there are the Christian and Druze reactions to consider. Among the Christians, majority opinion recognizes the Islamic fundamentalism spearheaded by Shi'i political activism as a danger not only to their social and political status in Lebanon, but also to the future of the Christians of the Arab world in general. This has created pressures within the Christian Lebanese political ranks to hasten the process of settlement in the country through compromise with the conventional Muslim elements. On the other hand, the Christian Lebanese extremists view the surge of Islamic fundamentalism in the country with unconcealed satisfaction and as the ultimate justification of their position against political compromise. This attitude on their part has brought discredit to their platform among the Christians; at the same time, it has taken a heavy toll on the credibility of the fundamentalist platform on the Muslim side, because of its suspected collusion with the Christian extremists in its political action, regardless of whether or not such a collusion actually exists. More and more, the political conflict in Lebanon has turned into one between Muslim and Christian moderates on the one hand, and Muslim and Christian extremists on the other, rather than remaining the head-on confrontation between Christians and Muslims with which the Lebanese civil war started.

Among the Druzes, ordinary opinion is no less opposed to Islamic fundamentalism than among the Christians. Historically, however, the position of the Druzes with respect to Islam has

been a delicate one. While Sunnis and Shi'is have normally accepted them as fellow-Muslims politically, they could not regard them religiously as being strictly Muslim since their esoteric tenets represent a particularly radical departure from conventional Islam. Faced by the Muslim fundamentalist surge, the Druze community has reacted much as the conventional Sunnis and Shi'is have done, by reaffirming its traditionally Arab nationalist stand with a special emphasis on secularism.

At the same time, however, the Druzes in Lebanon represent a small community as compared with the Muslims and the Christians, and as such can have little enthusiasm for a rapid Muslim-Christian reconciliation to which they can only be a secondary party. In a way, this has placed them in the same position as the Christian extremists: politically, there are those among them who seem to feel they have nothing to lose, and perhaps something to gain, as long as Islamic fundamentalism remains a factor on the Lebanese scene to keep the conflict in the country unresolved. Moreover, the Druzes have always been anxious to be accepted as a regular Islamic sect, and some among them possibly believe that they stand a better chance of achieving this end by maintaining channels of communication with the Muslim fundamentalists.

In the final analysis, what is the significance of all this? We may recapitulate in order to understand. Ever since the emergence of the modern Arab world, there has been a conflict between the reality of the Arab sovereign state and the claims of pan-Arabism which were deviously geared to compromise its interests. The Palestinian revolution, as a particularist Arab movement involving a pan-Arab cause, brought the conflict into focus throughout the region, but the issue could only be fought out in Lebanon. There alone, an important sector of the Arab population, the Christians, were prepared to declare themselves openly for the legitimacy of the state

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against the claims of pan-Arabism in the manner in which they were pressed, mainly because their long-term interests as Christians in a predominantly Muslim Arab world dictated that they do so. The outcome was a clearer vision of what legitimately belongs to Arab sovereign statehood, and what legitimately belongs to pan-Arabism.

Today, one sovereign Arab state, which is Iraq, finds itself at war with a non-Arab Islamic state, which is Iran. The Islamic republic in Iran fights Iraq under the banner of fundamentalist Islam. Consequently, both the concept of Arab sovereign statehood as well as that of pan-Arabism find themselves in confrontation with Islamic fundamentalism throughout the region. But the same conflict also involves a confrontation within Islam between Shi'ism and Sunnism on the one hand, and between fundamentalists and non-fundamentalists on the other hand, which places Sunni and non-fundamentalist Islam on the same side of the conflict as pan-Arabism and the sovereign Arab state. Ultimately, there is a whole way of life at stake.

In Lebanon, Islamic fundamentalism in its Shi'i and Sunni forms has insinuated itself into a situation where different parties, again, can take open stands over the issue. Here, the impact of fundamentalism, rather than sharpening the lines of division between the Christians and the Muslims of the country, has actually blurred them by throwing a non-belligerent majority of Christians and Muslims on one side, and a minority comprising the belligerents of both communities on the other. The first are prepared to agree on a reinterpretation of Lebanese statehood within the broad context of a reinterpreted pan-Arabism; the second seem determined to keep the issue from being resolved for as long as possible.

Can a settlement of the question in Lebanon be achieved independently of what happens outside? One cannot really tell. Since 1975, however, fundamental issues of long standing in the

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region have been broken down to their component elements, one after another, and reduced into fine grain between the free-moving millstones of Lebanon—the only country in the area where this could happen. These issues have involved progressive stages of interaction between three different regional realities, each as real as the other in its own way: the system of sovereign Arab states as they actually exist; the moral imperative of pan-Arabism; and the historical and social claims of Islam on the area. What the synthesis between these three realities will ultimately be remains to be seen. Meanwhile, by carefully observing the trends of the interaction between them as they go on in Lebanon, one may be in a better position to estimate what the future has in store for the region as a whole.

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