

War and the “New Middle East”: US Coalition Building and the Arab League

By [Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya](#)

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In the collective memory of many inside and outside the Arab World, the summits of the Arab League have a tradition of inconsistency and contradiction. They symbolize the dysfunction that has plagued the Arab World since the First World War. The pageantry and speeches of Arab League conferences are scorned by the citizens of Arab League members as hollow, empty, and as the pinnacles of hypocrisy.

Here is an important look back at three summits of the Arab League held in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria in 2003, 2007, and 2008. The importance of these Arab League summits are in their roles in paving the political grounds for U.S. war plans in the Middle East.

It is in the context of the Arab summits of 2003 and 2007 and the U.S. desire to categorize the Middle East into two opposing camps, one of so-called “moderates” and the other of so-called “radicals” or “extremists,” that the 2008 Arab League gathering in Syria must be analyzed. A review of the Arab League gatherings of 2003, 2007, and 2008 will also give a glimpse of the involvement of Arab governments in American war plans in the Middle East from Iraq to Lebanon and beyond.

The 15th Arab League Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh

Looking back at the twilight of the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq...

“We — the leaders of the Arab Nation, our permanent differences, and our refusal to follow the path of unity — all this has made the nation lose its confidence in our credibility as well as hope for today and tomorrow.”

-King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia (Opening Speech, Riyadh, 19th Arab League Summit)

On March 1, 2003, less than three weeks before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq, the Arab World gathered in the Egyptian port resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on the Red Sea for the 15th non-emergency gathering of Arab rulers under the auspices of the Arab League. [1] The Arab League’s gathering in Sharm el-Sheikh before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq illustrates where the interests of Arab rulers lay and that they all knew that the invasion of Iraq was part of a series of wars to come in America’s “long war.”

On the eve of war the Arab League adopted a set of resolutions calling on members to refrain from assisting in the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq. The rulers of Saudi Arabia,

Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the U.A.E. however utterly ignored the resolution in practice by assisting, supporting, and hosting the invading Anglo-American forces with critically important military facilities. The American and British troops, vehicles, tanks, and warplanes that were preparing to attack Iraq did so in the territories and waters of these absolute monarchies of the Arabian Peninsula. Saudi, Jordanian, Kuwaiti, Qatari, and Emirati airspace was also used throughout the invasion and in the occupation phase of the war against Iraq. All this took place against Iraq without the slightest protest from the rulers of these Arab states.

The transcripts of the gathering in the port of Sharm el-Skeikh are in a way a form of indictment that exposes the culpability of the leaders of the Arab World in the bloodbath that has become occupied Iraq. In an all too familiar gesture of war, the U.A.E. and the Arab Sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf personally blamed Saddam Hussein for the Anglo-American war preparations and aggression against Iraq. Iraq the victim was being blamed for the actions of the aggressors, America and Britain, and their Arab accomplices. These gestures however were diversions or distractions from the underlying objectives of the Anglo-American war against Baghdad. These dubious claims were also contested by Syria as false as the Syrian President took the podium at the Arab League gathering in Sharm el-Skeikh.

Al-Ahram Weekly, the English version of the renowned Cairo-based *Al-Ahram*, and numerous other reports throughout the Middle East and the Arab World testify to two facts. The first was that the Arab leaders gathered in Sharm el-Skeikh on 2003 were aware that the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq had ulterior motives than what President George W. Bush Jr. and Tony Blair were telling the global public. The second fact was that Damascus clearly warned the collective leadership of the Arab World about a project to divide Iraq, escalate further war in the Middle East, and redraw Middle Eastern boundaries through a new or reinvigorated geo-strategic project.

Al-Ahram Weekly reported (March 6-12, 2003) that the Syrians clearly forewarned what was to unfold in the Middle East with the invasion of Iraq: “[Syrian President] Assad said that the U.S. wanted the Arabs to [legitimize] and facilitate a war on Iraq. ‘Some Arabs, not foreigners, think that the problem lies in President Saddam [Hussein] or the Iraqi regime,’ he argued. ‘If this is really the problem I think it is our duty to send a delegation to ask the [Iraqi] regime to sacrifice [depart from power] in order to save the country and the entire region. But we [the leaders of the Arab World] all know this is not the [real] issue.” [2]

The Syrian President also outlined that the weapons of mass destruction (WMD) issue was a smokescreen for justifying hidden objectives: “We all know what masks [false pretexts] have been used.’ The ‘masks’ first came in the form of the return of inspectors issue, then in the form of implementing [United Nations] Security Council Resolutions, followed by the weapons of mass destructions issue, and then regime change. ‘Then they entertained us with the issue of democracy [in Iraq and the Middle East], then human rights and now they are promising development achieved by war. All these are American masks to deceive the world.’” [3]

The most hunting and ominous segment of the Syrian President’s warnings to the Arab League gathering in Egypt were when he warned them about what was intended for post-invasion Iraq and when he warned of what Condoleezza Rice would later call “the growing — the ‘birth pangs’ — of a ‘New Middle East’” when Israel began its war against the Lebanese in 2006. The Syrian President clearly outlined to the entire Arab League exactly what has been executed in Iraq since its occupation. A look at the mentioned report on the 2003 Arab

gathering by *Al-Ahram Weekly* also discloses this from the Syrian President's speech: "But the issue was oil and 'redrawing the map to suit them, and, of course, Israel,' Al-Assad said. The issue was 'destroying [Iraq's] infrastructure, and I do not mean labs and missiles...they want a nation [Iraq] with a beating heart but without a brain.'" [4]

The 15th Arab League Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh *Libya and Saudi Arabia at Loggerheads over Riyadh's role against Iraq...*

While Syria's leadership warned of the unveiling of the Project for the "New Middle East" the leadership of Libya, during a live broadcast of the summit in Egypt, accused the rulers of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Sheikdoms of treachery, in alignment with American interests, against Iraq and the Arabs. This resulted in a live televised spat between Colonel Moammar Qaddafi and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia (who was the Saudi crown prince at the time). This spat quickly resulted in the termination of the live coverage from Sharm el-Skeikh. The public spat between the leaders of Saudi Arabia and Libya made headlines across the Arab World.

According to what Colonel Qaddafi was implying the leaders of Saudi Arabia were already involved in a plan to go to war with Iraq in 1991 before any ultimatums were given to Baghdad for invading Kuwait. Amira Howeidy has reported that "[Colonel Qaddafi] said that after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, he had called Saudi Arabia's [late] King Fahd and enquired about information he had received about U.S. forces pouring into the [Kingdom of Saudi Arabia]. [King Fahd], according to Qaddafi, said, 'America is a big country, and if it is going in [meaning going to attack Iraq], who can stop it?'" [5]

Colonel Qaddafi was touching on a delicate subject for the House of Saud through implicating their role in a premeditated war against Iraq. It came to the point where the head of the Saudi delegation angrily cut off Colonel Qaddafi and began cursing him: "Elaborating further on how the rich [Persian] Gulf states, apprehensive of the repercussions of the [1979] revolution in Iran, supported Saddam [Hussein] in his war against that country [meaning Iran], and how later on being threatened by Saddam they invited the Americans to protect their interests, he went on to say: 'America is committed to protecting this region [meaning the Persian Gulf] because this region is a very important source of energy.' At this point [Qaddafi] was interrupted by an angry Prince Abdullah who waved his index finger saying, 'Saudi Arabia is a Muslim Arab country, not an agent of imperialism like you and others. Who brought you to power? Don't talk about things you have no luck or fortune in.' The shocked faces of other Arab leaders clearly contrasted with [Qaddafi's] grins, but the live transmission was cut off at this point, leaving summit watchers in the nearby press centre or at the promenade flabbergasted. Later, parts of the censored footage were aired on various Arab satellite channels, where [Qaddafi] was seen responding to the Saudi crown prince by saying 'if it wasn't for the [Persian] Gulf [countries] there wouldn't be [American and foreign] forces there now — the problem is an Arab-Arab one, not an Iraqi-Arab one [meaning the problem is not a problem between Iraq and the rest of the Arabs, but a problem between the whole of the Arabs against the Arab partners of the U.S. government]'" [6]

Undoubtedly Libya's ruler and its officials were also in positions of high pressure in 2003. The upper echelons of power in Libya knew very well that their country was also an Anglo-American target and that Tripoli would either have to prepare for confrontation too, like Iraq, or start negotiating a peaceful surrender. Five years later, at the 2008 Arab League meeting in Syria, Qaddafi's apprehension and anxiety about the fate of Iraq and its former Baathist

leadership would be revealed publicly. “A foreign force occupied an Arab country [meaning Iraq] and hanged its president [meaning Saddam Hussein] and we stood by and watched,” Colonel Qaddafi scolded the officials gathered in Syria for the annual Arab League meeting. [7] The venue, Damascus, for Qaddafi’s reminder was a fitting place because of the existence of the probabilities that a similar scenario could reoccur in Syria.

Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported on Qaddafi’s apprehension about the possible fate of any Arab leaders opposed to American policy: “‘How can they execute a prisoner of war and the president of a member of the Arab League?’ [Colonel Qaddafi] asked. ‘He said Saddam had been a friend of the United States during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s ‘before they turned against him and executed him.’ ‘You could all suffer the same fate,’ he warned. ‘Even you, even we, who are considered friends of America, one day (America) can give the green light for our own hanging,’ said the Libyan leader whose country resumed ties with the United States in 2004 after a 23-year break.’” [8] These statements illustrate the psychology and motives behind Libya’s decision to negotiate with America and Britain: a fear of invasion and the systematic trial and execution of its leadership in foreign-controlled kangaroo courts.

The 15th Arab League Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh *Betraying Iraq from 1988 to 1991 to 2003: Arab Rulers show their colours...*

When the Arab assembly was finished in 2003 at Sharm el-Skeikh, the Information and Culture Minister of the U.A.E., Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, who represented the U.A.E. at Sharm el-Sheikh told reporters that a U.A.E. initiative to support the U.S. and Britain in demanding the removal of Saddam Hussein was backed “on the record” by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. The Emirati official also told reporters that there was broader, but secretive, support amongst Arab rulers for the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq: “We [also] got support off record from other [Arab] countries, but unfortunately they do not want to discuss it on camera. All the Arabs agree that Saddam should go, but none have the courage to say it publicly.” [9] This secretive approach has been a trademark of the autocratic regimes plaguing the Arab World.

The simple truth is that the Arab rulers had conspired against the government of Saddam Hussein and against Iraq many years before 2003. When the charge of invading Kuwait was read out against the late Saddam Hussein, by the American-controlled Coalition Court after his capture, the former Iraqi leader burst out in anger saying “In Kuwait I was protecting the Iraqi people from those Kuwaiti dogs [meaning the rulers of Kuwait] who wanted to turn Iraqi women into [ten]-dinar prostitutes.” [10] President Hussein was alluding to the economic tactics or warfare that was being waged against Iraq, which involved the leaders of Kuwait.

The reality of the situation in regards to the invasion of Kuwait was that Iraq was pushed into a desperate position after the Iraq-Iran War through acts of diplomatic entrapment by the U.S. and the rulers of Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E., and Kuwait. [11] During the Iraq-Iran War and by its end the U.S. was already demonizing their ally Saddam Hussein in preparation to regain the nationalized energy reserves of Iraq. After the Iraq-Iran War ended in 1988 Baghdad was battered and bankrupt. Exasperating the situation, the Arab Sheikdoms reneged on their promises and pledges to help Iraq and even demanded the immediate repayment of war loans, but even worse in coordination with the U.S. they significantly increased their oil production which lowered the price of oil. Oil was the economic life blood of Iraq and this act by the rulers of fellow Arab states was placing Iraq under huge economic difficulty and forcing it to consider taking additional loans with higher costs that would

further impoverish Iraq and force it to sell state assets to foreign countries. The situation was somewhat the same for the Iranians. In short, there was a program to brutalize the Iraqis immediately after the Iraq-Iran War and Arab rulers were parties.

Kuwaiti leaders even ordered for the deliberate extraction of Iraqi oil from the Rumaila oil field located on the Kuwait-Iraq border by means of slanted drills that crossed over into the Iraqi portion of the field. The technology was also provided to Kuwait by the U.S. as a means to steal Iraqi oil. General Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., the head of United States Central Command (USCENTCOM/CENTCOM), even made several visits to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia from 1988 to 1990 to coordinate American-led efforts of instigating the Iraqis into another war through the covert economic siege. Finally Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 for economic relief, to halt Kuwaiti action against Iraq, and also out of anger at the Kuwaiti function in weakening Iraq.

The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh

In the aftermath of 2006 post-war Lebanon, Coalition building in the Middle East...

The 19th Arab League Summit, which was held in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, was filled with paradoxes. In line with global governance, what was said by Arab leaders contrasted with reality and the facts. The whole event was choreographed for the stimulation and manipulation of the public in the Arab World and the Middle East.

Libya however boycotted the Arab League gathering in Riyadh, maintaining that it was a ploy to divide and conquer the Middle East. The Syrian President was given a special reception by the Saudi King, even though Saudi Arabia and Syria were at diplomatic loggerheads, especially after the Syrians called the leaders of the Arab World traitors for supporting Tel Aviv in the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon and the Gaza Strip during 2006.

This diplomatic about-face by Saudi rulers in regards to the Syrians was linked at the time to the strategic idea of coercing Syria and dissociating it from its strategic alliance with Iran, a non-Arab country and the regional power in the Middle East. More importantly for the itinerary of the 2007 Arab gathering, Syria also had some form of veto power in regards to the summit agenda. Without Syrian cooperation certain resolutions of the Saudi-hosted Arab League event would not have passed or become legitimate. [12]

The Iranian Foreign Minister was also invited to Saudi Arabia for the Arab League gathering as an observer. [13] The U.N. Secretary-General, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (O.I.C.) Secretary-General, and the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) were also invited. Officials from the African Union, the E.U., China, Russia, India, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey were also present.

The importance of the Arab gathering in Riyadh were its links towards furthering the game plan to divide the Middle East into a “radical” camp and a “moderate” camp between the indigenous forces of resistance in the Middle East and the forces in the Middle East linked to Israel and non-regional powers as clients, proxies, or allies. This scheme to divide the Middle East into two rival camps was unveiled by Washington, D.C. and London in the aftermath of the 2006 Israeli aerial siege of Lebanon.

Iran, Syria, the Palestinian Resistance (including Hamas), and the Iraqi Resistance all were categorized as “radicals” or “extremists.” Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt, Kuwait, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf were all categorized as the “moderates.”

Along with Israel, Turkey, the U.S., Britain, and NATO these so-called “moderates” form the “Coalition of the Moderate.” In Lebanon, the Lebanese Resistance and the National Opposition also fell into the so-called extremist camp. Adversely the governing political parties in Lebanon (which have been rhetorically called the “majority” because of their slight few-seat majority in the Lebanese Parliament) have fallen into the “moderate” camp. In reality the extremists are the resisters to foreign agendas and form a loose-knit “Resistance Bloc.”

The term “Coalition of the Moderate” brings to mind another Anglo-American coalition that was built for war on the eve of the invasion of Iraq, the “Coalition of the Willing.” Both terms were coined by Anglo-American policy makers in regards to their program in the Middle East. It is clear the same lexicon is being used in regards to Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Iran as in the case of launching an invasion of Iraq. It is also worth noting that during the Cold War the Arab nations that were independent or pro-Soviet were also called “radicals” by the U.S., Britain, France, and their allies. Amongst these Cold War “radicals” in the Arab World were Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and South Yemen.

Based on documents attributed to the Egyptian government the formation of an Arab military pact was discussed amongst the Arab League. The same Egyptian government document also urged Arab League members to develop nuclear power. [14] The Egyptian idea of an Arab League pact was suspect in that its motive could have been to target Tehran and its regional allies, like Syria, in the future. This could also have been part of the ongoing effort to artificially substitute Iran, the ancient neighbour of the Arabs, in the place of Israel as a threat to the Arab World.

Both the Anglo-American alliance represented by Condoleezza Rice and the Franco-German entente represented by Chancellor Merkel also started shuttling from one Middle Eastern capital to another to prepare the frameworks for the 2007 Arab League gathering in Riyadh and to supposedly revive talks to establish a country for the Palestinians. [15] In reality Condoleezza Rice and Chancellor Merkel were preparing the grounds for a major diplomatic initiative that would accelerate Franco-German and Anglo-American interests in the Middle East and bolster the “Coalition of the Moderate” against the Resistance Bloc.

The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh *The Two Rival Lebanese Delegations in Saudi Arabia...*

Lebanon sent two delegations to the 2007 conference, just as it did to the 2006 Arab League meeting in Sudan. These two Lebanese delegations were a representation of the regional political divide in the Middle East, which was sharpened after the 2006 Israeli attack on Lebanon. Émile Lahoud the former president of Lebanon, which was supported by portions of the Lebanese National Opposition, led one delegation which was snubbed by Riyadh through the implementation of improper diplomatic protocol. The second Lebanese delegation was led by Fouad Siniora, a career banker who has worked for both Citibank and the Hariri family. Émile Lahoud, as the president of the Lebanese Republic, upon his arrival to Saudi Arabia was not greeted by the appropriate Saudi representative as a symbolic gesture of disapproval by the House of Saud.

As noted, ironically the delegation from Syria was given a warm, but insincere, welcome. The distinguished reception given to the Syrian delegation also embarrassed the Lebanese delegation representing the Hariri-led March 14 Coalition, which describe themselves as

“anti-Syrian” although they were Syria’s closest Lebanese cronies in the past. The Saudi reception to the Syrian delegation also had a potent sting for the so-called “anti-Syrian” political parties in Lebanon because they portray Saudi Arabia as their patrons. The truth of the matter is that the leaders of the March 14 Coalition, which includes the Future Movement of the Hariri family, are not really anti-Syrian, they have merely traded Damascus for Washington, D.C. as their master and the real issue is that the U.S. has problems with Syria and is using them as a means of leverage against the Syrians. Metaphorically speaking, the road to Damascus goes through Beirut (as well as Baghdad) as the road to Tehran goes through Baghdad, Kabul, Baku, and the Persian Gulf.

Prime Minister Siniora, representing the Hariri-led March 14 Coalition, unconventionally led the second and rival Lebanese delegation to Riyadh. Constitutionally in Lebanon the responsibility for representation of Lebanon would fall under the duties of the office of the Lebanese presidency. The March 14 Coalition’s delegation, rivalling the presidential delegation from Beirut, however justifiably claimed that the presidency of Émile Lahoud was not legitimate. This was because Émile Lahoud’s presidency was extended by the Lebanese Parliament, which ironically included many members of the Hariri-led March 14 Coalition, because of Syrian influence in Beirut.

The paradox of the situation in Riyadh was that ironically the Lebanese government formed by Prime Minister Siniora and the Hariri-led March 14 Coalition was also constitutionally illegitimate. The cabinet of the Lebanese government is only legitimate when all religious and sectarian groups have cabinet-level representation through ministerial posts. The moment one group withdraws its representation from the government, which is composed of a cabinet of twenty-four ministers, then the said government is legally considered illegitimate and unconstitutional. This is exactly what happened in 2006 when all five of the Shiite Muslim ministers, along with one Orthodox Christian minister, withdrew their support for the Lebanese government. Overnight one-third of the Lebanese cabinet withdrew its support for the Lebanese government because of its sinister position during the 2006 Israeli attack against Lebanon. Although Émile Lahoud argued that his extended term was valid due to a vote by the Lebanese Parliament and Fouad Siniora argues that his government is valid as long as it retains two-thirds of its ministers, both the Lebanese delegations in Riyadh, in summary, were illegitimate under the perimeters of Lebanese law.

The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh

Talking about the Arab World’s Problems: A Festival of Hyperbole and Duplicity...

King Abdullah ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia started off the 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh by saying that Arab rulers were to blame for the problems of the Arab World, including the chaos in Iraq and the abysmal despair in Israeli-occupied Palestine, and adding that the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq was illegitimate. [16] The Saudi King also addressed the problems in Sudan and Somalia, both African member states belonging to the Arab League.

In a show of two-faced populism King Abdullah laid blame on the assembled Arab rulers in his opening speech: “In beloved Iraq, bloodshed is continuing under an illegal foreign occupation, and detestable sectarianism which may pave the way for the break out of civil war. Lebanon, which was a good example of coexistence and prosperity, is now crippled and unable to move ahead, and its streets have been turned into trenches, and sedition is about to show its teeth. In Sudan, the Arab meekness has paved the way for foreign intervention in its affairs. In Somalia, one civil war ends to make way for another one. All this takes place

while we are unable to extend help to our brothers. The question is this: what have we done during these years to resolve all of this? I don't want to blame the Arab League because the Arab League reflects our real situation, but the blame should fall on us. We — the leaders of the Arab Nation, our permanent differences, and our refusal to follow the path of unity — all this has made the [Arab Nation] lose its confidence in our credibility as well as hope for today and tomorrow." [17]

King Abdullah was merely shedding crocodile tears just as he did after the execution of the late Saddam Hussein by pretending to oppose the execution. These public gestures are part of a strategy to give King Abdullah and other Arab despots some form of legitimacy by trying to conjure an image of popular Arab representation in the eyes of their citizens. On closer inspection and in context of official Saudi policy these statements are simply duplicity. Saudi Arabia, like Jordan and Egypt, has openly stated numerous times as official policy that it is opposed to the withdrawal of American-led foreign troops from Iraq. [18] Saudi Arabia also sided with Israel against the Lebanese and the Palestinians during the months of August, July, and June in 2006. Riyadh also continues to give significant aid to the U.S. and Britain in Iraq, including assistance of U.S. and British intelligence and media operations.

In 2007 Saudi Arabia also absolved about eighty percent of the over \$15 billion (U.S.) Iraqi debt that was accumulated by Baghdad under the presidency of Saddam Hussein. Baghdad's debt to Riyadh went back to the Iraq-Iran War and the 1991 Gulf War. Habitually the Saudi princes consistently refused to write the Iraqi debt off, even during the years that Iraqis were suffering under U.N. economic sanctions. In 2007 Riyadh decided to inexplicably write off most the Iraqi debt as a means to support the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq and the privatization of the Iraqi economy. [19]



The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh
The End of the Arab World: Colonel Qaddafi and Libya's Chilling Warnings

"The Arab World is on the way to extinction!"

-Colonel Moammar Qaddafi, Leader of Libya

Months after the fall of Baghdad, Libya also capitulated, without fighting, to the demands of Washington, D.C. and London. On December 20, 2003 Tripoli announced that after months of negotiations with the so-called West (foremost meaning the U.S. and Britain, but including France, Germany, and Italy), it was ready to play its role in building a world free from all forms of terrorism.” [20] The U.S. and British governments immediately praised the Libyan resolution and Tony Blair called the Libyan announcement “an historic one and a courageous one.” [21]

Prime Minister Blair explained in an interview that “Libya came to us [London and Washington, D.C.] in March [2003] following successful negotiations on Lockerbie to see if it could resolve its weapons of mass destruction issue in a similarly co-operative manner.” [22] The coincidence of the timing in regards to the invasion of Iraq is no simple accident. The reality of the situation was that after the show of strength in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libya immediately asked for negotiations. Libya knew that it was one of the seven countries that were strategic targets to be subjugated and controlled. The others were Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon, Syria, and lastly Iran. Tripoli was afraid that Libya would also suffer the same fate as Iraq if it did not peacefully surrender.

A year after the invasion of Iraq by U.S. and British forces, Prime Minister Blair gleefully arrived in the Libyan capital and triumphantly shook hands with Colonel Qaddafi while expressing his satisfaction by saying there were expectations for a “new relationship” between Libya and Britain. [23] Simultaneously the “new relationship” became apparent. It was revealed concurrent to Tony Blair’s visit that Royal Dutch Shell, an Anglo-Dutch corporate oil giant, had signed a deal worth up to £550 million or over \$1 billion (U.S.) for gas exploration rights off the Libyan coast. [24] In league with the opening up of the Libyan market and economy to America and the E.U. the negative image of Libya slowly vanished from international headlines, only appearing occasionally when reports of Colonel Qaddafi’s controversial statements made the international headlines.

Four years later, in 2007, Colonel Moammar Qaddafi and his government boycotted the Arab League’s gathering in Riyadh and ridiculed both the Arab leaders and the Arab League as U.S. pawns and servants. The statements in Tripoli were a political blast against the U.S. and Saudi Arabia that had political scientists and analysts guessing the motives for Qaddafi’s statements. Colonel Qaddafi has been labelled as a madman and an eccentric for years, but his statements in this case did reflect popular Arab opinion and actuality. Speaking to Al Jazeera television, Colonel Qaddafi said “We feel for them, the poor things,” referring to the Arab leaders. “We know they are in a position of weakness. They have no power or strength.” [25] According to the Libyan ruler, the meeting in Riyadh was merely serving the interests of what the Libya leader called the “American Empire.” [26]

During the interview Colonel Qaddafi was seated in front of a map of Africa and wore a white suit with a green badge in the shape of Africa on his chest symbolizing his country’s break with the Arab World. He went on to express his anger at the rulers of the Arab World by saying “Libya has turned its back to the Arabs...Libya is an African nation, as for the Arabs, may God keep them happy and far away.” He justified his anger by saying that the Arab World never fought by Libya’s side against the U.S. nor did the Arab leaders help Libya against the U.S. sanctions imposed on the Libyan people.

Colonel Qaddafi, who curiously has no official government position in Libya, also projected an image that Arab rulers only do as they are ordered by the White House like marionettes. He then went on to assertively tell his interviewer that U.S. Secretary of State

Condoleezza Rice, which Colonel Qaddafi referred to as his “dark African sweetheart,” was giving the orders to the Arab leaders. [27] “We admire her very much and we are very proud of her because she is giving the orders to the Arab leaders,” Qaddafi sarcastically said in regards to the U.S. Secretary of State followed by his impressions of the Arab leaders; “Leeza, Leeza ... she brought with her the summit agenda.” [28]

The Libyan leader’s rationale for not going to the meeting of Arab leaders in Saudi Arabia was that Riyadh was a venue designed to divide the Muslims, betray the Palestinians, sacrifice Iraq, and to hatch a major conspiracy against the Iranians. He told Al Jazeera that the Arab rulers gathered in Riyadh were preparing to sell “the Palestinians like sheep” and that the gathering only served the interests of “colonial powers.” [29]

“I am not going to participate in the conspiracy of mobilizing Arabs against the Persians [meaning the Iranians],” and “I am not going to participate in a conspiracy that divides Islam to Sunni Islam and Shiite Islam,” the Libyan leader declared. [30] Libyan criticism continued until the end of March in 2007, while Colonel Gaddafi was in Niger he continued to criticize the British government when British military personnel were captured by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard in the Persian Gulf and also declaring that the type of colonialism represented by the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq was the enemy of Arabs and Iranians alike. [31] He also pointed out that ironically through their actions Arab leaders supported the Anglo-American occupation of Iraq while the American people inversely opposed their own government’s decision to occupy Iraq.

“They are also selling the Palestinians in an auction. They’re giving the Palestinians a little money as if they were sheep to be fed,” Colonel Qaddafi additionally charged the leaders of the Arab World. [32] Days after the Arab assembly in Saudi Arabia was adjourned and discussions were made about reaching out to Israel the Hashemite monarch of Jordan, King Abdullah, told a visiting Israeli delegation that the millions of Palestinian refugees that are waiting to return to their homes will not return to their ancestral homeland, but instead would be compensated by Israel and moreover the wealthy Arab countries, such as the U.A.E. and Saudi Arabia. King Abdullah also reassured the Israelis that the Arab peace initiative was really a set of talking points and not an action plan at all. [33]

It is in the context of the dismal state of the Arab World in 2007 and the events leading to the Arab League’s 19th non-emergency summit in Riyadh that the poet Ali Ahmed Said Asbar, known by his famous alias Andunis, told Dubai Television on March 11, 2007 that the Arabs have become extinct or are on their way towards extinction. Andunis, a professor of Arabic literature and a candidate for a Noble Prize, complained about the inert state of the Arab World and likened the Arabs to the ancient Greeks, the Pharaohs of Egypt, and the Sumerians of Mesopotamia: “We [the Arabs] have become extinct. We have the quantity. We have the masses of people, but a people becomes extinct when it no longer has a creative capacity, and the capacity to change its world.”

The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh ***Using talks of Peace for War Plans and to Sew Divisions...***

The 2007 Arab League gathering in Saudi Arabia passed a major American-led initiative. Syrian cooperation was important in this aspect. This is a major reason for the warm Saudi reception for the Syrian delegation. The Arab League’s 2007 gathering in Riyadh renewed an important element in the roadmap for creating the “New Middle East.” The summit in Riyadh saw the renewal of the Saudi-initiated 2002 Arab League offer of normal ties with

Israel in return for its withdrawal from all land it seized in 1967 and the creation of a Palestinian state. Through the renewed talks of peace the stage was being set to demonize all those forces that are opposed for the appeasement of Israel. The objectives to divide the Middle East as Colonel Qaddafi had warned were also being enforced. A campaign was being started to portray those Middle Eastern players who are opposed to a one-sided peace with Israel, such as Hamas and Syria, as bloodthirsty savages and “extremists” who refuse to co-exist. The reality of the situation is that real peace is in the best interests of these players, but not in the interests of the underlying economic forces that control the foreign policies of the U.S., the E.U., and Israel.

Israel rejected the 2002 Arab League offer of normalization after diplomatically flirting with the idea and raising the hopes of the Arab public. This period of Israeli flirtation was linked to the build-up for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The same 2002 offer was made again in 2007, in the aftermath of the Israeli attacks on Lebanon, and yet again in 2008 in connection with the Annapolis Conference. After 2003, this process would not have been possible without the demonization of Hezbollah and Hamas. Hezbollah was demonized through a wide effort by Arab governments to blame it for starting the war with Israel in 2006. The isolation of the democratically-elected Hamas-led Palestinian government, as the official voice of the Palestinian people, in 2007 and the propping up of Mahmoud Abbas were other preconditions to renewing the 2002 offer to Israel. Each time the 2002 Saudi-proposed initiative has been water-downed. Subsequent to the 2007 Arab League conference in Riyadh the aspects of Israeli territorial withdrawal from Palestine were elucidated as negotiable by Arab leaders and that some form of token Palestinian autonomy was the real basis of the Saudi-initiative.

As elucidated early, it must be noted that the last two times that a diplomatic initiative was put forward by the U.S. and Arab leaders for establishing Palestinian statehood there were consequent links to two major Middle Eastern wars. The first time Palestinian statehood was brought up was after the 1991 Gulf War, which led to the Oslo Accord (1993) which placated the growing anger in the Middle East and Arab World about the post-Gulf War treatment of Iraq. Oslo proved to be a farce that Israel would never accept. The second time Palestinian statehood was revived as a topic amongst diplomats was before the Anglo-American invasion of Iraq in 2003. Once again, the issue of Palestinian statehood is being revived while war clouds seem to linger in the horizon of the Middle East. One can not be faulted for dismissing the offers by Arab leaders and the entertainment of these offers for a limited time by the Israeli government as merely an illusion to distract the global public while war preparations are being made.

The 2002 Saudi-proposal is deeply tied to Anglo-American interests. When the plan was presented in 2002 at the 14th gathering of the leaders of the Arab League, which was hosted in Beirut, the delegation from Libya angrily demanded and questioned why the Saudi-initiative towards normalization of relations with Israel were suspiciously being given an enormous amount of attention and pushing away from the traditional position of the Arab League. Lebanon, Syria, and several other Arab League members expressed some suspicions towards Saudi Arabia and felt that Riyadh was acting as a front for Anglo-American and Israeli interests. Another aspect of the Saudi-initiative is that it was and is also a red herring. Prince Saud Al-Faisal, the Saudi Foreign Minister, has even emphasized that there is no timeframe for the peace initiative that has been put forward and that Israel can take its sweet time. King Abdullah II of Jordan also dismissed the Arab initiative as a plan and reassured Israel that the Arab rulers were their allies. [34] An additional layer of the

2002 Saudi-proposal for normalization of Arab ties with Israel is a window to integrate and subordinate the economies of the Arab World with the economies of the E.U. and Israel.

The 19th Arab League Summit in Riyadh *The Real Motives for King Abdullah's 2007 Speech...*

Professor Abdul Sattar Kassem, a professor of political science at An-Najah National University located in Nablus, Palestine has summed up the true meaning behind the 2007 gathering of the Arab League;

Both Israel and America are interested in mobilizing the Arabs against Iran, and the Sunnis against the Shiites. America is facing tremendous problems in the region, from Somalia to Afghanistan, and Israel has lit the red light after its failure in Lebanon.

(...)

For most Arab regimes, Hezbollah, the Iraqi Resistance and Iran are real threats although they are not menacing the Arab nations. Most Arab regimes care about their own security regardless of their people's interests. Therefore, they maintain good secret and official relations with Israel, which threatens the security of the Arabs but not that of their regimes [and leadership and rulers].

Arab regimes are dialectically and practically Israel's allies. They sided with Israel in its war against Hezbollah [in Lebanon], and most Arab regimes are excellent instruments to carry out American and Israeli policies. These regimes waged a war against Iran in the early 1980's, sided with the U.S. in driving Saddam [Iraq] out of Kuwait, and have been an important element in financially besieging the Palestinians.

The situation in the Middle East is now more complicated than ever. The Iraqi Resistance is relentless and is expected to escalate, Hezbollah is armed to the teeth and well-organized, and Iran is making major technological achievements. The Arab regimes are trembling, the U.S. feels that a regional power [meaning Iran] is about to challenge its dominance in the area. Israel is also forced to reconsider its arrogance.

In such conditions, cooperation between the three troubled parties [the Arab regimes, Israel, and the U.S.] is more than necessary. The best possible path is to strengthen the Arab regimes, which can divert the attention of the Arabs toward Iran instead of Israel. Following such a path requires the emergence of an Arab leader who should receive all encouragement and assistance so as to be able to mobilize the Arab public. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia is the nominee.

The U.S. has been trying to revolutionize the traditional, almost illiterate, tribal king and has paved the road for him through these previous actions:

1. Allowing the Palestinian and Lebanese internal situations to slightly settle down, so that the king could hammer out the Mecca agreement between Fatah and Hamas. The U.S. and Israel are now showing unreal opposition to the accord so as to give the king the image of a hero who challenges both countries.

2. Trying to lead the Arab summit in Riyadh to the reactivation of an Arab initiative that doesn't insist on the return of the Palestinian refugees and tacitly accepts resettlement in the Arab countries. Both Israel and the U.S. are still talking about amending (negotiating) the initiative.

3. Giving the king a margin of rhetoric [sic; rhetorical] expression such as the call for Arab unity, making self-critique, and describing the U.S. presence in Iraq as an occupation. These statements and the like are met with highly positive reaction in the Arab street.

Recent developments in the Middle East, as detailed above, show that Israel and the U.S. are now trying to make of King Abdullah the [Che] Guevara of the Arabs, which should contend a growing opposition and assist Israel and the U.S. in their regional policy. [35]

Professor Abdul Sattar Kassem articulates what political scientists and experts in regards to the Middle East and the Arab World have recognized from the onset of the intense U.S., British, and E.U. diplomatic shuffling that took place in the Middle East after the Israeli failure in Lebanon.

As a part of this scheme an attempt was made to propel King Abdullah and the Saudi regime to mislead Arab populations. Just before the Arab League summit in 2007 King Abdullah refused to attend a White House social event in his honour without providing a convincing explanation, which conveniently was scheduled in close proximity to the Arab League meeting to bolster King Abdullah's anti-U.S. credentials in the Arab World. [36]

One should inquire into how the international press would know that the Saudi King declined a diplomatic gala in his honour at the White House "without providing a convincing explanation," without directly being told by the invitee or the hosts. In sensitive cases that could cause embarrassment to the U.S. in regards to the Middle East this type of information on invitations is not released. The White House released or "leaked" the information as part of an important global public relations campaign.

The 20th Arab League Summit in Damascus

The Dividing Lines in the Middle East have have been set...Has the Stage been set for War?

The 20th non-emergency gathering of Arab rulers under the auspicious of the Arab League was held in the ancient Syrian capital of Damascus. 2008 has also been the year that has seen Damascus inaugurated as the cultural capital of the entire Arab World. The events in Damascus are however clouded by the regional fault line that has slowly been simmering in the Middle East.

Before the 2008 Arab League meeting in Syria could even take place the dividing lines in the Middle East have been reinforced. The political crisis in Lebanon that has been caused by a political deadlock between the Lebanese National Opposition and the Hariri-led March 14 Alliance has been used as a means to diplomatically assault Syria and call for boycotts of the Arab League gathering in Damascus. The presidential void that has been left in Lebanon with the departure of Émile Lahoud on November 23, 2007 has not been filled. In a state of irony the U.S. and its allies who accuse the Syrians of intervening in Lebanese affairs are trying to force Syria through the Arab League gathering in Damascus to use its influence in Lebanon to force the Lebanese National Opposition to cave-in to the demands of the March 14 Alliance.

In Lebanon a few members of the minority forces (who ironically and ambiguously refer to themselves as the "majority"), which control the Lebanese government and are agents of Anglo-American and Franco-German interests, have called the 2008 Arab League meeting in

Syria a forum controlled by Tehran. They have shunned sending any representation from Beirut in line with the rest of the “Coalition of the Moderate” who will not send heads of state, but lower-ranking officials. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen, and Bahrain were amongst the Arab nations who sent low-ranking representatives to Syria. In total, just over half the heads of state from Arab League countries, fourteen of the twenty-two, arrived to Syria; amongst them were the leaders of Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Qatar, and Tunisia.

De-linking Syria from Iran is also a major factor behind the pressure on Syria and the absence of the leaders of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. The U.S. and France both called for a boycott of the conference in Damascus by Arab League members. In line with the non-Arab pressure, the E.U. also stated that the Arab League should use the summit in Damascus as a political tool to pressure the Syrians in regards to accommodating Anglo-American and Franco-German objectives in Lebanon, which would fully politically align Beirut as a proxy within the “moderate” camp. Israel has also officially stated that removing Syria from the Resistance Bloc is pivotal to Israeli security and strategic objectives in the Middle East. In this regard Ehud Barak’s forecast to Israeli diplomats sheds light to the game plan of Tel Aviv in regards to Syria: “in the end, Israel will meet Syria either in the field of battle or in the negotiating table.” [37]

The 20th Arab League Summit in Damascus

The March to War continues...is the “New Middle East” peering its head in the Horizon?

The Arab World is being torn between two visions and even this process may be playing to U.S. foreign policy objectives for establishing the “New Middle East.” In the words of Roger Hardy, an analyst of the Middle East for the BBC, “Arab rulers find themselves caught between the American eagle and the Iranian lion.” [38] The divisions in the Middle East are also being portrayed as a result of American-Iranian rivalry for control of the Middle East (as well as Central Asia) and a clash over spheres of influence. The term “spheres of influence” has also been repeatedly emerging in the discussions and articles of establishment mediums in the Anglosphere, such as *The Economist*, in regards to the tensions between the U.S. and Iran. Hamas, Hezbollah, the Amal Movement, the Free Patriotic Movement, Sudan, Syria, and sometimes even Qatar have all been described as members of a so-called “Iranian Bloc” or “pro-Iranian Bloc.” Nevertheless this is rhetorical, the commonality all these players, aside from Qatar, have is their common resistance to outside forces that seek to control their traditional environments.

“There are now [with the start of the 2008 Arab League gathering in Damascus] two axes — Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hezbollah are on one side and the rest [of the Middle East and the Arabs] are on the another [*sic*],” the editor-in-chief of the annual Arab Strategic Report at the Cairo-based Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, Wahid Abdel-Meguid, has been widely quoted with authority from an interview with the *Associated Press*. [39] This distinction is part of the process of identifying those resisting U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East as an enemy bloc that must be addressed. Once again, as in 2007 when Libya warned that Arab-Iranian and Shiite-Sunni divisions were being nurtured, Colonel Qaddafi warned the gathered leaders of the Arab League in Damascus that divisions between Arabs and Iranians would spell doom for the Middle East and the Arab World. The Libyan leader also told Arab officials at their 2008 conference in Syria that Arab nations were being re-divided into colonial protectorates or “spheres of influence.” [40]

Additionally, the U.S. and its allies are using the Arab regimes to create pretexts for future

aggression against Iran and Syria. Lebanese politics and the Hariri Assassination are being used in the case of Damascus, while a peaceful dispute between Iran and the U.A.E. over the Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb, and Lesser Tunb is being used in the case of Tehran. The territorial disputes between the U.A.E. and Iran were brought to the forefront of the Arab League's attention in Damascus through American instructions. This territorial dispute between the U.A.E. and Iran, which started in 1904 as a result of British disregard for the territorial integrity of Middle Eastern states, was pushed into the limelight starting in 2007 to portray Tehran as an aggressor towards the Arab World, while the Israeli and Anglo-American occupations of Arab lands and territory by military force were downplayed. The dire situations in Iraq and the Palestinian Territories are also being used to build cases for conflict against both Syria and Iran.

Following the 2008 Arab League gathering in Damascus *Al-Ahram Weekly* (April 3-9, 2008) posed a series of questions by Salama A. Salama for Arabs to ponder over: "Furthermore, why exactly is it better for Arab 'moderate' countries to join a [American]-Israeli alliance than an Iranian-Syrian one? Haven't we [Arabs] made enough concessions already in the hope that things would get better in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq? Is it really that bad to let Iran and Syria have their way for a change? Has it not been clear since [the] Annapolis [Summit] that the Americans [and their allies] have no interest in resolving the Palestinian issue? Forget Arab solidarity. Had Arab solidarity been real, Egypt and Saudi Arabia would have sided with Syria in a quest for an independent pan-Arab policy, one that keeps our options open and our interests intact." [41]

Salama A. Salama continues to link the 2008 Arab League gathering in Syria to the march towards a regional war. *Al-Ahram Weekly* concludes that the Arab schism that was advertised through the Arab League's 2008 gathering in the Syrian capital and the publicity about the existence of two rival alliances in the Middle East have helped nurture the grounds for an American-led war against Iran and its Middle Eastern allies to establish the vision of a "New Middle East" controlled by the U.S., the E.U., and Israel: "The sorry image that unfolded in the recent summit will only tempt the Bush [Jr. Administration] to try another [military] adventure. [America], in alliance with Israel, may decide to act [meaning attack]. They have been dying to strike at Iran's nuclear [energy facilities]. And they know they have the blessing of Germany, France and the rest of Europe [meaning the European Union, which is not the soul representative of Europe]. For now, everyone seems in agreement that a strike against Iran would keep [Hezbollah and its allies in the Lebanese National Opposition] and Hamas [and its allies in the Palestinian Territories] at bay. A strike against Iran, many believe, would kick start a new regional order where everything would go exactly as the [U.S. government] and Israel have planned all along." [42]

The road of the historical conflict for control over the Middle East does not end in Damascus it goes through Damascus, as it did through Baghdad, for the Arabs and all the other peoples of the Middle East, including the Iranians and the Turks. Damascus has merely served to further expose the political dividing lines that exist in the region. This political divide and the alliance system that it accentuates, which is also solidifying, in the Middle East have striking similarities to the political process and the alliance systems that were in place in Europe on the eve of the First World War. The most important question in regards to this process is where are these divisions taking the Middle East? Is war the final objective or is something else? Even if the objectives of this process are understood the sentiments of the public in the Middle East are united, with some variations, from Iran and Turkey to Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia — and this in itself is a genuine challenge to imposing the

Project for the “New Middle East.”

Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya is a writer and geopolitical analyst based in Ottawa. He has worked as a researcher for The Canadian House of Commons focussing on the Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP) of North America. He is currently Research Associate at the Centre for Research on Globalization.

NOTES

[1] In some chronological classifications of the Arab League’s summits the 2003 gathering in Sharm el-Skeikh is categorized as the 25th summit of the Arab League. The logic behind this categorization is the addition of the ten previous emergence summits of the Arab League into the chronology of Arab League summits along with regular or non-emergency gatherings.

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[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Kadhafi warns US allies could suffer Saddam’s fate, *Agence France-Presse (AFP)*, March 29, 2008.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] Howeidy, Swan-song, *Op. cit.*

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[15] Angela Merkel off to Middle East, *Associated Press (AP)* [March 31, 2007](#).

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[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] Blair hails new Libyan relations, *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC), [March 25, 2004](#).

[24] *Ibid.*

[25] Gadhafi mocks Arab summit, saying it is following American orders, *Associated Press* (AP), [March 27, 2007](#).

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[28] *Ibid.*

[29] Gaddafi accuses Arab leaders, *Op. cit.*; Qaddafi says Arab summit against Iran, *Press TV* (Iran), [March 28, 2007](#).

[30] Gadhafi mocks summit, *Op. cit.*

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[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Shahar Ilan, Jordan's Abdullah tells Israel: We share same enemies, *Haaretz*, [April 19, 2007](#).

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[35] Abdul Sattar Kassem, Revolutionizing the King, *AMIN*, April 1, 2007.

[36] Yitzhak Benhorin, Report: Saudi Arabia turning its back on US, *Yedioth Aharonot*, [March 30, 2007](#).

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[42] *Ibid.*

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About the author:

An award-winning author and geopolitical analyst, Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya is the author of *The Globalization of NATO* (Clarity Press) and a forthcoming book *The War on Libya and the Re-Colonization of Africa*. He has also contributed to several other books ranging from cultural critique to international relations. He is a Sociologist and Research Associate at the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), a contributor at the Strategic Culture Foundation (SCF), Moscow, and a member of the Scientific Committee of Geopolitica, Italy.

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