



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*  
by Fouad Ajami

Review by: Daniel Pipes

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addition to the literature on China's foreign relations.

This study's narrow focus is also a major problem. Sino-Soviet relations, however important they may be in motivating China's foreign policy in this region do not represent, necessarily, the entire range of factors influencing this policy. For example, China's entry into Iran in the 1970s was guided by, among other things, a desire to secure access to air routes to Africa and Europe and thereby lessen China's isolation.

While China has little interest in Middle East oil at the moment, China does have considerable interest in Middle East trade and the Chinese are very much aware of the possibility of improving their balance of trade globally by increasing exports to the Middle East. China's trade surplus with the region between 1970 and 1973 fluctuated around \$50 million per year. It increased by 500 per cent in 1974 and in 1975 when it reached a quarter of a billion dollars. It is estimated that in the 1980s this surplus could go as high as half a billion dollars per year. This is all the more significant since China's total trade deficit jumped from \$170 million in 1973 to \$970 million in 1974.

China also expects to use trade with the Middle East as a means of compensatory trade with Japan. China has already signed agreements with Japanese corporations to supply disciplined and trained labor for their projects in the region, principally in Kuwait, Oman and Iraq. Rumors which have surfaced periodically since 1978 that China has established diplomatic contacts with Saudi Arabia may be a further indication of China's continuing efforts to increase its involvement with countries with whom it can improve its balance of trade.

In the 1980s China will also be searching for investment capital from abroad. The Chinese have already signed agreements with Arab banks to train Chinese personnel in international banking and they hope to attract Arab capital for modernization programs in China.

When viewed from this wider perspective, Shichor's study is too narrow. It is true that between 1950 and 1973 China's interest in the region was largely based on China's national security concerns. Since 1973 there has been a significant change. While national security remains a major

concern, China now has a long-term economic interest in the Middle East as well.

△ ISHWER C. OJHA, Boston University.

THE ARAB PREDICAMENT: ARAB POLITICAL THOUGHT AND PRACTICE SINCE 1967, by Fouad Ajami. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Text to p. 200. Notes to p. 211. Index to p. 220. \$19.95.

*Reviewed by Daniel Pipes*

Though much discussed in the press, Arab state relations have received little serious analysis. Malcolm Kerr probed them in *The Arab Cold War* and Fouad Ajami has now brought this important topic up to date in *The Arab Predicament*.

Professor Ajami considers the Arab-Israeli war of 1967 to be the watershed of recent Arab politics, the event which in one stroke overturned the secular pan-Arabist doctrines of Nāṣir and the Ba 'th party, stimulated "an intense wave of self-criticism" (p. 24), and began "the struggle for the shape of the Arab order" (p. 25) In his view, Arab politics are still coping with the consequences of that defeat.

Three rival groups emerged after 1967 with proposals for the future of Arab society: *radicals* seized on Israel's victory to argue that pan-Arabism "had merely mimicked the noise of revolutionary change" (p. 34) without truly transforming society. They called for a wholesale rejection of tradition along the lines of Cuba and China. *Muslim fundamentalists* also used the 1967 humiliation to indict secular pan-Arabism: they suggested not a break with the past but a return to traditions. *Conservative* leaders of such countries as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait came out of the 1967 war with new strength; "the secular pan-Arabists lost their self-confidence and the traditionalists recovered theirs. The latter no longer seemed as anachronistic as the former had said they were" (pp. 67-8).

Which of these groups would prevail? Two events determined the future: when Nāṣir reconciled himself to King Faiṣal, it meant that pan-Arabists had acceded to kings; when Jordan successfully suppressed the Palestinians, radicals lost. Ajami shows how all the major events of the following decade then confirmed the turn from

radical nationalism to Islam and from *thawra* (revolution) to *tharwa* (wealth).

Ajami despairs of this transformation, for the shift from the Nāṣir era to the Saudi era created new illusions and pitfalls. Just as Nasirism fell when its visions proved to be hollow, so Saudi power (based on freakish wealth and an oxymoronic Islam) failed to deliver. "The era of commissions and the middlemen" which replaced "the era of nationalism and ideology" (p. 156) tried to but could not stifle Arab politics through "dreams of prosperity and visions of a static order" (p. 131). The Arabs fell back on their religious identity as a substitute for honest grappling with their problems; but this has proved no more satisfactory than Nasirism; thus, the Arab predicament.

My only serious criticism of an otherwise outstanding analysis concerns the treatment of Islam. Ajami views Islam as a flaccid, characterless "tradition." One guesses that if Arabs were Buddhist or Christian, he would see their predicament unchanged. But this is profoundly wrong; Islam creates the framework in which Arabs act. For example, the very fact that Arab peoples are so inextricably caught up in each others' fates (in contrast, say, to Spanish or English speaking peoples) can only be explained with reference to Islam.

This objection aside, Ajami understands Arab politics and culture; though angry and impatient with its shortcomings, he empathizes with it; though passionate, he writes with insight and clarity. This book is a pleasure to read and important to contemplate.

△ DANIEL PIPES is the author of *Slave Soldiers and Islam* (Yale University Press, 1981).

LAWYERS AND POLITICS IN THE ARAB WORLD, 1880–1960, by Donald M. Reid. Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1981. Studies in Middle Eastern History, No. 5. xvii + 399 pages. Tables. Bibl. to p. 420. Index to p. 435. \$35.00.

*Reviewed by Gamal M. Badr*

Of all Middle Eastern elites, lawyers have played in the recent political history of the region

a role out of proportion to their numbers. This may be an echo of the prominent historical role of lawyers (*fuqahā'*) in the Islamic cultural context. Since the latter quarter of the nineteenth century this role largely passed from *fuqahā'* specialized in traditional Islamic law to lawyers versed in the newly adopted Western-inspired systems. Because of the political problems arising from the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire and from confrontation with dominant European powers the lawyers' role acquired a more pronounced political character as compared to the traditional role of *fuqahā'* in Islamic society, Khumaynī's Iran being the notable exception. Lawyers in fact spearheaded the movement within each country towards national independence and constitutional government and they championed the cause of pan-Arab unity.

Reid's book is an admirable survey of this role in Egypt and in the Fertile Crescent, with separate chapters dealing specifically with subdivisions of the latter region: Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and Iraq. The wealth of materials is remarkable, the analysis is good and the conclusions reached are generally sound. The author is no newcomer to the field, having published in the mid-1970s informative articles on professional organizations in modern Egypt and on the political role of the Egyptian Bar Association.

In explaining the lawyers' political prominence, the author goes beyond the commonly cited considerations of affinity or special abilities for politics. He rightly observes that "the law schools took shape before many of the other higher schools and produced a large percentage of all the graduates of college-level schools. Even random entry of college graduates into politics would thus have given the lawyers a respectable representation" (p. 93). He further notes that "the weakness or absence of other professional associations goes far to explain the National Bar Association's political muscle" (p. 164). Historical factors are thus duly given credit for the prominent political role of lawyers in the Arab world.

The advent of military regimes in many Arab countries resulted in a sharp decline in the lawyers' political role since the early 1950s, as Table 6 (p. 388) illustrates. A contributing factor to this decline was no doubt the fact observed by the author (p. 96) that "there was no shortage of