Middle East Studies Center
Jordan

The Arab World
From Division
To Reconciliations

Reviewed by

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Abstract

The Arab World
From Division to Reconciliations

This book is the result of a specialized scientific seminar that was held by the Middle East Study Center on 24-25 November 2018, titled "The Arab World: From Division to Reconciliations", attended by around 100 experts, academics and politicians from five Arab countries, including Jordan. The book discusses the current state of division in the Arab World, the state of chaos witnessed by some Arab countries on the national level, impacting the political, security, economic and social situation. It also discusses inter-Arab conflict, political currents and forces and their use on the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab-Arab relations and the Arab-Islamic dialogue. The book then moves to explore the challenges facing the rift existing in the Arab world and the conditions needed to exit from this, looking at national reconciliation, national dialogue, political partnership, damping the acuteness of polarization and reorganization of external relations on common basis for comprehensive development, sustainability, regional integration and building bridges with the outside world.

The first part is titled "The current situation in the Arab world and reconciliation strategies", looking into the political and security implications for the current division in the Arab world, exploring border conflicts left by the colonial powers as time bombs, the sharp division between Arab states and those of the region including Turkey, Iran and Israel, the division about the peace process, Palestinian factions and the Arab Spring and after. The state of conflict and division in the Arab world caused wide political consequences the most important of which is the decline of joint Arab action - even in its minimum form, inefficiency of joint Arab work platforms as the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Maghreb Union and ethnic and sectarian polarization of Arab societies in light of the Arab and regional polarization in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen, and the infiltration of super and, sometimes regional, powers in the Arab world and the increased dependence on foreign forces.

Chapter two this first part establishes the effort to build political partnerships with national groups in the Arab world and the challenges that face it. It discusses the concept of political partnership, national groups obstacles and challenges and finally the mutual concurrent elements needed to achieve political partnerships and building national consensus. It warns the alternative to political partnership is isolation, as such partnership guarantees the protection of interests for the majority and the minority and allow them to defend these interests; it also gives

the right to veto decisions that harm the interests of any sector of society which guarantees security for all and achieves stability between political forces and prevents tyranny against one another.

Part two presents case studies in the Arab world and horizons of national reconciliation. Chapter one discusses the Egyptian case and researching the roots and characteristics of the current political crisis in Egypt by presenting its development since before the revolution. It then goes on to the revolution's stage and the accompanying sharp political turns with the election of Mohammad Morsi and the post-Morsi era, including the period before the election of Abdulfattah Al-Sisi up till now (2019).

It concludes the crisis Egypt is the result of the failure of the forces that participated in the revolution of the January 2011 to establish a more democratic regime than the one it brought down. It ultimately failed, bringing the emergence of a regime that is more restricting of freedoms and much less democratic. The book then reviews the concepts that include the "reconciliation initiatives" and searching for an exit of the political crisis since June 30th 2013. It attempts to extract the reasons for the failure of these initiatives for not possessing the necessary assets for success, either because of the lack of understanding of the reality of the crisis or lack of the needed willpower to overcome it, or both. At the end of the chapter, the book emphasizes the problem in the Egyptian case is it reflects the Arab world as a whole emphasizing the real battle is defending democracy in the Arab world to guarantee stability and other achievements.

Chapter two of part two discusses the horizons of the national reconciliation in Palestine. It starts with introducing the possibilities of achieving Palestinian national reconciliation through two basic factors: First the international and regional environment that influences the path of Palestinian reconciliation, and second is the nature of the sought after reconciliation. Change in the regional environment isn't sufficient to determine the balance of power for any of the parties and the change that took place in international policy represented the will of the new US administration of Donald Trump which weakened the Palestinian National Authority, while aiming to make Hamas part of the desired political project.

The discourse of the current US administration aims to achieve the policy of double containment for the divided parties by lengthening the time of division and controlling the abilities of both parties to change. On the other hand, the Palestinian leaderships couldn't agree on a unified political project which obstructed comprehensive national unity and the

involvement of all Palestinians in reconciliation. This polarized the importance of the popular backing and strengthening Palestinian institutions to face the least risk. Palestinian reconciliation wasn't achieved for many reasons like the ideological contradiction between Hamas and Fateh, on Islam v. secularism, negotiations and peaceful popular resistance and armed resistance, Jerusalem and so on.

Part three continues to study the horizon of national reconciliation in the Arab world. The first chapter discusses national reconciliation in Syria after 2011 and the tripartite of hope, adaptation and employment. The book sites important phases in the "Reconciliation Process" which witnessed an active role for the international and regional influencers as well as Syrian political, military and administrative personnel since "National reconciliation" is a national goal that supports local stability. The Arab initiative presented by the Arab League includes 13 articles to settle the crisis and which called on the Syrian government to stop all acts of violence against civilians, and confirmed that "dialogue should be based on the supreme Syrian national interests".

However, the initiative failed and the Arab League suspended the membership of Syria. In February 2012 Kofi Anan through the Geneva Process presented an initiative with six points to solve the Syrian crisis according to the vision of the UN and the international community. This was followed by Geneva Document 1 which was followed by a number of initiatives and meetings between the two sides and an agreement was reached in Vienna 1 and Vienna 2. Resolution 2245 was issued unanimously in December 2015. The resolution outlined the start of the negotiations between the regime and opposition. It stipulated a ceasefire should take place, a transition government should be formed within six months and elections should be scheduled within 18 months. As well, the Astana process started in 2017 after the military intervention of Russia in the Syrian crisis.

The book sees the importance of re-reading the basic Geneva Declaration according to the concept of sharing government and authority, not just government positions. This means giving priority to elections under international observation since the opposition and the regime don't have legitimacy. Supporting countries for a solution in Syria should strengthen the system of local government and legitimize it as a model in controlling local security and peace in addition to guaranteeing local stability and administrative and financial independence according to the framework of a unified Syrian territory.

This cannot be achieved in isolation. At the end of the this chapter the book re-examines local Syrian reconciliation as a local negotiation process between representatives of the regime and local communities, through which the regime can regain control over areas it lost earlier time while reaching a settlement with supporters of the revolution and their representatives through individual settlement processes. Residents of these areas should be granted permission to go back to their homes. The book compares all reconciliation processes in the world with those in Syria, and how they ended in formulating a social contract inside these countries.

Chapter two of part three discusses national reconciliation in Iraq. It emphasizes Iraq needs national reconciliation between all of its societal and political components with huge effort by a working team that includes experts in history, politics, law, social studies, economy, and psychology to study the matter, remedy the situation and put permanent solutions. It stresses the goal of any project committed to national reconciliation and justice, is one that aims to reach social and national peace.

The first step is the amendment of the Iraqi Constitution and rid it of all articles and phrases that contain sectarian or inciting words and/or any reference of division. Arms should be limited to the state, army or police; end armed militias affiliated to ethnic, sectarian groups and foreign bodies; satellite stations with sectarian or racist tendencies should be closed down; local and foreign radio stations that broadcast news that further division and sectarianism, or encourage people to cling to outdated practices should be closed down as well. These help in the fragmentation of the Iraqi people. And finally devising development plans that guarantee the construction of projects that provide services for the Iraqi people and secure jobs for the unemployed. It is important to point out reconciliation needs concessions and consensus, not gains but courage and conscious will-power of all political and social powers.

Part four looks at Arab national reconciliation from the point of views of Arab political powers like nationalists, Islamists and leftists, discussing constants and common denominators to build an Arab bloc capable of changing the situation and the absence of a united Arab stand towards belonging to one nation and its unity, sovereignty, independence, and fighting the enemy. The book shows Islamic, national and leftist forces stood in a single trench at the beginning of the Arab Spring revolutions. These forces succeeded in some countries to create political partnership but there was no depth nor coordination to face dominant state repercussions.

Chapter two deals with the axes of the Arab crises and reconciliation, discussing the events that took the Arab world by storm and led to the polarization of two weak axes – the "Moderates" and the "Rejectionists" - in line with regional and international forces and entering military, political and economic conflicts on the expense of the people. The first axis moves within the orbit of the US and EU, seeking to normalize relations and thus cooperate with Israel. The second axis moves within the Iran orbit, and seeks alliance and cooperation with Russia and China. While the rest of the Arab countries are busy with their internal affairs and aren't interested in joining either axes.

The book outlines three "futuristic" scenarios for the (2018- 2028) decade. Certain trends support the realization of each scenario: the first is the status quo on the Palestinian, Arab, regional and international levels. The other scenario is represented in the increased strength of the rejection and resistance axis and its success in Syria and depends on the Moderates losing power. The final scenario is represented in the demise of both axes and their replacement with general Arab reconciliation.

Chapter three discusses the events and development of the Gulf crisis and how it has become a crisis of trust and absence of agreement on a number of regional and international issues, which points to the depth of the crisis and its potential consequences on the Gulf Cooperation Council because it is the most dangerous conflicts yet in the region. The crisis led tensions and escalation to cutting diplomatic relations with Qatar by three Gulf states (Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Bahrain), in addition to Egypt. Borders, marine and airspace were closed on June, 5, 2017, which could threaten the Gulf system if the crisis isn't contained.

The book discusses the potential scenarios of the crisis which include breakthrough and reconciliation's scenario, escalation and aggravation's scenario and finally the continuation of the present status quo of stalemate and split between the parties. The book concludes that the real solution to the crisis demands the existence of a number of bases the most important of which is the solution be a Gulf and Arab one and preserve the independence and sovereignty of all states. This is in addition to crystallizing a project to collectively confront the joint challenges – through drawing joint policies to communicating jointly, clearly and seriously– terror groups that are against Arab interests whilst refusing to push the Palestinian issue with internal differences and the preservation of one Arab stands against the Israeli occupation.

Part five enables the reader to see the world between two stages: Division and reconciliation. Chapter one diagnoses the Arab reality with the term "The division stage" exceeding political division and sharp differences between neighboring countries and internationally generating divisions and fragmentation and exposing a lurking enemy. So where can we start to create a suitable healthy environment for a comprehensive reconciliation?

Do we start from a political or intellectual perspective (Islamic, liberal and secular conflicts), or cultural and social aspects? It concludes the current situation is difficult and we should rectify it before its too late according to a higher long-term goal away from man-made borders to reach a comprehensive unified unit and economic and security integration similar to the European Union. There shouldn't be a conflict about the need for political reform, satisfactory democracy, political consensus and sound and open governance.

After ending the Arab division phase and fixating the reconciliation phase, its is important to forge an official and public regional alliance that eliminates Sunnah-Shiite sedition, end the Iran-Gulf conflict, puts basis for a political solution that ends the war in Syria and Yemen and concludes in an Arab-Iranian-Turkish security agreement for peaceful cohabitation, respecting national sovereignty and non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. Three things should be agreed up, first the Palestinian issue and just conditions for peace with Israel; secondly, a program for economic, political and cultural integration, and thirdly, agreement on a balanced method for relation with major countries and blocs without animosity or dependency.

Chapter two discusses external and internal factors that contributed to creating divisions and ways to exit from this by citing historical events and comparing them with the current situation. These include the Arab national project which appeared in Egypt during the 1950s. This project was a spark of hope to a nation's unity - the unity between Egypt and Syria in the early 1960s, giving Egypt a natural leading role. However, the project, which was adopted by the late Jamal Abdul Nasser, failed to build institutions achieve the goals of this project, it also marginalized the role of civil society and obstructed the role of the state's authority and non-democratic practices.

In conclusion the book puts great hope on polarizing the features of a roadmap and vision to move from division into reconciliation on the national level according to mechanisms and principles and practical images for the transition process and its social, economic, legal and

political requirements. The transition should include dialogue, discussions, activating social, political and mutual living, understanding of risks, defining priorities of risks then formulating basis and rules for the best social contract and political system, recognizing basic human rights and agree on an Arab project of development.