

# CONTEMPORARY ARAB VIEWS ON GLOBALIZATION

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Among the important issues currently discussed by Arab intellectuals, businessmen, and other leaders is the phenomenon commonly referred to as "globalization". Although the concept is not fully understood from either a theoretical or practical point of view, we can observe a number of impressions and attitudes that currently prevail among Arabs concerned with globalization. It would be useful in this respect to consider the various motivations and reactions related to this issue that come into play in the Arab World.

Islamic movements throughout the Arab World, including both moderate and extreme factions, view globalization as an obstacle to creating the "Islamic regime" they hope to establish, if not a "conspiracy" against such a regime. Nationalist and left-wing movements in the Middle East, with their varying degrees of acceptance and influence, consider globalization to be incompatible with their Arab nationalist aspirations. They see it a rejection of the Arab World and the incorporation into the Middle East of an expansionist Israel, which has never given up its dream of "Greater Israel", as the dominant power in the region. In north Africa, on the other hand, the attention of the "modern" educated classes, businessmen, and leaders is primarily focused on the issue of "partnership" with the European Union, and are influenced by the French, who are wary of globalization and the threat of American domination.

It is at present quite difficult to find an Arab perspective that welcomes globalization, defends it, or stresses its advantages. The scholar is therefore limited to presenting the main elements of Arab viewpoints that oppose globalization or are suspicious of its motives, while focusing on the dangers it poses to Arab nationalism and economic development.

## **1- Globalization: Concept and Questions**

The first point we should mention is that although the term globalization first appeared in the arena of finance, trade, and economics, it soon expanded beyond this limited scope. Today globalization is considered a worldwide system or trend that encompasses finance, marketing international exchanges and communications, politics and ideology. When a specialized term is used outside the limited field of specialization where it first appeared, it becomes common property and topic of universal discussion. The prevailing attitude in the Arab World, indeed in much of Europe and the developing world as well, is based on the common, universal understanding of the issue. We shall bear this in mind as we consider the contemporary perspectives to be found throughout the Arab World with respect to this issue that concerns us all.

Perhaps the most widespread understanding of globalization is that it is the process of making something global, of changing it from something limited and controlled into something unlimited and uncontrolled. The limited entity we are referring to here is the nation-state, with its geographical borders and strict control of customs and the transport of goods. Nation-states also defend themselves against any external danger or interference, whether economic, political, or cultural. The unlimited entity is the world, or the planet Earth. According to this understanding of globalization, it entails elimination of national borders in economic (financial and commercial) terms, and the operation of economic forces on a worldwide level. The fate of the nation-state is the first issue raised in the Arab World when this subject is considered.

As this concept first appeared in the United States with the sense of expansion and universality, it is not difficult to view the call for globalization as an attempt to extend the American model to encompass the entire world. In other words, because the call for globalization originated in the economic and financial circles of the United States, one might conclude that it is not merely a means of modern capital development, but also an attempt to impose a particular model. In addition to being an economic system, globalization is seen as an ideology that reflects, serves, and reinforces this system. Some Arab writers equate globalization with Americanization, or the universal expansion of American ideas and values.

In view of the foregoing, a number of examples and comparisons suggest themselves. The wave of colonialism that swept over the world in the second half of the last century and the beginning of this century is viewed as the latest stage of “traditional” capitalism, brought about by the industrial revolution in Europe. Is globalization just another form of colonialism? Is it correct to call it the latest stage of the “new” capitalism, brought about by the information revolution and developments in the fields of technology and communications? In other words, is globalization equivalent to “post-colonialism” (and here “post” does not mean the opposite of “pre” but rather the continuation of a particular phenomenon in another form), that is, a new form of colonialism, just as we use the term “post-modern” without meaning a break from modernity and its elements?

If globalization does indeed contain elements of expansion and domination, how will it affect countries that have not yet entirely thrown off the shackles of traditional colonialism or eliminated its lingering effects? How will it affect countries that aspire to build a nation-state, complete their liberation, and achieve economic development, as is the case with the countries of the Arab World?

These are the principal and fundamental questions that must be addressed in our discussion of what today we call globalization. Let us explore them in greater detail.

## **2-Globalization: Growing Disparity and Increasing Poverty**

The term globalization was first used in economic circles to describe a phenomenon that became increasingly common over the past few decades : the expansion of production and trade to encompass the entire world as a potential market. Some scholars describe this phenomenon as the current stage in the development of capitalism, as its history begins only with the dominance of finance in the world of capitalism. Others see it as the culmination of a long period of economic development and expansion that goes back to the fifteenth century and the European Renaissance. It is characterized by technological advances in the fields of communications, transportation, and advertising, and by the creation of a single global market, with the same products and manufactured goods available everywhere at comparable prices, thus creating, unified consumption and standard consumer habits worldwide.

This sort of globalization is being led by a new breed of economic actors. In the past, from the European Renaissance up to the middle of this century, the dominant players in modern economics were merchants, industrialists, and managers who controlled the capital, and their activities were confined within borders of their particular nation-state. Beyond these borders it was the state itself that engaged in commercial transactions on their behalf. In other words, economics was ruled by the logic of the nation-state, the logic of domestic vs.

foreign. But the globalization of today is characterized by economic activities carried out by independent contractors and industrial or financial groups, assisted by their governments, through multinational corporations and establishments. Their goal is to overcome borders and eliminate the distinction between domestic and foreign, and to gain control of worldwide economic and financial activities. Because competition and mergers are the driving forces behind this type of economic activity, the number of actors or players has been greatly reduced, with the inevitable result of concentrating global wealth in the hands of the fortunate few. Experts estimate that no more than 15 more or less integrated global networks control the world's markets, and that the owners of these networks are the real masters of today's world, the world of globalization.

The first manifestation of globalization, from this point of view, is the concentration of worldwide economic activity in the hands of a small group of actors, resulting in the marginalization or even the elimination of everyone else. This concentration of power is inevitably accompanied by increased disparity among nations and within individual nations. The following examples are among those cited by experts in the field to illustrate this phenomenon.

Five countries -the United States, Japan, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom- are home to 172 of the world's 200 biggest corporations. These 200 giants in effect control the world's economy, and they are determined to strengthen this control. Their worldwide investments increased rapidly in the period from 1983 to 1992: a fourfold increase in production and three times the number of international transactions. A United Nations report stated that 358 wealthy individuals in the world control financial resources that are equal to the combined resources of 1.3 billion people living in poverty. Expressed in other terms, 20 percent of the world's wealthy control 80 percent of domestic production of raw materials throughout the world. In the United States, total wealth increased by 60 percent from 1975-1995, but less than one percent of the country's population were beneficiaries of this increase.

Among the social consequences of this excessive worldwide concentration of wealth is a widening of the gulf between nations and between the segments of a single society -not just between classes, but between the groups, subgroups, and individuals that constitute each level of distinction. It is not uncommon for the income of two or three executives in a bank, for example, to equal the combined incomes of half of the lower and mid-level employees of the entire establishment. This phenomenon of increasing disparity, which has long been considered a characteristic of the "backwardness" that plagues many developing countries, has begun to appear frequently in the developed countries, particularly in the United States and Europe. An American scholar observed that in the United States the lower middle class is sinking to the level of a third-world country, while the wealthy - in comparison with this lower middle class -have begun to resemble the wealthy classes of third world countries. This great disparity between rich and poor is characteristic of the backwardness of third world countries, if not one of the causes of this backwardness, and that is exactly what is happening in the United States according to the above-mentioned scholar.

The same sort of social deterioration is occurring with great speed in Europe, where forced globalization is imposing fierce competition, reduced benefits, and fewer social services. This trend will have dire consequences by broadening social differences that are already considerable and widespread. In the Arab World and other developing countries, disparity is growing day by day and is expected to become even more severe in the future -as it is

reflected directly in terms of stability and security - with policies of privatization that these countries are pursuing, by choice or by force. The immediate consequences of such policies include laying off huge numbers of excess workers in the public sector, which had traditionally employed them in order to reduce society's burden or unemployment .

One of the direct results of globalization is increased poverty, which is an inevitable consequence of increased disparity . The economic principal that rules the global economy is " producing more goods with fewer workers ". The problem that preoccupies scholars and specialists in the field can be stated as follows: If economic growth in the past used to create jobs, economic growth in the context of globalization and extreme liberalism leads to -and in fact depends on- a decrease in the number of jobs. A number of sectors in the fields of electronics, information, and communications, which are among the fastest-growing in the today, require only a small number of workers. In the context of globalization and privatisation technological advances lead to increased unemployment, and in turn, to social crises.

### 3. The ideology of globalization and the World Empire

Although globalization appears to be, at least on the surface, a result of the tremendous advances that have been made in the fields of computer and information technology over the pas few decades, some scholars trace it back, as an economic, information, and technological system, to an initiative proposed in 1965 by a group of visionaries in the United States. Their initiative consisted of three elements, which they incorporated into a working plan to ensure Washington's dominant role in the world.

The first element involves the use of world markets as a tool to disrupt the balance achieved in many nations through legislation and programs to provide social support.

The second and central element is the use of information and the media to bring about the desired changes at both the local and global levels.

The third element is concerned with markets and competition, advocating the extern position that the market should play a role similar to the process of natural selection in Darwinian theory, applying the biological concept of " survival of the fittest " to global economics.

In effect, we are faced with a distinct ideology that is based on three principles :

1. Breaking up the current system of nation-states to enable multinational conglomerates and the " new capitalism " networks to gain control of the world.

2. Using information and modern means of communication in a campaign of cultural and intellectual imperialism to single out a small group of educated individuals (particularly technocrats) and to create an elite circle of " managers " who are mindlessly focused on profits to the exclusion of everything else. Their prevailing philosophy of self-interest develops theoretical instruments to reduce tensions and resolve disputes, seeking the solution to every problem in technology and the media without giving any consideration to the human and moral aspects of the issue.

3. Treating the world and human beings in an inhumane manner, according to the principle

of survival of the fittest, where the " fittest " means the most successful in acquiring wealth, influence and power. In the context of this philosophy, privatization, free enterprise, and competition are all part of an ideology that promotes the marginalization and elimination unnecessary labour, according to the principle of " more profits, fewer workers " .

One scholar specialized in the field has focused on the imperialist nature of globalization, pointing out that it is not merely a program to be implemented or a campaign to improve competition and increase international trade, but rather a system imposed by the imperialism of monetary capitalism -as distinct from the capitalism of goods and products- which has pushed liberalism to its most extreme and brutal limits. Globalization has led to the elimination of the institutions which have been used by governments for the past 50 years to promote social balance. One of the basic elements contributing to this balance has been paid labor, which in addition to providing income is also a means to enhance social cohesion. Another element was the international monetary system based on fixed exchange rates, and finally, there were strong international institutions which imposed discipline and order on the system of free capitalism. The destruction of these three elements has led to widespread marginalization and the loss of millions of jobs, especially among the young, creating massive unemployment even in many relatively advanced countries. The situation was aptly described in an article written by a former official of the United States Department of Defence, which appeared in the march-April 1996 edition of the American journal *Foreign Affairs*. In this article the author explains how in the near future. The United States will be able to strengthen its political domination of the world through its unrivalled ability to incorporate various types of complicated information systems. He believes that geopolitical control, and therefore world domination, has come to depend on the control of intangible power -the power of the technology and information that today define the borders of cyberspace (the economic and political borders defined by advanced electronic means of communication).

This we find that globalization is replacing national borders with invisible, imperialistic borders drawn by the networks of international power that control the world's economy, tastes, and culture.

In the Arab World, as in all regions that aspire to economic and cultural development within the framework of a national homeland, globalization is viewed as a phenomenon where all progress and each step forward is at the expense of the state and the nation. The authority and powers of the state, not only in terms of economics and information, but also in political and cultural matters, are being usurped by global institutions. The results are similar to those of privatization program that transfer ownership from the state to the private sector. In the age of globalization, the private sector may well be controlled by foreigners, and in fact, it "should be" controlled by capital, which has no nationality. Globalization appears to have three targets: country, state, and nation. If we eliminate these three entities, what will be left at the national or local level?

What will remain to take their place is global imperialism for the age of globalization, which will comprise:

- 1- The multinational corporations and institutions that are taking over the management, direction, and control of the world, thereby taking the place of states throughout the world.
- 2- Human beings in every region of the planet who are able to consume the uniform goods, products, and every services offered to them by globalization, including the electronic

goods that dictate their shared tastes, preferences, and desires; in short, international consumerism in the age of globalization

- 3- the rest of the world's population, who do not have the financial means to consume and are thus subject to marginalization and dismissal, by the process of survival of the fittest, characterized by competition that is fiercer than ever before and whose motto is "more profits, fewer workers"?

The world of globalization, when viewed from this perspective, appears to be a world without countries, states, or nations. It is a world of corporations and networks, a world of "actors", who run things, and the "acted upon", who consume the food, drink, pictures, information, and the myriad sights and sounds that bombard them from the airwaves and communications networks with economic, political, and cultural messages of every kind. This is their new "country" with no regard for geography or history; a country with no borders, no memory, no heritage.

#### 4- Globalization , Divisiveness, and the End of Politics

If globalization is a system that overcomes the limits of country, state and nation, it is also a divisive and disruptive force, at least it leads to such results. Weakening the authority of states and diminishing their status in favor of globalization leads inevitably to the awakening of allegiances to groups that precede or are in conflict with allegiance to the state, such as membership in a tribe, clan, religion, or sect. The result is a division of society and the breakdown of its unity, which often causes the state, or what is left of it, to become preoccupied with preserving "law and order".

The question that must be asked with respect to the Arab World and other developing countries is how can development and progress be achieved if state has become no more than a policeman whose job is to preserve law and order for the " new winners", that is, the multinational corporations and institutions whose motto, as we have mentioned above, is "more profits, fewer workers". What will be the meaning of politics and democracy in this world of globalization

The original meaning of politics in Greek is " city management ", with city here referring to the city -state. Its citizens participated in discussions and decision-making by exchanging opinions , presenting arguments, and passing laws based on the opinion of the majority, which overruled individual preferences. The meaning of politics is still basically the same today, except that modern states are much larger and more complicated than the city-states of ancient Greece, and have a wider range of duties and functions to perform. Perhaps it would not be inaccurate to replace the word " city " with "state ", and thus define politics as managing the affairs of state.

The affairs of a modern state are many and multifaceted, including.

Affairs of the country, protecting its borders and the integrity of its land people, defending its air and water routes, etc...

Affairs of the nation ensuring its economic well-being and political independence, preserving its cultural heritage, etc.

Affairs of the government responsibilities taken on by the state on behalf of the nation, with the authority to preserve law and order, to dispense justice, to plan and implement development programs, to co-operate with other governments to defined economic and

strategic foreign interests, etc.

Politics, or managing the affairs of state - these multiple diverse and interrelated affairs in practised in democratic systems through free expression as the right of every citizen, through writing, speaking, the press, and the other media, as well as voting its leaders into or out of office, passing legislation, etc...All these forms of expression constitute democracy.

The question we must now ask is what role is there left for politics, after globalization has swallowed up all the affairs that used to be its domain ? Does not globalization contradict the appeals we hear for respecting human rights and the choice of democracy. ?

If politics consists of managing the affairs of state, this role has been usurped by globalization, the goal of which is to remove the economic and other obstacles facing international corporations, institutions, and networks, thus allowing them to exercise their power and assume the role of governments in the fields of economics and information, etc.. The role of the state is thus reduced to that of policeman within this same system of globalization. If the functions of the state are so greatly reduced, there remains little scope indeed for politics.

In the globalized world system, the role of the state in economic supervision and control is reduced to zero, or at least that is the attempt being made. Maintaining control over communication, information and culture has become impossible, the government's only option is to facilitate communications and distribute information to the benefit of the worldwide networks Foreign policy in the age of globalization has been taken over, either directly or indirectly, by the institutions referred to as the " international community ", primarily by the U.N security Council , in addition to the influence wielded by international economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Just as globalization has taken over the affairs of the nation-state, so has it done with politics. Politics used to be practised, until quite recently, through discussions, agreements, and disagreements concerning the affairs of state that we have enumerated above. Political parties were characterised by their diverse platforms, their points of difference and contradictions. There used to be two economic and social options, one called the left and one called the right.

They promoted a diverse range of ideas and methodologies that made the political arena a broad and spacious one.. But today globalization has imposed a single pathway and a single idea :

liberalism and nothing but liberalism, which today means privatisation and globalization.

This has led to another phenomenon that has been observed in recent years. The similarity between the programs of opposing political parties, to the point that are nearly indistinguishable Whether the elections are in the United States, France, or other European countries, the differences between opposing parties - in both the form and content of their platforms - have become so slight as to be practically non-existent, Political, advertisements of one party or another no longer have anything of substance to say, so instead they focus on marginal issues that have nothing to do with politics It is strange indeed that the lack of political differences has caused political campaign organisers to focus on " moral " shortcoming in a world that has no place for morality, a world in which " success " is valued above all else.

We can observe the same phenomenon in the third world, where the government, consisting of an individual or a party, dominates the entire political arena. When globalization in turn takes over the state, it also takes over political activity within the state. While there may still be a number of different parties, there is no real difference among them. There is only one available choice some refer to it as " integration " into the world market, while others prefer to use the term " adjustment ". In either case the wisdom of the saying applies ". If you can't beat them, join them.

Aside from politics, the citizens of the globalized world are divided into two classes. The first class comprises consumers, who are an integral part of globalization, who are drawn toward the 'outside world ", away from their country, state, and nation, and who are ensconced in the invisible world of communications, which does not permit separation. Politics is dying with the lost possibility of separation, the possibility of independent thought. This class lives in a world without politics.

The other class of citizens includes the poor, the destitute, the unemployed, the marginalized, and the defeated-those whom the ideology of globalization, as we have seen, wants to abandon to the law of nature selection.

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The situation has definitely changed-but will it last ? Can it last ?

I do not believe so. The universal law that applies in reality to both the natural universe and the human world is not the law of natural selection, but the law of action and reaction . When the process of selection occurs, it does so as the result of action and reaction, sometimes brought about by an action and at other times by a reaction. It is therefore a mistake to consider.

The principle of " more profits, fewer workers "-the slogan of globalization, as we have mentioned - is a principle with no regard of history. It provides no solution for the historical problems of development, it merely ignores them. The firing of hundreds of thousands of workers in the industrial countries, which lays the foundation for structural unemployment in these countries, cannot continue unchecked. Meanwhile, the situation in developing countries has gone from bad to worse, with increased disparity, the situation in developing countries has gone from bad to worse, with increased disparity, and deprivation.

The situation at the end of the twentieth century is similar to conditions at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, when industrial capacity reached extremely high levels compared to earlier periods, but was accompanied by terrible exploitation of the workers, which brought about both practical and intellectual reactions among the working classes and those who supported their cause. Europe was able to resolve some of the resulting problems and crises by complying with workers " demands for improved conditions and by establishing social services to alleviate the worst suffering. This Europe was able to adapt itself to the circumstances and to disprove the predictions of Karl Marc concerning the inevitable collapse of the capitalist system and its replacement by socialism.

It is not unlikely that reactions similar to those cited above will reduce the dangers and negative affects of globalization and preserve the role of the nation-state in protecting its territory, directing its economy, and defending its interests. The opinions and perceptions



that we have presented above are themselves reactions. If they appear somewhat exaggerated, this indicates an awareness of current problems and potential dangers. We have witnessed an increasing awareness of the need to create and join cooperative organisations to defend our common interests, not only against oppressive domination, but also to ensure that the necessary conditions are met for continued development and the ability to survive in a world where competition will likely play an ever-increasing role. In this connection, the European Union is perhaps an example we should attempt to emulate.

It is clear that in order to face the dangers inherent in this "brutal" globalization with respect to Arab interests-economic, national and cultural interests-we must be more keenly aware of these dangers. Until a cooperative Arab organization is established to co-ordinate its economic and political development plans, the Arab World will remain unable to hold its own against the fierce competition and imperialistic trends prevailing in the world today whether in the context of globalization or any other international system.