Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System

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This article explores the relationship between institutions, roles, and role conflict, and examines the destabilizing effects of the coexistence of overlapping international institutions in the context of the Arab Middle East.

I am concerned with two features of the relationship between institutions and roles. First, while roles figure prominently in many definitions of institutions, they are given scant theoretical or empirical attention in the institutions literature. The second concern is what transpires when the state is embedded in more than one institution and each institution demands a different role and set of behavioral actions. Therefore, the state's actions that are consistent with the role requirements of one institution might be inconsistent with the role demands of another institution. States frequently experience role conflict as a consequence of their presence in two or more institutions, and such coexisting institutions, far from producing the stabilizing qualities observed by many theorists, can generate false expectations and conflict. We need a better understanding of the effects of overlapping institutions on state behavior.

The Arab states system is used as an illustrative case study to demonstrate how role conflict complicated the search for regional stability. Arab states had two distinct roles because of the institutions of sovereignty and pan-Arabism: they were at one and the same time to recognize each other's authority and to follow pan-Arabism to its logical conclusion of political unification. These institutions provided different and potentially contradictory roles for Arab states, which complicated the search for regional order.

Scholars of international relations have gravitated toward the concept of international institutions over the past few years. The reasons behind this move are understandable. Not only does an institutional approach offer a potentially superior explanation of historical processes and change, its emphasis on and positive evaluation of the prospects of interstate cooperation—and particularly so in the context of rapid political change—makes it an attractive theoretical alternative to the pessimism associated with realism and its modern variants (Kupchan and

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Kupchan, 1991:118). By clarifying norms, rules, and principles that guide state behavior, by defining a range of acceptable behavior, and by altering (or creating greater certainty in) a state’s expectations of another state’s behavior, institutions create mutual expectations and stable and predictable outcomes and thereby encourage actors to have greater trust in each other and in the future. In other words, institutions lengthen the shadow of the future and escape the classic competitive trap fostered by the Prisoner’s Dilemma.

Because international institutions offer the promise of order and cooperation among self-interested states, theorists and policy makers alike have ventured from simply discovering the existence of such institutions to proposing their wholesale construction and application to confront a series of international problems. To solve current and future environmental problems, states must build on and strengthen such international institutions as the United Nations Environmental Program and the Montreal Protocols (Young, 1989; Haas, 1990); to steer the international trading community away from the beggar-thy-neighbor policies which accompany increasing uncertainty about future cooperation, states must maintain and strengthen free trade institutions such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Ruggie, 1991); to head off chaos and disorder in Europe, a myriad of security institutions, many that had emerged during the Cold War to confront a very different strategic environment, must be modified, developed, and coordinated (Kupchan and Kupchan, 1991; Adler, 1992). In short, moves in any substantive direction reveal a positive evaluation of how international institutions can mitigate the anxiety and insecurity-producing effects of anarchy, and, therefore, promote stability and increase interstate cooperation.

Roles figure prominently in the explanation of the workings—indeed the very definition—of institutions. Robert Keohane (1989:3) defines an institution as a “persistent and connected set of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations”; and Oran Young (1989:5) views institutions as “identifiable practices consisting of recognized roles linked by clusters of rules or conventions governing relations among the occupants of these roles.” Such definitional inclusion is theoretically justified because it is the routinized behavior associated with institutionally generated roles that is central to producing the cooperative and orderly qualities associated with institutions. In general, institutions distribute roles that mutually constrain actions and that increase the probability of a strong correspondence between expectations and outcomes; that is, once state actors adopt a particular role they usually limit their behavior in a continuous and predictable manner which, accordingly, harmonizes mutual expectations and increases system stability.

I am concerned with two features of the relationship between roles and institutions. First, whereas roles figure prominently in many definitions of institutions, they are given scant theoretical or empirical attention in the institutions literature. Keohane and Young are representative of this gap between the definitional inclusion of roles and the theoretical attention they generate.2 Because roles represent an important link between agent and structure, the failure to examine the relationship between roles and institutions has significant implications for our understanding of how institutions foster the order and stability so widely observed.3

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1See Keohane (1984, 1989), Young (1989), and Strang (1991) for various appraisals of the greater explanatory and analytical power of institutional analyses.

2Whereas international relations theory has been relatively negligent of roles, the foreign policy (Walker, 1987, 1992), American politics (Wahlke, Eulau, and Buchanan, 1962; Searing, 1991), and comparative politics (Hopkins, 1971; Price, 1975; and Magid, 1980) literatures have been more attentive to their research value.

3Searing (1991) suggests that roles provide a bridge between economic and sociological man—that is, roles incorporate how behavior is both purposeful and shaped by the institutional context. Hollis and Smith (1990:167) argue that roles are a “two-way process between structure and actor.”
The study of roles, then, highlights "a chief problem confronting all social and political systems: that of maximizing conformity between expectations for the behavior of members, and their actual behavior. The stability of a system is in part a function of the degree of conformity between the two" (Magid, 1980:328).

My second concern is what transpires when the state is embedded in more than one institution and each institution demands a different role and set of behavioral actions. That is, it is possible that the state's actions that are consistent with the role requirements of one institution might be inconsistent with the role demands of another institution; therefore, the state's actions that are consistent and stabilizing in one institutional setting might breed conflict in another. This is a potentially important area of concern, but one that both rationalist and reflectivist approaches to institutions have failed to examine. For instance, whereas Keohane (1989:163–164) argues that "institutions differentiate among actors according to the roles they are expected to perform, and institutions can be identified by asking whether patterns of behavior are indeed differentiated by role," to my knowledge no rationalist approach to institutions has explicitly addressed either the question of whether or not state roles are incompatible or the implications this incompatibility may have for institutional stability.

Reflective approaches to international institutions also overlook the effects of multiple institutions on state behavior. In contrast to rationalist approaches to institutions that examine how actors with already well defined identities and preferences establish institutions, sociological approaches investigate how institutions do not simply constrain state action but are also an important source of state roles and interests. That is, actors develop a particular identity as a consequence of their presence in institutions. Most likely because of the reflective program's preoccupation with understanding the origin of and changes in the state's interests and preferences, this literature has implicitly assumed that there is one determinative socializing agent. There is every reason to suspect, however, that states are embedded in multiple international and domestic institutions, which implies that states may have multiple roles, identities, and interests. Although this line of argument represents an important theme in the sociological literature that inspires much of the reflective program, curiously thus far the reflective literature has overlooked this dimension. By recognizing that state actors may be influenced by more than one institution, we allow for the possibility that the same state will learn and adopt different roles because of the presence of different (socializing) institutional influences. In sum, we need a better understanding of the effects of overlapping institutions on state behavior; this is particularly so because international relations theorists recognize that states are embedded in a myriad of institutions and indeed encourage movement in this very direction.

This article explores the relationship between institutions, roles, and role conflict, and examines the destabilizing effects of the coexistence of overlapping international institutions in the context of the Arab Middle East. In the following section I discuss the relationship between international institutions, roles, and role conflict. In the section entitled "Role Conflict and the Arab States System" I use the illustrative case of the pre-1967 Arab states system to showcase how overlapping institutions produce contradictory demands on Arab states' foreign policy and

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5See the recent special issue of International Organization (Haas, 1992) dedicated to epistemic communities for some good examples of this approach.

6Here I have in mind the work of Mead (1934), Blumer (1969), Turner (1978), and Stryker (1980).
contribute to regional instability. Specifically, the Arab states system has been characterized by high levels of regional instability, largely a product of the contradictory state roles associated with the overlapping institutions of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty. I conclude by discussing the relationship among international institutions, roles, and stability.

Institutions, Roles, and Role Conflict

Roles can be understood as how the individual (or state) participates in society according to a particular identity and comes to modify behavior accordingly (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:72-74; also see Stryker, 1980:57). Rosenau (1990:212), one of the few contemporary international relations theorists given to thinking about roles, defines them by their “attitudinal and behavioral expectations that those who relate to its occupant have of the occupant and the expectations that the occupant has of himself or herself in the role.” In short, an actor comes to identify with a particular role and accordingly limits its behavior in accordance with the expectations and demands that role generates.

Two immediate issues accompany any discussion of how roles shape state behavior. The first concerns whether states—rather than the leaders who act in the name of the state—occupy roles; that is, to whom do we attribute the actions emitted in the name of the state? This is, of course, a perennial issue for students of international relations: whereas international relations theory (and this is particularly true of the institutions literature) routinely speaks the language of states-as-actors, historical narratives employ the state-as-actor as a shorthand for state officials acting in the name of the state. To what extent are we justified in using language generally reserved for the actions of individuals, and in appropriating theories that are built at the individual level, to discuss and consider the actions of states? Below I briefly identify three approaches that suggest that enduring environmental forces that produce a constancy of state action justify the application of the language of action, roles, and interests to states.7

The first equates the state with its top officials. Whereas the state is a shorthand for the preferences of leaders, the consistency of actions across governments is generally explained by systemic (Krasner, 1978) or domestic (Holsti, 1970) constraints.8 While the first approach views roles as constraints on leaders, the second suggests that leaders are socialized into, and internalize, these roles. Whether a product of belief systems (Little and Smith, 1988) or ideology (Carlsneas, 1987), because the international and domestic environments from which leaders emerge are relatively stable, states’ actions are consistent from one leader to the next. In contrast to the second approach, which holds that individual thoughts and expressions have a social origin, the third, more controversial, stance contends that it is plausible to portray corporate entities as having a stable identity (Douglas, 1986; Kertzer, 1988:17-19; Gilbert, 1989:chap. 5; Wendt, 1992b).

Notwithstanding their specific differences, these three approaches share the view that, first, international institutions are stabilizing because they are not wholly dependent on the individualized whims and preferences of state leaders, and, second, we can reasonably present states as occupying roles and as acting. As E. H. Carr (1964:149) argues, we can justifiably personify states because such categorization “expresses the continuity of institutions.”

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7See Wendt (1992b) for an extended treatment of these issues.
8The bureaucratic politics literature is also relevant here. See Hollis and Smith (1990:chap. 7) for an explicit discussion of roles and bureaucratic-driven state action.
Institutions generate their stabilizing properties once actors consistently adopt a particular role conception and modify their behavior according to each other’s roles, behaviors, and expectations. The second issue, then, is the degree to which roles shape behavior. Although roles do not determine behavior (even though much of the writing in international relations theory implicitly proceeds on the assumption that they do), if the concept is to retain importance it is because roles are constraining. An important distinction here is between position roles and preference roles; the former are generally associated with formal institutions and have well-defined and detailed guides to action; the latter are more closely linked to informal institutions and are less constraining on behavior (Searing, 1991:1249). International relations contains both formal and informal institutions, and when investigating their effects on international processes it is important to recognize that each role type places greater or lesser boundaries on state action. Contrast, for instance, the role of the U.S. in the United Nations' Security Council with its role as a sovereign state in international society. In the former there exists well-defined guides and limits to its actions because of codified rules and procedures; the latter, although still limiting state behavior, allows for greater discretion and behavioral leeway.

This suggests that when examining how roles affect state behavior, and particularly so for preference roles, the state’s understanding of and the meaning it attaches to its role must be incorporated. As Keohane (1989:6; emphasis added) acknowledges, “Institutions may also affect the understandings that leaders of states have of the roles they should play and their assumptions about others’ motivations and perceived self-interest.” K. J. Holsti (1970:245–246) argues that foreign policy elites often express a “national role conception,” which signals the actions that are appropriate to their state and the tasks it should perform in the international system. Therefore, it is important to incorporate a more interpretive perspective (Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986:772–774; Adler and Haas, 1992:367). For instance, the failure of the U.S. to play the role of the hegemon during the interwar period was partially due to U.S. policy makers’ interpretations of the role the U.S. should play in the international system (Kindleberger, 1971).

This raises a related question, the origin of roles. Social roles are never created in a vacuum but are formed in relation to others; it is in the process of interacting and participating within an institutional context that the actor comes to occupy a role. In short, roles are learned. For instance, American decision makers were profoundly affected by the U.S.’s failure to play a more active role in the interwar period and were determined that it occupy the role demanded of it by virtue of its

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9For instance, Holsti (1970) argues that balance-of-power theory assumes that states play established roles (i.e., balancer) and that failure to perform in the prescribed manner increases system imbalance and instability. In other words, the institution of balance of power (Bull, 1977; Holsti, 1992) distributes roles to states, and the failure to act in accordance with these roles potentially increases system instability.

10Giddens (1983:116–117) dismisses role theory for its inherent structural determinism and assumption that actors’ behavior and understandings must adjust to societally distributed roles. In a later work (1984:84) he substitutes social "position" for social role. "Social position ... can be regarded as a social identity that carries with it a certain range (however diffusely specified) of prerogatives and obligations that an actor who is accorded that identity may activate or carry out: these prerogatives and obligations constitute the role-prescriptions associated with that position."

11Similarly, Rosenau (1990:212) argues that roles "vary in the extent to which they allow their occupants discretion in interpreting the expectations and in resolving the conflicts that stem from the occupancy of multiple roles."

12Also see Walker (1987).

13Hollis and Smith (1990:168) similarly argue that "role involves judgement and skill, but at the same time it involves a notion of structure within which roles operate."

14The idea that roles and interests are learned within an institutional context is related to questions of socialization. See Berger and Luckmann (1967), Blumer (1969), Stryker (1980), and Wendt (1992a:399).
power position following WWII (Baker, 1991/92:11). Moreover, actors do not passively appropriate roles conferred upon them by others because they are actively involved in categorizing and classifying themselves; that is, they often explain their behavior with reference to particular roles. For instance, states routinely justify their actions because they are states and are therefore entitled to act in certain ways. In sum, “The occupants of roles not only have an understanding of what is expected of them, but they also carry around a multitude of premises or assumptions about how others in relevant systems will conduct themselves in relation both to them and the problem at hand” (Rosenau, 1990:216–217).

Presently international relations theory suggests that state roles derive from the international system (Keohane, 1989; Wendt, 1992a). That is, it assumes that states learn their roles from other states and from their presence in an international institution. Yet domestic institutions are also a source of state roles. In fact, early role theory slighted systemic in favor of domestic forces, in contrast to today’s structural bent. Holsti (1970:243; emphasis in original) asserts, “The fact of sovereignty implies that foreign policy decisions and actions . . . derive primarily from policy makers’ role conceptions, domestic needs and demands, and critical events or trends in the external environment.” Said otherwise, sovereignty is viewed as a preference role which provides tremendous leeway for state action, and so analysts must look to domestic-generated roles to guide that action. If one takes seriously that states are embedded in domestic and international institutions and that roles do not determine but shape behavior, then one needs to incorporate more fully how actors’ conceptions of their roles are produced and affected by both international and domestic institutions.15

Role Conflict

What happens when state actors are embedded in two different institutions—whether at the domestic and international levels or both at the international level—that call for different roles and behaviors? Key here is the concept of role conflict, which exists when there are contradictory expectations that attach to some position in a social relationship. Such expectations may call for incompatible performances; they may require that one hold two norms or values which logically call for opposing behaviors; or they may demand that one role necessitates the expenditure of time and energy such that it is difficult or impossible to carry out the obligations of another role. (Stryker, 1980:73)

Role conflict may be produced whenever the actor exists in two different institutions that simultaneously demand that it express contradictory behavior.16 Actors have a number of social roles in the course of a day; as professor or mother, husband or wife, owner or worker, and so on. Although “the role selected in response to any situation depends upon the definition and perception of particular events” (Young, 1976:38), often situations structurally overlap, and it becomes difficult to predict which role will predominate.

An important consideration for anticipating the possibility of role conflict is whether states occupy preference or position roles. Each presents advantages and

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15This was an important critique of the regimes literature (Haggard and Simmons, 1987:516) and has come to be identified with the “two-level games” literature (Putnam, 1988).

16Turner (1978:1) describes a related phenomenon when “the attitudes and behaviors developed as an expression of one role carry over into another.” Such an occurrence represents a merger of the person with the role. Here the individual determinants, rather than the situational characteristics, become a better guide to and predictor of behavior.
disadvantages from the standpoint of reconciling role conflict. When states occupy preference roles, leaders have greater opportunity and determination over how to adjust to potentially inconsistent role expectations. This is because behavior shaped by preference roles is a product of the leader’s interpretations of that role and the meanings the leader associates with it. Yet because governments are allowed greater leeway in determining what behavior is and is not consistent with a particular role, there is greater potential for misunderstanding and failed expectations between states is greater because of the different meanings and understandings they attach to that role.17

Position roles hold the opposite advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, because position roles better define and limit state behavior they are better able to standardize expectations, avoid misunderstandings, and increase stability. On the other hand, they may be less resilient to role conflict because they allow decision makers little interpretive leeway to reconcile the competing role expectations they occasionally produce. In sum, it is important to recognize that institutions contain different types of roles, and that these provide important insights into the likelihood of role conflict, how easily role conflict is reconciled, and the prospects for stability and cooperation.

The idea that roles are both appropriated by states and conferred upon them by other states, that states may occupy multiple roles, and that such role conflict can lead to miscalculation and interstate conflict is illustrated by the Gulf War and Saudi Arabia’s decision to allow U.S. troops on its soil in response to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait. A role of sovereign state may have quickly led to the conclusion that Western troop presence was required; the role of representative of the Arab or Islamic nation, however, indicated that such presence would be anathema. Social roles are not only self-professed, they are also conferred upon by other actors. In fact, Iraq may have based its decision to swallow Kuwait whole—rather than simply take the Rumaila oil fields—on a belief that Saudi Arabia would respond in the role of the representative of the Arab nation and not one of sovereign state. According to the Iraqi foreign minister, Tariq Aziz, Hussein assumed that Saudi Arabia would never allow U.S. troops on its soil, and so by incorporating all of Kuwait, Iraq would deny the U.S. the logistical base it would need to reverse the Iraqi invasion (Viorst, 1991:67). The implication is that if Iraq had identified Saudi Arabia as a sovereign state, and not simply as an Arab state, then it might have been more restrained in its actions toward Kuwait. In this way, the presence of both pan-Arabism and state sovereignty confers separate roles, preferences, and expected behaviors for the Arab states, and is directly linked to regional instability.

How do governments resolve role conflict? There is little empirical or theoretical research to provide strong guides.18 Blackman (1970:318) suggests that role conflict is resolved based on the “perceived legitimacy of the expectations, the perceived

17Consider the changing role of the state in the international political economy during the interwar period. Prior to World War I there reigned a laissez-faire domestic and international context, symbolized by the centrality of the gold standard for managing the international economy. Because the role of the state was to promote and guarantee a liberal domestic and international economic order, the state’s role was consistent in both domains. Following World War I, however, domestic social forces began to champion a new role and social purpose for the state, one that was to protect and promote national welfare. That is, this newly defined, domestically generated role conflicted with the state’s traditional role in the international institutional context. This role conflict contributed to the economic instability of the period (Polanyi, 1957). “Embedded liberalism” can be interpreted as the state’s attempt to ameliorate these roles (Ruggie, 1991).

18“Identity salience” refers to the situation in which different identities may be conjured up, and attempts to identify which identity will dominate depending on their relative location in the identity hierarchy (Stryker, 1980:61). Although this sounds helpful, there is frequently little reasonable guide to behavior based on such broad generalizations.
strength of the sanctions imposed for nonconformity to each of the expectations, and the actor’s orientation relative to legitimacy and sanction." Rosenau (1990:213) argues that such conflict is largely reconciled by power politics considerations; and the example of Saudi Arabia supports his realpolitik argument. Rosenau implicitly assumes that state roles are generated largely by the international system; yet because domestic institutions are also an important source of roles we need a better understanding of whether roles generated by domestic or international institutions provide greater salience, are more restrictive and demanding, and are more consistent with its power interests. The state’s survival is rarely at stake but the government’s domestic standing frequently is, so it is possible that domestic-generated roles will have greater force than roles dictated by power considerations. At this early stage it is difficult to suggest how states resolve such conflict.

In sum, a key issue for the study of international institutions, and particularly so with regard to their hypothesized stabilizing properties, is that of role conflict. The present tendency in international relations theory is to focus on one institution and then examine how the state’s roles and its related actions are or are not consistent with the functional requirements of stability and cooperation. To do so, however, fails to recognize how those state roles and their accompanying actions that are consistent with the requirements of one institution may be inconsistent and destabilizing for another. The next section explores these very issues in the Arab Middle East.

**Role Conflict and the Arab States System**

One way to conceptualize the Arab states system and the corresponding state roles associated with pan-Arabism and state sovereignty is to ask, what is the relationship between the part (state) and the whole (the Arab World)? Specifically, there have been two basic visions of how the Arab states system should be ordered which are reflected by the institutions of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty. The first is the idea of the unity of the Arab World, and the focus is on the security and power of the Arab World and not the security and power of any individual Arab state. The second is the belief that the Arab states system should be organized not to project the Arab World’s power but to protect the Arab states’ security and allow each state to pursue its own raison d’etat.¹⁸ In short, each institution contains an understanding of what it means to be—what the role is of—an Arab state.²⁰

This approach deviates significantly from the dominant realist and neorealist explanations of the dynamics of inter-Arab politics and the instability within the Arab states system (Evron and Bar-Siman-Tov, 1975; Taylor, 1982; Walt, 1987; Telhami, 1990).²¹ This literature argues that despite the nominal presence and

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¹⁸This is analogous to F. H. Hinsley’s (1963:chap. 8) provocative reading of the evolution of the European state system.

²⁰Zartman and Kluge (1984:176) argue that “the conception of foreign policy as the ‘role’ of a nation has a deep grounding in Arab political tradition.” Indeed, Nasser himself used the language of role: “For some reason it seems to me that within the Arab circle there is a role, wandering aimlessly in search of a hero. And I do not know why it seems to me that this role, exhausted by its wanderings, has at last settled down, tired and weary, near the borders of our country and is beckoning us to move, to take up its lines, to put on its costume, since no one else is qualified to play it” (cited from Zartman and Kluge, 1984:176). See Korany (1991) for an explicit use of roles in discussing Egyptian foreign policy.

²¹For exploratory purposes I limit my discussion to the Fertile Crescent countries; this is largely consistent with the aforementioned realist literatures. I bracket the role of Islam because (1) Islamic movements were not a prominent force behind the attempted reform of the territorial map; (2) Islamic reforms revolved principally around changing state–society relations and not inter-state relations; and (3) there is a body of Islamic scholarship that suggests that Islam and sovereignty are not incompatible (Piscatori, 1986).
rhetoric of pan-Arabism and the self-proclaimed belief that the Arab states represent a single family and community, Arab states demonstrated the same interactive patterns as did states in other regions and historical periods, and remained fearful of each other’s motivations and actions. Such fears generated a similar and familiar pattern of threatening behavior, balancing, and coalition formation.

Although realist-driven explanations have their obvious parsimonious attractions, they are unsatisfactory in two principal ways when attempting to understand the dynamics of the Arab states system. First, whereas Arab states have evidenced clear balancing formulations, such balances are not driven by a preponderance of military considerations alone. Balance-of-threat formulations are equally unhelpful (Walt, 1987), because frequently these threats are not a product of imminent military invasion, or even of fear of loss of external autonomy (indeed, pan-Arabism suggests that Arab states move precisely in that direction). Simply stated, a neorealist approach “does not predict whether two states will be friends or foes, will be revisionist or status quo powers, and so on” (Wendt, 1992a:398). In short, we require an approach that signals why certain states are viewed as threats even though they represent little military menace; otherwise it is hardly intelligible why, for instance, in the 1940s, a militarily powerful Egypt should fear a substantially weaker Iraq that was a thousand miles from its borders, offered little military challenge, and, in fact, offered itself up for political unification.

Frequently the threat posed by Arab states was not military but rather the successful portrayal of a rival role for the Arab state that potentially undermined the state’s internal and external basis of existence. By suggesting that the purpose of the Arab state was to work toward political unification and to safeguard the common interests of Arab states regardless of their citizenry, pan-Arabism undermined the state’s external and internal sovereignty. Accordingly, an Arab state that successfully wielded the pan-Arab card threatened to subvert the state’s internal and external security. A richer and more complex understanding of inter-Arab dynamics must incorporate how the threat posed by Arab leaders was their willingness and ability to forward a particular understanding of the Arab state’s role and relationship to other Arab states. Power translates into threat only within a certain set of understandings and presentations; the implication is that even relatively weak states represented a potential threat to stronger states. Such a perspective begins to suggest why, for instance, a potential Syrian-Iraqi federation in the late 1940s and the realized Syrian-Egyptian unification in 1958 proved so threatening to the entire region.

Second, a balance-of-power approach presumes that these states accept each other’s sovereignty and legitimacy. Because balance-of-power systems are comprised of sovereign states, a system is more than the ability of the actions by one party to affect the actions of another consistently over time (Bull, 1977:2); just as critical is each party’s willingness to recognize the other members as legitimate parts of the system. Consequently, states should recognize that they have “common interests in the elementary goals of social life” (Bull, 1977:53, emphasis in original), which is a mutual stake in the others’ survival and sovereignty. Such an acceptance and recognition restricts the level of violence present in the community. An even cursory reading of the Middle East, however, demonstrates that states have routinely questioned each other’s sovereignty. Sovereignty was an incomplete conquest in the Middle East, not solely because of the troubled search for empirical sovereignty, a task that frustrated most Third World states, but because of the difficult process of establishing juridical sovereignty.

A brief comparison of the African and Middle Eastern state systems highlights this point. By recognizing each other’s sovereignty, African leaders adopted an institutional armor that imposed self-restraint and limited state actions; African states faced both external and internal security threats, and by accepting juridical
sovereignty they could limit external violence and concentrate on internal threats and the task of state-building (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). In contrast to the African case, Arab leaders, who also ruled states that were arbitrarily created by Great Powers, held a decidedly more ambivalent relationship to both sovereignty and their inherited borders. Far from uniformly embracing each other's juridical sovereignty, at various times Arab leaders strove not only to modify their borders but to erase them altogether.

By reconceptualizing the Arab states system as comprised of the overlapping institutions of sovereignty and pan-Arabism that distributed two different roles to Arab states, we are in a position to address: why Arab states were considered threats; why the Arab states failed to embrace uniformly the principle of sovereignty; and why the search for regional order has been so tortured and painful.22 As Ben-Dor (1983:146) argues, "The transitory situation between these two poles [realpolitik and pan-Arabism] debilitated and denormalized Arab politics for over a generation, and so the unstable nature of the Arab political system destabilized the entire region."23

The discussion is organized as follows. To begin, I briefly discuss the evolution of pan-Arabism, suggest why it can be properly conceptualized as an international institution, and outline how the preference roles associated with the institutions of sovereignty and pan-Arabism produced contradictory role expectations and guides to action for Arab states. Subsequently I examine three principal ways in which these contradictory roles affected the foreign policies of Arab states and complicated the search for regional order. Specifically, I focus on how pan-Arabism complicated the search for regional order by (1) frequently providing Arab states with an incentive and set of expectations to conform to the norms of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty; (2) encouraging a clash between those who wanted to maintain the territorial system and sovereignty and those who advocated reform; and (3) offering different meanings associated with being an Arab state, and how such rival interpretations led to failed expectations, misunderstandings, and conflict.

Pan-Arabism

Born in the literary clubs of Damascus in the late 1800s, pan-Arab movements began to flourish in the decades preceding World War I, demanding an "Arab awakening," a resurgence of an Arab identity.24 During this initial phase there was

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22I have bracketed how the superpowers might have produced or affected these roles for the following reasons. Although the superpowers have left their mark on the region, and the Middle East can be understood as a "subordinate system"—it is penetrated and affected by Great Power rivalries—much historical scholarship portrays the superpowers as accommodating themselves to, accentuating, or mitigating already present inter-Arab dynamics. See Ajami (1981), Ben-Dor (1985), Brown (1984), Korany and Dessouki (1984), Noble (1984), and Ismail (1986) for implicit and explicit endorsements of this position. Indeed, a recent, edited, volume that uses the concepts of roles to examine how superpower relations affected Middle Eastern politics concludes that Middle Eastern "clients" had tremendous autonomy and frequently controlled their patrons (Efrat and Bercovitch, 1991); therefore, roles associated with inter-Arab, rather than superpower, politics can be given greater weight.

23Hudson (1977:54), Noble (1984:48-50), and Ayoob (1992:48-50) also argue that pan-Arabism destabilized the region.

24Integral to the emergence of Arab nationalism was the introduction of the first Arabic printing presses in Istanbul (1812) and Cairo (1882), and the resurgence of Arabic as a language of instruction in primary and secondary schools. These developments paved the way for new vehicles of thought and cultural systems (Antoniou, 1965:38-40). A major impetus occurred with the Young Turk movement of 1908 and its desire to introduce a Turkification program in the Fertile Crescent. In response, Arab nationalists called for full instruction in the Arabic language, greater local autonomy and the protection of Arab rights within the Ottoman Empire, and the promotion of Arab unity and with it a sense of its historic past and a restoration of its glory. Notable at this time, however, was the absence of a demand for Arab sovereignty; most were content with remaining within the Ottoman Empire so long as their other goals of Arab autonomy and the revocation of Turkification were met (Duri, 1987:232).
a conscious attempt to promote and define the Arab nation, to create a political vocabulary of Arab nationalism, and to identify the "we" and 'they' in the geography of identity" (Young, 1976:382).

Arab nationalism increased in strength between the world wars as the result of four factors. First, the norm of self-determination legitimated and strengthened the desire by Arab nationals for independence. Second, during the war the Ottoman Empire and the Allied forces alike believed that the Arab populations represented a lethal military weapon; therefore, both sides attempted to win over the Arab leadership with various promises and guarantees of autonomy to be delivered after victory. These promises whetted the appetite of the local populations for political independence.

The third factor was the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the mandate system. These changes had a significant impact on how Arabs understood themselves and their desired political arrangements (Hourani, 1991:316). Briefly, the British won both the sympathies of the Arab cause and the war, but failed to follow through on the bulk of its promises concerning Arab independence. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire provided the British and the French with an opportunity to reconstruct the Middle East—and they wasted little time in doing just that. In addition to their established presence in North Africa, the European states obtained control of the Fertile Crescent through the mandate system; France now oversaw Lebanon and Syria, and Britain ruled Jordan, Palestine, and Iraq. Consequently, this period introduced two external elements which increased the sense of Arab nationalism: a duplicitous Western diplomacy that betrayed the cause of Arab independence and the recognition of the Zionist movement with Britain as its overseer. The division of these territories into mandates under British and French control rather than into units in the possession of the local rulers did much to develop Arab nationalism.

The fourth factor leading to the growth in Arab nationalism was the increase in extensive and intensive contacts among previously detached Arab communities. Whereas once most contact between Arabs occurred during the pilgrimage (which consequently gave identity a religious flavor), now newspapers multiplied, Arabs began to travel more frequently and to be educated in each other's schools, and even Egyptian films were being shown throughout the entire Arab World, all of which "helped to create a shared world of taste and ideas" (Hourani, 1991:339; also see Porath, 1986:chap. 3). World War II furthered the cause of Arab unity by increasing a sense of Arab identity and a demand for autonomy and independence from foreign forces (Hourani, 1991:356). In general, whereas once Arab nationalism had limited success because of the continued salience of religion, the local political structures, and the lack of coordination between Arabs in disparate locales (Antonius, 1965), after World War I it rose to challenge religious and local identities (Owen, 1992:82–86).

With independence, the Arab states occupied two distinct roles associated with the institutions of pan-Arabism and sovereignty. By aligning themselves with, and appropriating the language of, pan-Arabism, Arab leaders were suggesting that Arab states are "one nation having common interests and security priorities distinct from those of the West. . . . The countries of the area, which enjoyed unity of language, religion, history and culture should—indeed could—create their own system to counter any threat from whatever source" (Heikal, 1978:719).

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25There is obviously considerable debate concerning the nature of British promises, particularly with regard to the dispensation of Palestine. See Fromkin (1989) for a good discussion of Great Power intrigues and broken promises to the Arab populations.
Pan-Arabism’s broad claim that the Arab state derives its moral authority from an Arab nation that was artificially segmented by the West produced a set of demands on and expectations of Arab leaders. Their role was now to protect Arabs—and represent their interests—regardless of their citizenry, and to work toward political unification and therefore bring into correspondence the Arab nation and political authority. Therefore, during this period pan-Arabism can be understood as the belief that (1) “there is or can be created an Arab nation, formed of all who share the Arabic language and cultural heritage”; (2) “this Arab nation ought to form a single independent political unity”; and (3) “the creation of such a unit presupposes the development among the members of the consciousness . . . [and] that their being members is the factor which should determine their political decisions and loyalties” (Hourani, 1946:101).

Can pan-Arabism be regarded as an institution? Although many will concede that it imposed constraints and expectations on Arab states, three objections can be anticipated. The first is that pan-Arabism is simply an ideology exploited for power-seeking purposes by Arab leaders; to take seriously pan-Arabism is to take seriously their rhetoric. I find this charge difficult to sustain for a number of reasons. Although admittedly pan-Arabism has frequently been used by Arab leaders to serve their particularistic interests, we still need to account for why it could be used successfully by them. Part of the reason must reside with the simple fact that pan-Arabism had meaning for Arab populations; therefore, pan-Arabism was more than an Arab leader’s version of alchemy. Second, in their language and actions Arab leaders frequently exhibited a strong sense of the roles they were supposed to play and attempted to portray their policies and actions as consistent with Arabism’s demands. Indeed, Arab leaders may be captured by their own rhetoric. This is one interpretation of why Nasser agreed to the formation of the United Arab Republic with Syria in 1958; far from enthusiastic about political integration, Nasser could hardly reject the proposed merger for fear of being exposed by his own rhetoric (Dann, 1989:78). Therefore, the roles associated with pan-Arabism placed limits and expectations on the actions of Arab leaders. Finally, to argue that pan-Arabism cannot be considered an institution because it is associated with the self-interested aspirations of Arab leaders ignores a fundamental feature of the rationalist approach to institutions: they are the product of self-interested behavior.

The second objection derives from the observation that since its birth pan-Arabism has evidenced historical and regional conceptual elasticity. Notwithstanding pan-Arabism’s variations, historical evidence suggests that the masses were generally sympathetic, and susceptible, to a pan-Arabism that undermined sovereignty and advocated immediate political unification (Owen 1992:87–88). Indeed, whereas most Arab leaders were suspicious of territorial reforms that might strip them of their newly won independence, they frequently vocalized a pan-Arabism that meant not only Arab solidarity but also political integration. Their response was due not only to power-seeking behavior but also to domestic and transnational norms that demanded legitimation along these lines. Therefore, whether because Arab leaders felt constrained by domestic pressures and regional norms or because they had internalized Arab identities that necessitated certain objectives, they regularly vocalized support for, and occasionally adopted, policies that were consistent with pan-Arabism’s demand of political integration.

A third objection to viewing pan-Arabism as an institution is because pan-Arabism’s promise of political integration was never fulfilled. As Patrick Seale

(1986:4) argues, "Arab unity is still a matter of sentiment rather than a well-defined political notion." True enough. Yet there are formal and informal institutions, and the latter frequently place strong expectations and constraints on actors. As Keohane (1989:4–5) argues, institutionalization incorporates three dimensions: commonality, "the degree to which expectations about appropriate behavior and understandings and how to interpret action are shared by the participants in the system"; autonomy, "the extent to which the institution can alter its own rules"; and specificity, "the degree to which these expectations are clearly specified in the form of rules." Although pan-Arabism was weakly institutionalized according to the latter two principles, it subjected Arab leaders to norms that not only constrained their actions but also compelled them to be perceived as working toward Arab unity if not political unification.

Sovereignty, which holds that "the state is subject to no other state and has full and exclusive powers within its jurisdiction without prejudice to the limits set by applicable laws," is widely regarded as an institution (Bull, 1977; Krasner, 1988; Keohane, 1989; Wendt, 1992a). Being recognized as sovereign amounts to a social "permission" granted by the community of states to act with certain powers and implies a certain measure of self-restraint by other members of this community, a "live-and-let-live" attitude, as it were. This "anarchical society" (Bull, 1977) does not mean that states never have conflicts—quite clearly they do—but limitations to these conflicts are structured by the collective acceptance of the principle of sovereignty.28

If the institution of sovereignty instructed the newly independent Arab states to recognize each other's borders and authority over its population, the institution of pan-Arabism sanctioned just the opposite. By occupying the role of representative of the Arab nation, Arab states were expected to protect the Arab nation that enveloped its borders, and to work toward political unification. Therefore, if sovereignty prohibited interference in each other's domestic affairs, pan-Arabism not only sanctioned it but also denied the very distinction between the international and the domestic.29 Arab leaders were expected to conform to regional standards of legitimacy which undermined a strict realpolitik reading of their interests (Khalidi, 1978:696); indeed, pan-Arabism provided domestic and regional sanctions for those who violated its norms. Therefore, Arab leaders frequently found themselves attempting to accommodate and ameliorate contradictory roles; such role conflict complicated the search for regional order.

28Sovereignty has an internal dimension as well. The internal dimension of sovereignty asserts that the state represents legitimate domestic authority. It amounts to a claim that the state is the highest authority, not that it is always able to ensure compliance with its laws. External sovereignty conforms to what Jackson (1990) refers to as juridical sovereignty; internal sovereignty conforms to what he refers to as empirical sovereignty. I use these concepts interchangeably.
29See Owen (1983:20) and Salame (1988:345–346) for how pan-Arabism led to state policies that violated the principle of noninterference. The contradiction between sovereignty and nation existed elsewhere in the Third World, and this was particularly so as sovereignty contradicted the principle of "self" determination. This contradiction was accurately reflected in the 1960 U.N. Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Article 2 states: "All peoples have the right to self-determination; by virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development." Yet Article 6 reads: "Any attempt aimed at the partial or whole disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations." The self, far from being a nation, however, was essentially the colonial territory carved up by the West. Yet it was also recognized that these colonial territories, far from being fully developed "selves," contained multiple personalities because of how the colonial powers carved up the territory. In short, the norms of self-determination and sovereignty were in contradiction (Young, 1991:324–325).
Role Conflict and Regional Instability

At independence most Arab states were expected to adhere to the norms of sovereignty, to honor the principle of noninterference, and to recognize each other’s authority while also respecting the norms associated with Arabism. Arab leaders experienced strong domestic and transnational pressures to adhere to an Arabism that suggested at the least that what mattered was not the state’s interests but the Arab national interest, and at the most that there should be immediate political and territorial integration. Therefore, because Arab states were embedded in the twin institutions of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty, Arab leaders had to consider, articulate, and adopt foreign policies that reflected both sets of roles. Below I consider three ways in which role conflict affected the foreign policies of Arab states and the search for regional order.

Role conflict contributed to regional instability by encouraging Arab leaders to adopt foreign policies that were consistent with the norms of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty; by emitting policies and language that paid tribute to and were consistent with both pan-Arabism and state sovereignty it made mutual expectations and predictability difficult to achieve. There were two primary reasons for this dual stance. A primary, oft-cited, reason for pan-Arabism’s durability is the state’s lack of legitimacy (Hudson, 1977). Arab nationalism simultaneously complicated and assisted the Arab state’s search for legitimacy. As long as citizens in Arab states adhered to an Arab identity and did not identify with the goals of the state, Arab leaders were unable to use state-centric principles to justify their actions; therefore, these same leaders were likely to turn to an Arab political identity that was most salient to its population and to justify their policies as being in the interests of the Arab nation.30 For instance, in their fight for independence, Syrian leaders were more likely to vocalize Arab rather than Syrian nationalism or speak in favor of a Greater Syria because “there [was] no sense of Syrian unity, or even the existence of geographical Syria as a separate country” (Hourani, 1946:117). With the exception of the Lebanese Maronite community, this was true throughout the Fertile Crescent. “There was no historical, cultural, religious, or linguistic justification” for limiting the territorial goals (Brown, 1984:150–151). Such a strategy was available because the masses did question the appropriateness of the current borders and because they were more likely to see themselves as Arabs, not, for instance, as Syrians.

After independence nearly all Arab leaders continued to present their foreign policy in pan-Arab terms. In other words, whereas Arab leaders might recognize that sovereignty provided a basis for regime and regional stability, they also created obstacles to its path by the continual use of pan-Arab slogans for domestic political purposes; this only reinforced Arab, as opposed to state, identities. Accordingly, Arab states vacillated between a policy that corresponded to pan-Arabism and state sovereignty. As Lisa Anderson (1991:72) states:

The individual states of the Arab World are not congruent with, and cannot wholly appropriate, the powerful nationalism of Arab identity, yet they are equally unable to fully transcend or replace it by cultivating purely local loyalties. Thus the elites in the region have vacillated between attempts to portray themselves as the vanguard of Arab unity and to rely on provincial identities and loyalties to engender political support.

30The problems here can be highlighted with the concept of the national interest. The general assumption is that the state, whose mission is to promote the security of the nation, and the nation are circumscribed spatially by the same territory. An Arab leader who evokes the “national interest,” however, is potentially referring to his own population and those living in other Arab states. Consequently, even the mere use of the term national interest potentially violates the principle of noninterference. This is akin to the “national identity dynamic,” the sociopsychological dynamic by which a “mass national public may be mobilized in relation to its international environment” (Bloom, 1990:79).
That these states were expressing role conflict is also reflected by the following statement by Mohammed Heikal, a confidant of Nasser and editor of the semi-official Egyptian daily *Al-Ahram*:

As a state, Egypt deals with all Arab governments, whatever their reforms or systems. She takes her place beside them in the Arab League and at the UN and concludes defence, trade, and other pacts with them. . . . As a revolution, Egypt should deal with the people.\(^{31}\)

He continued, referring to Egypt, “[We have] no right to separate ourselves from the struggle of other citizens of our nation.” Egypt can be understood as having undergone a nearly century-long debate concerning whether or not it is a member of the Arab World, and what that membership entails (Ajami, 1981; Lopez, 1990); it is probably consequential that Anwar Sadat entitled his autobiography *In Search of Identity*.

In general, there are two, conflicting, dynamics at work: Arab leaders have a vested interest in seeing the principle of sovereignty honored because it represents an important basis for state survival; at the same time Arabism serves an important function for most Arab leaders because it provides a normative basis for their actions. In short, by suggesting that their basis of legitimacy was an artifice and a gift of the West, Arab leaders were paradoxically promoting their own domestic power and at the same time opening the door to interference in their domestic affairs by other states. Although such a scenario inevitably complicated their quest for regional and domestic order,\(^{32}\) in the absence of state legitimacy Arab leaders turned to the language of pan-Arabism to bolster their domestic fortunes.\(^{33}\)

Pan-Arabism certainly caused Arab leaders to either change their policies or legitimate them in the language of Arabism, but it is also important to recognize that pan-Arabism and *realpolitik* were not necessarily oppositional categories. That is, Arabism frequently helped to define the state’s goals and its definition of the national interest. The case of Egypt is instructive here: not only were Egyptian leaders forced to remain attentive to the masses’ pan-Arab aspirations, but soon these aspirations did more than constrain Egyptian state interests—they defined them. Until the 1930s Egyptian leaders and intellectuals showed little interest in Arab affairs, that is, events in the Arabian Peninsula and the Fertile Crescent. Egyptians characterized the Arabs as backward and inferior, and as a nation distinct from the Egyptian nation. Although Egyptians might share with Arabs the Arabic language, they shared little else (and Egyptian intellectuals often stressed that the dialects were quite different) (Gershoni and Jankowski, 1987:chap. 5; Porath, 1986:149–151). This attitude toward the Arabs meant that “Arab ‘unity’ was infrequently discussed in Egyptian political circles in the 1920s, and what opinion was voiced on the subject tended both to exclude Egypt from the terms of discussion and to be pessimistic concerning the possibility of Arab unity” (Gershoni and Jankowski, 1987:234). It is significant that the British and French presence in the Levant and the Syrian Revolt of the 1920s—a defining moment in modern Arab history and pan-Arabism—roused little interest in Egypt as an Arab event *per se*, but more as a possible signal of Western intentions in the region (Gershoni and Jankowski, 1987:235, 245–247).


\(^{32}\) The use of pan-Arabism by many Arab leaders might appear irrational because supposedly their “true” interest lies in maintaining the authority of their state, something clearly undermined by calls for pan-Arabism. Tsebelis (1990) argues that the observer focusing only on the need for state sovereignty might portray this behavior as suboptimal, but from the standpoint of the state actor who is interested in both sovereignty and domestic legitimacy it is rational. In Tsebelis’s terminology, the state actor is embedded in a series of “nested games.”

\(^{33}\) Ayoub (1992:48) similarly observes that “these days the narrower the base of a regime the greater is its need to pay lip service to the concept of the Arab nation in an attempt to augment its legitimacy.”
By the mid-1930s, however, the growth of an Arab identity and association with Arab causes within the increasingly politicized Egyptian population translated into societal pressure on the Palace to take a greater interest in Palestine and elsewhere in the Fertile Crescent (Seale, 1986:20; Porath, 1986: chap. 3). For example, Egyptian leaders would have preferred to have ignored the 1936 Palestine riots. At this time Egypt was attempting to convince the British to withdraw from Egyptian soil as soon as possible. Although Egyptian leaders calculated that strong support of Palestinian Arabs would potentially anger Britain, who oversaw the Palestine mandate, the Egyptians nevertheless felt compelled to respond dramatically because of how pan-Arabism had percolated through Egyptian society to produce new standards of domestic legitimacy (Porath, 1986:162-163). As Seale (1986:19) concludes, “Political leaders were not the real initiators of Egypt’s Arab policy: they responded to pressures which had become too powerful to ignore.” The importance of this change cannot be overestimated; because of the growth of pan-Arabism a new set of state roles and interests had emerged.

It is now that Egyptian officials began to consider Egypt part of the Mashreq (the East). In fact, because Egyptian leaders were being forced from below to take a greater interest in Arab affairs they became more interested in making sure that they controlled those events and were not controlled by them. “Indeed, once Egypt opted for membership of the Arab family she quickly saw that her national interest lay in containing the Hashemites, in preventing the emergence in the Eastern Arab World of a power strong enough to challenge her, in preserving the status quo of small sovereign nation-states subordinate to herself” (Seale, 1986:23). Egypt’s Arab policy and increased interest in events to the East cannot be separated from the growth of pan-Arabism and the associated demands it placed on Egyptian leaders. Egypt’s definition of the national interest was directly shaped by the growth of pan-Arabism. The implication is that Egyptian leaders would both use the language of pan-Arabism and pursue a policy that was more in keeping with realpolitik.

The Arab states system was also undermined by the clash between those who wanted to maintain the territorial system and sovereignty and those who advocated change. The region was filled with numerous movements to change its territorial shape; in accordance, different expectations of the Arab state were presented. Consequently, state leaders frequently defined the threat as those state and nonstate actors who championed a rival purpose and role for the Arab state. Arab leaders were quite aware that pan-Arabism and state sovereignty were a deadly mix and would probably destabilize the region. They were, however, of distinct minds concerning how this problem should be resolved. In 1943 Iraq’s Nuri al-Said, in response to the urgings of Britain’s Prime Minister Anthony Eden, convened a summit of Arab leaders to consider political and territorial reforms. Nuri al-Said proposed an immediate federation between Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine, who would then form a new Arab League with Iraq. Although the convention adjourned without substantive agreement, it was a significant moment nevertheless. Arab leaders had elevated pan-Arabism from the streets to the diplomatic table. Pan-Arabism appeared to be gathering momentum.

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34Also see Porath (1986:157–158).
35It is significant, then, that British policy accurately reflected these two forces in the Middle East. As a mandatory power Britain was responsible for “rearing” these countries into statehood and sovereignty, yet it also attempted to hitch its fortunes to a pan-Arabism that wanted to rewrite the region’s territorial configuration. Britain may have believed that by manipulating pan-Arabism they could further their own strategic interests and limit that of the French and the Germans (Khadduri, 1946:10). What is significant is that Britain was interested in attaching itself to a movement it considered unstoppable (Gomaa, 1977:chap. 4).
Indeed, it was the fear of pan-Arabism and its increasing popularity that caused Egyptian leaders to take a leading role in crafting the Alexandria Protocol of October 1944 and in establishing the League of Arab States in March 1945. It was hoped that both actions would end any question of redrawing the Middle East’s map and cause the principle of sovereignty to become the cornerstone of inter-Arab politics (Porath, 1986). Although the conference considered a number of pan-Arab designs—including a unitary state with centralized political authority, and a federated state with a central parliament and executive committee—in the end, members agreed on a loose confederation focused on issues of coordination and cooperation, which essentially amounted to an embracing of sovereignty and independence (MacDonald, 1965:33–38). It appeared that the League of Arab States would resemble other regional organizations that similarly adopted sovereignty as a cornerstone of regional order.

Notwithstanding Egypt’s hope that pan-Arabism could be contained through the League of Arab States, the League failed to answer the basic questions concerning the purpose and role of the Arab state. One reason why the League of Arab States failed to contain pan-Arabism is that whereas many Arab leaders demonstrated a general willingness to order their relations along state-centric, territorial lines, transnational and domestic forces continued to demand and expect another role for the Arab state. These subnational forces, consequently, argued that the rules of inter-Arab interaction were far from settled (Seale, 1986; Maddy-Weitzman, 1993). Noteworthy is the change that occurred in Syrian domestic politics and foreign policy in the few short years following the establishment of the League of Arab States. Those Syrian leaders who were signatories to the League in 1945 were suspicious of pan-Arabism and the territorial reforms advocated by Iraq’s Nuri al-Said. The overthrow of Syria’s President Shukri al-Quwatli by General Zaim in 1949, however, opened a new chapter in Syrian politics and “the struggle for Syria” (Seale, 1986). A number of Syrian groups now came to the fore, many of whom, like the National party and the People’s party, made a defining feature of their political program a more positive evaluation of pan-Arabism.

Syria’s domestic weakness and internal struggles over the future of Syria encouraged other Arab states to involve themselves in Syrian politics, some attempting to encourage the development of pan-Arab expressions, others attempting to discourage them. In other words, because of the state’s lack of legitimacy and transnational forces which demanded a different role for the Arab state, Arabism frequently provided opportunities for Arab leaders to interfere in the domestic affairs of others as long as these intrusions were viewed as serving pan-Arabism’s goals. For instance, King Abdullah of Jordan attempted to insert himself into Syrian politics by drawing from the reservoir of pan-Arabism and his family’s historical ties to this movement (Wilson, 1988). Abdullah was joined by a host of Arab leaders who, in the name of pan-Arabism, attempted to control Syria’s policies and military. As a consequence of these processes the Syrian leadership and its opponents began to make overtures to Iraq and to explore the prospect of unification between the two countries (Seale, 1986; Maddy-Weitzman, 1993). This possibility galvanized Egyptian and Saudi officials to try and counteract and undermine this option; for instance, Egypt proposed a (state-centric) collective security pact in lieu of an Iraqi-Syrian federation.

Although the result of this period of challenges and counterchallenges to the Arab states system was to check Iraqi and Syrian revisionist aspirations, there

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36This is akin to Holsti’s (1992) reading of the Concert of Europe as an attempt by Europe’s Great Powers to ensure that there would not emerge Napoleonic-like revolutionary forces that would challenge the status quo and increase the prospects of Great Power war.
remained a number of substate actors throughout the Arab World who were not as committed to a regional order based on the principle of sovereignty and who demanded that the Arab state go beyond the limitations imposed by sovereignty. In general, pan-Arabism encouraged instability of the Arab states system by providing Arab leaders with a camouflage for their interventions in each other’s domestic affairs. Such intrusions were not only inconsistent with the norm of sovereignty but clearly complicated the region’s search for rules of stability.

Ironically, it was the very Egypt that had hoped to make the League of Arab States a constraint on Arab nationalism that would soon lead pan-Arabism into its most visible, confrontational, and destabilizing phase. What Malcolm Kerr (1970) called the “Arab Cold War,” from 1957 to 1970, can be reconceptualized as a product of a clash between the roles that Arab states should play and how regional life should be governed. The tension between pan-Arabism and state sovereignty increased during this period, for three reasons. First, Israel’s presence and supposed affront and challenge it represented to the Arab World was portentous for maintaining Arab nationalism. “Anti-Zionism became the showcase cause of pan-Arabism, the vehicle for leaders to show their pan-Arabist credentials, or a way to protect themselves from those possessing them” (Pipes, 1983:155). Second, the U.S. was making inroads with the conservative regimes of the Arab World; this not only increased the perceived alien and artificial nature of these states by their societies but also strengthened the sense of national identity through much of the Arab World (Owen, 1992:87–88).

Third, and perhaps most important for strengthening pan-Arabism, was the ascendancy of a new generation of Arab leaders, including Nasser of Egypt, Quassim of Iraq, and Michel Aflaq, the father of the Baath party of Syria. These leaders came of age in the 1930s, when state-centric nationalists, who were associated with a particular constellation of political and economic interests, were leading their countries to independence. Beginning with the Suez War, these new Arab leaders rejuvenated pan-Arabism and lent it greater credibility and practicality, emphasized the Arab peoples’ common roots and dangers, and challenged the identity, purpose, and authority of the Arab state. And, as evident from the widespread appeal and tremendous excitement these leaders’ messages generated with the Arab masses, they were activating a barely submerged force and talking directly to the citizens of other Arab states (Korany and Dessouki, 1984:29). In general, Arab leaders were openly challenging the territorial basis of the Middle East as they articulated a belief that “the newly independent Arab states had enough in common, in shared culture and historical experience as well as shared interests, to make it possible for them to come into close union with each other, and such a union would not only give them greater collective power but would bring about that moral unity between people and government which would make government legitimate and stable” (Hourani, 1991:401). Various Arab leaders were arguing that the Arab people confronted a uniform set of challenges that called for common responses, and, ideally, political unification.

Consequently, the tension between sovereignty and pan-Arabism led to both domestic upheavals and inter-Arab conflict between those who supported Nasser (and pan-Arabism) and those who did not. The zenith of pan-Arabism, the formation of the United Arab Republic between Syria and Egypt in 1958, only further destabilized the region:

The proclamation of the union [between Syria and Egypt] had an electrifying effect on all Arab peoples, who saw in it the beginning of the realization of the Arab nationalist dream and looked to other Arab states to respond to the call to enlarge it. Iraq and Jordan responded by forming their own federal union, the United Arab Kingdom, on February 14, 1958. Yemen joined the United Arab
Republic in a federative arrangement called the United Arab States. Lebanon began to slide toward civil war. . . . In Saudi Arabia . . . nationalist sentiments swelled. (Safran, 1988:85)

Nasser’s promotion of a “unity of ranks,” his slogan for stressing that the division of the Arab nation into several states was an artificial creation of the West, and his establishment of the United Arab Republic destabilized the entire Middle East. Nasser’s challenge led to the formation of the Arab Federation (ittihad) between Jordan and Iraq two weeks following the establishment of the United Arab Republic (Dann, 1989:chap. 6). What is important is that the external environment was viewed as threatening, not simply because of the fear that the UAR would pose a military threat to the Arab World,37 but rather because its successful, rival, interpretation of the role of the Arab state provided a challenge to both the governing norms of the inter-Arab state system and the domestic legitimacy of many Arab states. In short, the institution of pan-Arabism continued to influence both Arab masses and leaders alike, who, in turn, challenged the earlier conception of state sovereignty as the cornerstone for regional life. Such conflicting role expectations significantly complicated the search for regional stability.

The third way that pan-Arabism accentuated regional conflict was by producing different meanings and understandings concerning what being an Arab state demanded. As I argued earlier, although Arab leaders supported pan-Arabism, they were of different minds concerning what that entailed or meant. Such conflict of meaning was highly likely given that pan-Arabism allocated a preference role, one that was dependent on the interpretations and meanings of the actors that occupied that role. Different interpretations could be expected to produce false expectations and conflict. Order would be possible only after collective meaning was established (Adler and Haas, 1992:368).

That pan-Arabism was subject to various interpretations was true both spatially and temporally. For instance, from the mid-1940s through the mid-1950s there were significant differences between the Arab states concerning what it meant to fulfill pan-Arabism’s norms. Saudi Arabia was suspicious of a pan-Arabism that potentially implied unification, and acquiesced to participating in various Arab summit meetings and deliberations only after it was guaranteed that Egypt shared with it an antipathy to unification schemes. The same Arab state also showed an ability to “learn” or adopt a new meaning and interpretation of pan-Arabism. Perhaps the most visible example is Egypt, which fluctuated among a pan-Arabism that meant inter-state cooperation (Faisal), one that meant political unification (Nasser), and one that meant raison d’état (Sadat). It is important, however, not to assume that such changes represented simply changes in personality; there is every reason to believe that these leaders were themselves representing social forces, changes in state-society relations, and the expectations and demands that societal forces had of the state’s foreign policy.

In sum, the twin institutions of state sovereignty and pan-Arabism significantly affected the foreign policies of Arab states and complicated the region’s search for order and stability. I have identified three reasons for this dynamic. First, because of pan-Arabism Arab states were on a constant search for legitimacy: their foreign policies often articulated, and at the least were couched in, Arabism’s designs, which only hindered the goal of institutionalizing sovereignty. Second, there were both state and nonstate forces that continued to place pan-Arabism on the agenda and to argue that the role of the Arab state and the design of the regional system

37The obvious exception here is the Yemen War between 1962 and 1967.
was still far from settled. Consequently, there was a direct relationship between those actors who were viewed as a threat and their presentation of a role for the Arab state that was consistent with pan-Arabism. Third, Arab states had different understandings of what pan-Arabism meant and what was expected of the Arab state. Such different interpretations produced false expectations and bred inter-state conflict. In general, such conflicting behavioral propensities meant that it was difficult to establish a stable set of expectations and a common set of meanings and understandings in inter-Arab relations; this clash of roles and understandings concerning what was expected of the Arab state complicated the search for predictable and stable expectations upon which any regional order would be based.

Conclusion

The concept of international institutions has swept international relations theory, but unfortunately this sweep has not included a detailed and careful study of the concept of roles. The neglect of the relationship between roles and institutions is unfortunate, for roles, by virtue of their ability to constrain state activity and harmonize expectations, are inextricably linked to questions of international cooperation and stability. In other words, the concept of roles is central for appreciating fully how, and under what conditions, international institutions produce stability. I want to conclude by considering, first, the relationship between role conflict and institutional instability and, second, how institutions promote stability not only by encouraging a stable set of expectations but also by helping to shape state interests.

Institutions facilitate social order once actors play set roles, which leads to certain institutionalized patterns of interaction that provide some degree of predictability and certainty in daily life. States frequently experience role conflict because of their simultaneous presence in institutions that demand contradictory role expectations and performances: acting in a manner that is consistent with one role might undermine the stability of another institution. Sovereignty failed to produce the same stabilizing outcomes in the Middle East as in Africa because pan-Arabism assigned to the Arab state a contradictory role and associated behavioral expectations. Because of the coexistence of pan-Arabism and state sovereignty Arab states were expected at one and the same time to act in a manner that was consistent with sovereignty and to recognize their own artificiality and transitory nature. State sovereignty offered some assurance of survival, giving Arab leaders a strong political interest in maintaining these borders, limiting regional violence, and recognizing each other’s sovereignty. Yet the belief that they shared a common identity, the idea that these were supposed to be national states, and the understanding that the West had arbitrarily created the Arab states and hence constructed a strong obstacle to Arab unity, combined to create strong domestic pressures for, and to produce a generation of Arab leaders that expressed, pan-Arab aspirations. Role conflict in the Middle East complicated the search for regional order. In general, frequently states are expected to perform any number of roles that may conflict with one another; this may be particularly true in an era of increasing interdependence that embeds state actors in a multiplicity of institutions (Rosenau, 1990:213).

The concept of role conflict offers potentially important cautionary notes for both neoliberal institutionalism and neorealism. Neoliberal institutionalism is most relevant where there are both mutual interests among states and institutions to

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38See Rosenau (1990:215–216) for additional insights to be gained from an examination of roles.
facilitate cooperation (Keohane, 1989:2–3); these conditions are likely to encourage states to evaluate outcomes according to absolute, rather than relative, gains. This study, however, suggests an important addendum: the presence of two or more roles, even where mutual interests attend in both, might both preclude the institutionalization required to encourage cooperation and increase the prospect of conflict and, with it, the salience of relative gains. Specifically, because pan-Arabism holds that Arab states have common interests, and sovereignty suggests that states have, at a minimum, a shared interest in each other’s survival, Arab states were seemingly positioned to favor absolute over relative gains. Inter-Arab cooperation and absolute gains were undermined, however, by role conflict and the regional suspicions that it bred. In short, whereas the presence of common interests and an institutional setting might increase state interest in absolute gains and cooperation, the presence of role conflict, even where shared interests for both roles attend, might reintroduce the importance of relative gains.

Role conflict undermines neorealism’s self-proclaimed goal of predictability in two ways. First, it challenges the general neorealist claim that international institutions, and particularly so for those that are weakly organized, are ephemeral, and that powerful actors can overrun their dictates when they view their demands as counter to the state’s interests. Whereas Arab leaders successfully ignored pan-Arabism’s demand of political unification, they were less successful at resisting its other charges. As Young (1992:161) argues, the “effectiveness” of an institution is determined by “the extent that its operation impels actors to behave differently than they would if the institution did not exist or if some other institutional arrangement were put in its place.” In these terms there is little question of pan-Arabism’s effectiveness. Second, role conflict suggests that the identity, role, and preferences of state actors cannot be assumed a priori. Although the institution of sovereignty may have long-run socializing tendencies such that it promotes “sameness” among state actors (Waltz, 1979:128–129), state actors often exhibit various roles as a result of their presence in different international institutions. Therefore, to attempt to deduce state interests from the international distribution of power is potentially misleading. Because “neo-realists have disregarded some of the most important sources of expectations lying at the individual (subjective) and institutional (intersubjective) levels” (Adler and Haas, 1992:369), they have ignored an important source of interstate conflict.

If roles are an important variable in explaining institutional stability, then we require a greater understanding of the source of roles. The present structuralism in international relations theory suggests that systemic forces represent the most potent origin of roles; pan-Arabism, however, highlights how domestic and regional forces must also be counted as additional sources. Moreover, we need greater attention to the relationship between regional and international systems; frequently international relations theory ignores that states are expected to adhere to both international and regional roles. Indeed, the necessity of examining the relationship between regional and international systems is probably more salient today because of the end of the Cold War and the increasing autonomy accorded to many regions as a consequence of their declining importance to the West. The decline of the Cold War has precipitated a reconsideration of nationality and territorial questions, which has prodded a complex search for identity for many states. For instance, a current debate in Turkey revolves around whether Turkey is part of the Islamic, pan-Turkic, or European community; the answer to such questions will have important foreign policy implications.

If states frequently experience role conflict, and interdependence increases that frequency, then we need greater attention to both how states reconcile such conflict and how such role conflict might act as an important source of instability.
An important consideration in attempting to understand how states reconcile role conflict is whether states occupy preference roles or position roles. Earlier I suggested that (1) while preference roles grant states greater opportunity to reconcile potentially inconsistent role expectations, this behavioral leeway is also associated with a greater likelihood for inter-actor misunderstanding and, hence, instability; and (2) while position roles better define and limit state behavior they may be less resilient to role conflict because they allow decision makers little interpretive leeway to reconcile the competing role expectations they occasionally produce.

The relationship between pan-Arabism and state sovereignty illustrates how preference roles offer these advantages and disadvantages. Pan-Arabism’s failure was partially due to the different understandings held by Arab leaders of what it demanded; during the early postwar period Arab leaders were not necessarily opposed to pan-Arabism, but they did present very different interpretations of what being an Arab state entailed. Indeed, a dominant explanation for the decline of pan-Arabism was that it generated false expectations and hopes (Ajami, 1981), which can be partially attributed to conflicting interpretations concerning what was expected of the Arab state. Because state sovereignty and pan-Arabism are informal institutions that distribute preference roles for Arab states, both allowed for a multiplicity of behaviors depending on domestic and international structures, states’ interactive learning process, and their own interpretation of the meaning and expectations associated with pan-Arabism.

In sum, it is important to recognize that institutions contain different types of roles, and that this has important implications for the likelihood of role conflict, how easily role conflict is reconciled, and the prospects for stability and cooperation. Regional stability in the Middle East would only increase as the Arab states began to share “specific goals and interlocking phases of performance” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967:72) and come to have mutual expectations and shared understandings.93

This discussion of pan-Arabism highlights the limits of anarchy-centric and microeconomic approaches to the study of international politics and institutions. Said otherwise, it identifies the benefits to be gained by adopting a more sociological approach. Specifically, an exclusive focus on anarchy misses how pan-Arabism helped to define the definition of the national interest, the content of state interests, and why some states were considered a threat. For instance, in Egypt as the definition of the national interest expanded from the Egyptian nation to include the Arab nation—an expansion that was a product of transnational forces and linkages not necessarily encouraged by Egyptian leaders—there was an accompanying shift in the definition of the Egyptian state interests: a foreign policy that once evidenced relatively little attention to events in the Fertile Crescent now found that events there were of concern. Indeed, Egyptian leaders believed that whereas pan-Arabism might hinder the state’s interests—for it was nurturing a détente with Britain that it hoped would increase its autonomy—they found the

93This discussion helps to account for pan-Arabism’s Mark Twain-like existence and the constant writing of pan-Arabism’s obituary (Ajami, 1978/79, 1981). Because pan-Arabism and state sovereignty are preference roles they are capable of embodying a different meaning and interpretation over time without one institution displacing the other. Specifically, pan-Arabism’s meaning has changed from political integration to inter-Arab consultation and cooperation (Owen, 1992:90). Therefore, in contrast to the early post World War II era, presently pan-Arabism and state sovereignty are not incompatible. Although this paper did not address the so-called decline of pan-Arabism, in another paper I argue that inter-Arab interactions and state formation processes have promoted a state-national identity that is better able to compete with an Arab national identity (Barnett, 1998). Therefore, I attempt to trace how one institution “won out” over another.
demands of pan-Arabism too strong to ignore. It is impossible to understand this change in Egyptian foreign policy by searching for external security threats; it becomes comprehensible only by examining the change in the idea of the nation among the Egyptian population. In short, the institution of pan-Arabism not only provided an important source of expectations of state behavior, it also helped to define the content of state interests. Finally, as pre-Nasser Egyptian leaders now considered Egypt as part of the Arab World, they came to define as a threat those states that attempted to challenge the norm of sovereignty and present a role for the Arab state that was consistent with the dictates of pan-Arabism.

Therefore, this discussion is consistent with those theorists who desire to move beyond rationalist approaches to international institutions and to champion a reflective research program that reverses the traditional relationship between institutions and interests. Specifically, this discussion reinforces the need to examine not only how pre-given state interests shape institutions but also how institutions shape state interests. There is an expanding literature that is interested in overcoming neorealism’s adherence to exogenously determined and theoretically given state preferences, and its failure to recognize that interactive learning, transnational institutions, and domestic forces can be an important source of state interests (Ikenberry and Kupchan, 1990; Adler and Haas, 1992; Wendt, 1992). Nevertheless, this discussion suggests that reflective research should pay greater attention both to the multiple sources of state roles and interests, and to how states may express and embody a number of roles at any one time. Too frequently this literature concentrates on one external source of state interests and fails to recognize that there are multiple sources of state interests. In general, this discussion reinforces the need for a better understanding of the relationship between state preferences and institutional structures; such a relationship potentially yields important insights into the nature of stability and conflict in international institutions.

References


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40This approach is consistent with Parsons’s solution to the problem of social order, that through the course of socialization the individual learns the norms, values, and ends of society that are proper and correct (Barnes, 1988:25). As Kupchan and Kupchan (1991:132) argue, "Institutions operating under conditions of mitigated anarchy can . . . promote cooperation by deepening the normative and ideational basis of an international community of nations."


