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Preliminary Communication
U. D. C.: 656(53)"20"
Accepted: Feb. 12, 2001
Approved: Feb. 26, 2001

THE NEAR EAST IN THE 21st CENTURY

ABSTRACT

Although an "avalanche of people" may be expected in the near future little confidence seems to be justified with respect to a peaceful and prosperous development in the Near East. Political antagonism, often fuelled by religious intolerance threatens or even prevents the evaluation of promising opportunities at this huge area between the Old World continents which could otherwise benefit so much from the by-passing great world traffic routes.

KEY WORDS

Near East: people, skills, capital versus religions, bureaucracy and retarded development

1. 200 YEARS OF DREAMS; AN INTRODUCTION

Almost daily the press and TV bring features about events in the Near East, giving the impression that this is the focal area of our world. In the studies on the modern world system, however, and on globalisation, the Near East does not figure at all. OHMAE as well as FRIEDMANN omitted it altogether and the same goes for more recent studies?¹ Is this region unimportant after all and the day to day turmoil but a ripple in a pond?

The present political situation supports the latter hypothesis. The Near East consists of a number of antagonistic states, all of them small, as well as a number of unrecognised and perhaps emerging entities. They block each other's political freedom, yet they cannot become tolerant of their neighbours. This situation has prevailed for about 80 years. It is one alternative configuration of this region and has occurred time and again.

The other case is that of an empire comprising the whole of the Near East and all its trade routes and cities into one political structure. The Ottoman Empire, dissolved after the First World War, was the last of them, apart from a short-lived British domination during the Second World War.

Presently, the Near East is beginning to stir again after long torpor induced by the Turkish domination

and the later years of colonial rule. During these times people felt responsibilities only for their families and kin, for their village or city. They are not yet fully awake today to a national outlook or to their real needs. Will they wake up during the 21st century or shall they once more be engulfed under an imperial cover?

In the memory of the Westerners, the early days of such empires are the glorious days and while they last the Near East is one of the centres of the world. It is still vividly remembered in Europe that once all the cities of the Western Christianity were outshone by Baghdad. Alas, when travellers during the 19th century re-familiarised themselves with the East, Baghdad had long lost her shine, the fields of Mesopotamia had withered and the trade-routes were almost deserted. What more noble and deserving enterprise should there be for the West than to bring back order and prosperity to these countries? Or at least to that little slice which we call the Holy Land? Thus a big dream was started. The great objective began in Egypt and other fringes of the East but gained access to the Asian parts of the Turkish Empire only after the Crimean War in 1856. On the Arabian Peninsula it had to wait for the advent of the oil-age.

Western influence started with schools and hospitals, with banks, hotels and many other modern services hitherto unknown or unnecessary in the Near East. Subsequently, the full tertiary sector of the bourgeois-society was transplanted and run efficiently. Modern cities, especially the capitals, were the most striking result. They were inhabited by a sizeable European colony, a westernised native middle class and the readily westernising religious and ethnic minorities. On the outskirts of such cities numerous migrants from poorer rural areas began to settle.

While this was a success-story, comparable results could not be had in other fields. Also, many objectives became illusionary when the ruling classes became alienated after the formal introduction of colonial rule by the European powers.

Agricultural settlement, for instance, proved the capability of the Europeans to make the desert bloom, but the farmers remained dependant on the sale of

their products on the markets of their home countries. They never managed to integrate into the native economy. After gaining independence, when that support finally failed, this whole system crumbled down. It is only because it had created a national market that Zionist agriculture in Israel remained successful. Similarly, the industrial skill of the Europeans, their intrinsic strength during the 19th century, found no real scope in the Near Eastern countries, where either the bazaars provided everything and the rest could be imported more cheaply than fabricated in place.

During the economic crisis of the 1930s and the years after the Second World War there was a widespread feeling that the Near East was falling back compared with Europe. Political independence was desired because it was generally thought it would remove all barriers to rapid modernisation and could also profit from the common struggle against Israel and the newly found oil wealth. Thus, the second wave of dreaming started. These dreams are still going strong for no government dares to admit it has long since failed in these efforts. The consequence is an unrealistic state of public opinion, which is dominated by exaggerated nationalistic rhetoric and strict conservatism. The governments, in turn, enhance their bureaucratic control, tend towards militarism and rely on public enterprise. Neither of these factors is seriously opposed, all are barriers to progress. Quite often they intertwine with other influences like religion. We shall briefly discuss three important issues here, that will have to be solved in the 21st century, better at once than later on.

2. AN AVALANCHE OF PEOPLE

The Near Eastern societies, Muslim as well as non-Muslim are inherently conservative and still on almost all issues. Even the most audacious youngsters do not question religion, family bonds or rule of approved conduct. Family is the one really substantial social organisation. A person cannot easily be dissociated from his or her family background. The social reputation of a family depends largely on the irreproachable behaviour of their womenfolk. Therefore, women have to be "protected" by their men, and this is the pretext to all sorts of restrictions imposed on them.

Such things may have a sort of exotic charm among the upper classes. In poorer families they are a serious oppression. General result of this sort of female existence is a continuous baby-boom. A short time ago this was but a matter of detached interest, today it has become a concern of governments and in the near future it will be one of the headaches of the world. There is no real expectation of reduced rates of population increase.

With present medical provisions the Arab population is growing at two to three percent a year. Birth rates are among the highest in the world, irrespective of the economic welfare of the population. Just to show one case: Egypt had 2.45 million inhabitants in 1800². By 1850 this population doubled but there was an adequate increase of useful land through new irrigation works. Birth rates remained as high as ever and by 1900 the population doubled again. As land reclamation kept pace, this caused no great concern, but at the next doubling this was no longer possible despite great efforts. Additional population remained poor and had to migrate into the cities.

Today, there are 70 million Egyptians and the annual increase is 2.2 percent. At that rate the population will double again in about 30 years. Theoretically, there might be 600 million Egyptians at the end of the 21st century. One shudders at the thought of Malthusian checks that might begin to operate³.

At present, population everywhere in the Near East is increasing rapidly. Rates are often higher than in Egypt. Should they persist for a 100 years even populations like that of Qatar (0.7 mill.) might increase to many millions by 2100. During the 100 years of population growth, Egypt has remained poor and will stay so if the process continues. Whatever increase there is, the aggregate social product has to be shared among ever more people. At present, this share can be held just at a certain level, but it seems doubtful how long this can go on. We can imagine a situation when this will no longer be possible, perhaps around the year 2040 with 160 million inhabitants? The ways out of this problem are all difficult and most countries of the Near East face the same situation, some sooner, and others later. They will not, with bigger populations, automatically become better and richer markets but will rather be sinks for international aid and be plagued by ungovernable mega-cities.

Yet not all resources are that scarce. There is ample space in a desert country like Egypt. Available water might not be sufficient to cultivate it, but houses can be built on such land. There is a tendency already to push the additional millions of people into new urban settlements in the desert areas. What jobs might be found there to make such "Hijrahs" or "emigrations" economically viable, remains to be seen⁴.

Demographic transition takes several generations. It may come about in the Near East during the next 100 years or not. It is not particularly likely anyway. For, after all, big families are at the base of oriental societies and a tradition since biblical times.

3. PEACE WITH ISRAEL?

At the moment, there is a sort of stale-mate. Neither side feels strong enough to force a military issue.

Israel is no longer in a position to impose a hegemony on her Arab neighbours. The strategy of the Arab side seems to be to outlive the period of Israeli strength as they had done once upon a time with the crusaders.

The many benefits of a stable peace are well known to both parties. Innumerable people with the best intentions have worked or prayed for it, and some have even given their lives. But the real problem cannot be tackled with the classical instruments of peace-making. It is the conflict between the Israeli and the Arab people about their land. Israelis believe God had once granted it to them. Arabs see themselves as its rightful owners by divine regulation. To say this more bluntly, a large part of Israel stands on land that in Arab eyes has been "stolen" from Palestinian families. Such land had been their "mulk" property which in a way is the essence of a family's existence. Even if such land has been expropriated after the owners had to flee, their rights persist and no Arab government can renounce them. The only way to make it into legal Israeli property would be to pay for it at its market value. For such an agreement nobody is prepared today.

The Palestinians, therefore, insist on their right to return to their former homesteads. They feel their status as human beings depends on this. For, outside their country they are but fugitive foreigners. They may be allowed to stay but are usually not entitled to acquire new mulk-property, belonging to them without restrictions. This way of thinking is alien to the Westerners and perhaps also to the Israelis as it does not turn up in peace talks. Here, however, is the main reason why states and their presidents cannot "make" such a peace. The best we can hope for at this moment is an unbroken armistice, maybe called "peace" by the governments involved. There will never be peace between the peoples and in this situation any form of co-operation will be extremely precarious.

Otherwise, Israel is excellently placed and prepared to become the economic hub of the Near East. Yet, the outside investments and globalising influences can reach it only from the Jewish sources. Similarly, very little international or even Arab capital will be attracted by areas too near to her frontiers. This zone of neglect might be tentatively delimited by the Suez Canal in the west, by the Aqaba-Amman-Damascus road in the east and the Beirut-Damascus link in the north. Even if some money was invested in the mining ventures, tourism and agriculture the big infrastructure schemes and industrial projects remain on the drawing boards. Military reservation, the stationing of peace troops and general mistrust block the development of areas along the frontier-lines.

It can be doubted today to what degree either party is really interested in a peace-settlement. They do not need each other. Too many particular interests already profit from the conflict, not least the military es-

tablishments which in all countries involved have an extraordinary influence.

A look at the map reveals how the existence of Israel blocks the important transport routes. Jordan and Saudi-Arabia are cut off from easy access to the Mediterranean ports. The Via Maris, the traditional north-south axis of the Levant has been interrupted since 1947. It can be bypassed only by sea or by air. The former rail-link between Syria and Egypt has in large parts been dismantled. Haifa, the best port on the Mediterranean has no hinterland outside Israel. We might add that a sort of shadow has fallen on the broad area that reaches up to Baghdad, Kuwait and Medinah. This later effect has been frequently aggravated by other closed frontiers and boycotts that enforce tedious roundabouts in any communication.

Is all that really to such a disadvantage? In Central Europe we know from the recent experience that Iron Curtains are also quite comfortable as walls to lean one's back to. Any peace will reveal the "walls in the minds" among people of the Near East. Clearing up the region for peace, that is making all parties to admit and to negotiate their real intentions, and to bring about melioration step by step will therefore take a very long time, maybe the better part of the new century.

4. STATE ENTERPRISE AND BUREAUCRATIC CONTROL

Except for Israel, the Near Eastern countries have no substantial industrial sector. Manufacturing firms are mostly small and engage in consumer goods and simple intermediate products. They serve local or national markets and lack outlets for export-oriented growth. They might get an important push if foreign enterprise and capital were allowed to engage on a larger scale, but unfortunately there is no safe-guard included that this would not lead smaller countries into new forms of colonial dependence. Arab nations are burnt children shunning the fire. They have done all they can to prevent foreign economic interests from gaining control. The most extreme forms are found in the smaller oil-states of the Persian Gulf. Here the governments keep strict control on their own and on the behalf of the native population and their descendants. This policy includes among other things the obligatory majority ownership of all businesses in native hands and the barring of foreigners from owning real-estate. It is also in the background of state ownership of the petroleum sector and the downstream-industries tied to it. While this is very profitable for the native business community it is also a sure way to keep out the know-how, innovative ideas and the most modern standards. As most of the bigger

companies have been set up by the state and are owned by national companies, their markets are often restricted to the national territory as all neighbouring countries own the same set of industries. Else, they have to go to the overseas markets. Co-operation across the frontiers is very rare. In the Arab world there are almost no large and established regional or multinational companies able to join into the mainstream of globalisation. The few international companies we find are not engaged in hard-core industries but rather in construction, tourism, agriculture and services.

This can be attributed to post-colonial reflexes as we find them in most newly independent states. All Arab countries are new nations in this sense and the rejecting attitude towards foreign enterprise finds perhaps more reason here than in other part of the world. They had to push out the former colonial establishment and immediately afterwards felt the rising tide of petroleum-imperialism. Although this problem has been overcome now, there remains a constant fear of Israeli influence behind the stage with all the bigger investment proposals. In fact, in the liberalised world economy of today there is no real way to avoid that. As it is felt to be a danger it shall be very difficult to overcome such a barrier. Again, we think that contacts to Jewish capital will be avoided for the better part of the new century.

Meanwhile, there are attempts at privatisation and liberalisation, notably in Egypt. For other countries free-zones are set up as a way around such self-imposed barriers to foreign enterprise. Only in such zones can foreign companies set up wholly owned subsidiaries. Despite recent successes, for instance in Jebel Ali in Dubai, it is still too early to see any general effect on industrialisation.

5. SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME

So far, our region has shown more problems than prospects. It is politically fragmented into mutually antagonistic states, threatened by overpopulation, beset by rigid and conservative standards and burdened by irresolvable conflict. Will it become during this century an affluent area again and a core part of the globalising world, or will it remain one of its neglected peripheries? The answer is not obvious.

Some 40 years ago the famous Austrian geographer Hans BOBEK stated that the Islamic East was not following the same development path as the West, that is, building up an industrial society. There is no real reason for us today to be of a different opinion. But in the meantime, industry has lost some of its former importance as the economic base of a society and all countries of the Near East, except a few, have found oil and gas. With oil-money there is a bright

spot on the horizon, even if countries like Algeria do their utmost to prove the contrary.

Can oil substitute industrialisation? At present all benefits from oil-exports except a small share for the operating companies, accrues to the governments. This is an easy though not reliable income, due to price fluctuations. When it is substantial enough it can finance the public sector without recourse to individual taxation. And such funds are spent like tax-money in any other country. It feeds the public service and allows numerous subsidies. Certainly, no bigger share is spent for the really useful things than in our own countries.

An effort to channel part of it into sustainable downstream investments is a good thing but not easy to do. Almost all investments one can think of require heavy initial capital outlays and annual subsidies for many years after. Government bodies, as investors have no intrinsic experience. For efficient management and successful linking into international markets they need foreign experts. But experts are experts, they care only for their immediate projects and do not look for possible synergies in a national economy. Capacities are usually a bit on the larger side. Run continuously and at full scale a profit can be expected but there are also periods of idleness due to disruptions.

Moreover, oil and anything associated to it does not create jobs. If oil money is to do just that it must be channelled into other fields of activity. Creating productive jobs in industry, agriculture or similar fields is a slow thing. It is swifter and much more popular to create jobs in the public sector for teachers, social and office staff, in security and in the military. In this way oil-money is directly converted into consumer-spending and gets visible in the shape of imports. Handling imports and distribution of goods are in fact the most booming sectors of the private economy in the oil-countries. To all intents this can go on further as long as there is a surplus of oil and gas to be exported and as long as the national population remains small enough to see their basic needs fulfilled. Let us say, at least for some 50 to 60 years more. Only then shall it become imperative to look for other pillars of the economy in earnest. And we can surmise that in some countries nothing much will be done earlier.

What the chances might be 50 years hence is difficult to imagine. Thinking back for an equal length of time, there have been many nasty surprises. Steel, coal and basic industries were then wrongly thought to be the strength of nations. Nobody would have foreseen the European Union to be plagued by gigantic agricultural surpluses. Who might have imagined the present boom of international tourism and micro-electronics? Critics of capitalism hailed the coming of socialism, not the least in the Arab World. They generally overlooked its outdated practice. In the same vein we may

ask whether capitalistic consumerism spiced with electronic businesses will really be going on strongly for fifty or hundred years more?

There is little doubt that manufacturing industries absorbing the future manpower and providing exports will become an economic necessity in the Near East too. Other sectors hold too little potential for the future. Adequate numbers of jobs cannot be found in mining or agriculture and most services provide no exports. Just what industries might come about we cannot really say. At present, there is no field of applied technology in which the Near East has a lead. Manufacturing is no big exporter today, nor does it seem it could become one soon. Putting out certain stages of manufacturing processes has been done in Morocco and Tunisia. This might be a chance for, say, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, where oil money is not so plentiful. Also for Egypt as long as the wages remain sufficiently low. In other countries the wage level is too high already compared with Asian developing economies.

Specific niches may result when favourable factors can be combined in a new way. This was the case with the striking boom cycle of the readymade-garments industry in the Gulf States for some years. Regulations for immigrant labour here allowed bringing in low-paid seamstresses from South Asia and import-quotas of the USA opened a market. Indian firms were quick to respond to this chance. Possibly similar niches will open from time to time allowing for small booms in manufacturing.

Companies producing for national markets in the Near East face the problem of having to compete against imports from all over the world. Such imports generally dominate the higher quality and price segments. The simpler merchandise can come from small family firms with limited scope. This picture can change once foreign producers can be induced to set up subsidiaries in the Arab World and to take local producers into partnership. We might suppose, however, that this should require a sort of Common Market in the Near East, as most countries are too small individually. Politically, that day has not come yet.

Much better chances can be seen for international tourism today. Warm-water-beach-holidays are a segment set for growth world-wide. The southern half of the Near East abounds in possible warm-water destinations, while the Mediterranean north holds much less appeal for foreigners. Up to this moment mostly Europeans frequent such holiday centres but, who knows, maybe soon the Chinese and Indians will flee hither from their summer-monsoons. Arabia is always sunny and thanks to modern amenities even excessive summer heat is no longer felt as such an inconvenience for beach-holidays. The Italians for instance have pioneered the summer-season in South Sinai.

Perfect oasis or "south sea" environments have been created in some places and in a remarkably short span of time.

Possible beaches for development include the whole of the Red Sea except the cooler parts of the Gulf of Suez, the Arabian coasts along the Indian Ocean excluding Dhofar during monsoon time, and the Persian Gulf southward from Qatar and Bahrain. In this vast area the beach season can possibly be extended throughout the year. Supplies are no problem any more. Water, if not locally available, can be provided by desalination of sea-water at full cost, which the tourists can well afford to pay. Access will be by chartered flights.

At present this type of tourism is found in a few localities only. Elath in Israel, Aqabah in Jordan, the Egyptian coast of the Gulf of Aqabah and a stretch around Haghada west of the Red Sea have been developed already. In the east, Dubai and Sharjah are established in this tourist trade as well as a handful of other places in the Emirates and in Oman. The rest is virtually empty.

If warm-water tourism is set for growth we must not expect this to be very rapid. Beach tourism in Arabia faces a lot of religious and psychological reservations. Many aspects of current Western tourist behaviour seem outright scandalous in the native eyes and difficult to bring into line with local convictions and customs. But one by one the countries have learned how to handle tourism. Familiarising with it takes away the old fears and misgivings. The U.A.E. have even "morally" survived the impact of the Russian mass-arrivals a few years ago. It is quite interesting to note that Saudi Arabia does not receive foreign tourists and is in this attitude imitated by a few other governments. In reality, however, Saudi-Arabia is quite well equipped with resorts on the beaches and in the mountains for her own affluent population and the many foreigners residing inside the country. The Saudis are among the most adventurous and modern-minded people in matters of recreation.

Tourism is labour-intensive and an absorber of normal consumer goods and processed foodstuffs. All this can be produced in the Near East already and shipped to new destinations from countries like Egypt, fostering in this way regional exchanges and the growth of certain industries.

This is also the point where regional and national tourism comes in. Numbers of holiday trips by people in the Near East rise steeply, with preference still for the cities and for cooler summer destinations on beaches or in the mountains. In Egypt the coasts not favoured by Western visitors have quickly filled with clubs and holiday-camps for a national clientele.

International services might be the last field of promise to be touched here. The Near East is still

rather dependent for high-level services on the outside world. This goes for banking, insurance, brokerage, audition and technical certification for example. Large sums are paid for licences. This dependence cannot be easily broken while no institutions exist that can competently handle the technical and legal procedures involved in global business. Basic issues like the question of interest on money transactions or the rights of foreigners to do business have not been definitely resolved. This often pushes such transactions into offshore-sectors of some kind and precludes a more fruitful linkage to the inland markets. This is the way in which Bahrain and Dubai operate at the moment⁸. Beirut formerly funnelled Arab oil-money outward to international markets. The volume of this business is certainly much larger today but Beirut no longer dominates. Unfortunately, during the interlude of "Arab Socialism" Cairo and Alexandria were put out of action as centres for banking and their stock and commodity exchanges closed. As a consequence of wars and nationalisation and also of state control of most firms such a role could not be won back.

At this moment there is no city of global rank in the Near East or in the whole of the Islamic World. The big money transactions go to New York and London. Arab capital cities cannot compete in these matters as they are either too committed to national causes like Cairo, Damascus and Riyadh, also Tel Aviv, to offer good milieu for international business or they are too strictly under the heel of an autocratic system. Centres of smaller political entities seem to have better chances. The expected increase in population of the big cities will not improve their international standing.

At this moment much of international business flocks to Dubai which takes the role of an eastern emporium in the Gulf, halfway between Europe and Singapore. Dubai fills the place that was formerly assigned to Basrah. Presently, its influence is on the rise and it casts a marked shadow-effect on the nearby Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and also on Maskt, Bandar Abbas, Doha and even on Bahrain. Geographically, we should find a similar western emporium too, but this position is not occupied at the moment by a city with high prestige. Political and strategic vicissitudes have taken away the chances of Alexandria, Haifa and Beirut.

6. THE ROLE OF TRANSPORT IN THE FUTURE

Transit trade between the Mediterranean countries and South Asia has long been a mainstay for Near Eastern civilisations and cause for their prosperity. Today, it is of little importance. Will the globalisation

of trade and the opening-up of Central Asia change this outlook?

It seems rather significant today how in recent debates old issues of a hundred years ago show up again. Every now and then the Berlino-Baghdad railway is mentioned again, without considering that such a transcontinental project was made feasible only by the existence of the Ottoman Empire. In the world of today there is no need for it, just as nobody needs a Hijaz railroad any more. The tentative designs for Pan-Arabic or Pan-Asian transport networks will not materialise in the political world of today, although they would be technically feasible and not even too costly to build⁹.

Also the framework of world-traffic has changed. Air transport has taken over and cares for all transport needs requiring speed and reliability. 100 years ago that task was the responsibility of liner-shipping and express-trains. With a few exceptions the airspace above the Near East is almost empty compared to Europe or to the USA. The capitals can still function as the main hubs. The system can be flexibly expanded any time by minor airports, charter airports or connecting transshipment hubs. Underused but well equipped airfields of the military abound in all countries. The UN-forces for instance, use an airport at al-Jurah in north-eastern Sinai, ideally placed for an international cargo-hub. The overall capacity of air-transport can still be adapted to growing needs without congestion.

Passenger transport between the cities is by car, bus or taxi, goods-transport by truck. Innumerable small firms are engaged in this business. This is in a way an adaptation to the structure of society and the prevalence of family businesses there. Overland-transport on roads faces no serious future restrictions as construction costs for new roads are low and public land can often be had at zero opportunity-cost.

Other modes of overland transport are difficult to organise. The fragmented political geography brings about national solutions for all transport problems. Quite often highways have not been improved in frontier areas, services do not continue beyond it or are seriously delayed by elaborate chicanery at frontier posts.

The general lack of co-operation has most seriously hit the railways. Most former trans-frontier links were interrupted a long time ago. Such railway services should demand a very co-operative spirit from the governments involved and from the railway organisations, which again are subordinate departments of the governments. To suppose a change in this respect should be to demand too big a miracle. Moreover, to entrust one's goods to the railway means to rely on an organisation over which the forwarder has no control. They feel safer when using trucks, and so

the railroads carry mostly the products of other government-owned factories.

Trucking across Arabia is done on a large scale, however, mainly for consumer-goods and perishable foodstuffs. The road networks are adequate already and can be further improved. This is why a more modern overland transport mode, for instance the Transrapid technique has no immediate chances, although it might be technically and economically feasible⁹.

What now about transit traffic that once sustained the cities in the Near Eastern corridor from the Mediterranean to the Gulf? It is obviously difficult to organise and not really necessary any more. No forwarder from Europe or Japan would unload his goods in a Near Eastern port, carry them overland to the opposite coast and re-ship them there. Of course, such things are occasionally done, but it is necessary to keep apart the obvious rule and the exceptions.

The rule says that today regular transport of parcels is done in standard containers and by container-ships. This mode is efficient, rather cheap and sufficiently rapid. Therefore goods, except oil and a few bulky items, reach or leave the Near East containerised and via a few very efficient handling ports. Quite often, though, containers are unloaded and cleared in the receiving port and the goods continue by aircraft, truck or as general cargo in small wooden boats.

The container-route from North America and Western Europe through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea onwards to Ceylon, Singapore and ultimately China and Japan is the backbone of the world-trade. Arabia and the whole Near East are favourably located in relation to it. Along this axis we find a number of transshipment-ports, mostly of very recent foundation, from where containers are forwarded by feeder-shipping to the more remote sea-ports. The big container shippers today land their vessels by preference in a few hubs only, like Malta, Damietta/Port Said, Jeddah and Dubai with her satellites in Khorfakkan and Fujairah. As there are still some big gaps between those ports Aden might have a future and Oman is trying to capture some traffic for her port in Mina Raysut near Salalah. Iran will probably try to do the same for a port in the Area of Bandar Abbas.

Other ports are called on by the shippers only reluctantly as going there prolongs the intercontinental trips by two and more days. As this disrupts the tight schedules for many goods there are no great chances for Kuwait, Basrah, Dammam or even Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. It is quite the same for the ports of the Levant for which feeding from Port Said or from Cyprus is a better solution.

From major container-ports land bridges might be organised to inland destinations or even to the oppo-

site coast. This is not yet done in an organised way in Arabia. As long as there is no Trans-Arabian rail-link there is no real scope for such a land bridge. Theoretically, such a land-bridge for broken transport might save three to four days on a Europe-Japan run between Port Said and Dubai. This is not enough to warrant the big investment.

There are other places for new international transport. Thanks to the breakdown of the Soviet Union there is a possible access into Central Asia and into Caucasia from the south for the first time in 200 years. Dubai is now the focal point in a fan of routes from the Gulf into Aserbajdschan, Armenia, the Central Asian Republics and also into Afghanistan. Much of the goods go by air but there is also increased trucking through Iran. Even a rail-link has been opened between Iran and Turkmenia near Sarakhs.

Such routes are at the moment easier to organise than the western approaches of either Caucasia and Central Asia through Russia. Bandar Abbas and other Iranian Gulf ports are most favourably situated in this respect. Perhaps, one day they will supplant Dubai. Still, there is the open question of the ultimate lifting of the embargo on Iraq and peace in Eastern Anatolia. Other routes might then be possible and Turkey could gain a hub-position in the west of the Levant.

In this respect the future picture of transport in the Near East can be quite different from what historical experience has taught us so far.

7. CONCLUSION

Political fragmentation and deeply entrenched conflicts put the Near East region at a disadvantage in the age of globalisation. The dregs of a former imperial framework and a misplaced conservatism in its wake have yet to be shed by the people. Independence and even oil-wealth have proved to be no substitutes for a solid place in the world earned by one's own labour. There still hangs over the whole region the shadow of yet another imperial unification, but this attempt would be seriously opposed by Israel and the outer world. What appears necessary is peaceful co-operation of different nations and social awakening of people to remove the stifling old inhibitions.

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2. Older data after **M. & E. Wohlfahrt**: *Das neue Ägypten*; Berlin 1962, p. 375; recent figures after Fisher-Weltalmanach and other statistics.
3. **Robert Malthus** a British philosopher stated some 250 years ago that populations would grow at a geometric rate (exponentially) whereas their means of subsistence increase only arithmetically. Nature and human society provide the calamities that keep populations in check. This thesis might find confirmation in the Near East. A solution of the population problems through emigration of the necessary numbers will be impossible.
4. Hijrah means "emigration" and is known from the prophet Mohammed's emigration to Medinah. In Arabia this term is used generally for migrations of people, not wholly voluntary, to new settlements.
5. Transit between Egypt and Jordan through Israel is legally possible. There was, however, no bigger use made

of this possibility when the present author visited Northern Sinai in 1997.

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8. **Wigand Ritter**: *Die arabische Halbinsel im Welthandel*. In: Geogr. Rundschau 1999/11, p. 613-617.
9. **Wigand Ritter**: *A Transrapid-Network for the Near East?* In: Promet II, Portorož-Trieste 1999, p. 129-133.
10. The functioning and the technical conditions of the North-American transcontinental land-bridges are discussed in: **Markus Exler**: *Containerverkehr*, Nürnberg 1996, p. 131ff.

CONCLUSION

Political fragmentation and deeply antagonistic conflicts are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East. The huge of a desert region, the lack of water resources and the lack of infrastructure are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East. The huge of a desert region, the lack of water resources and the lack of infrastructure are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East. The huge of a desert region, the lack of water resources and the lack of infrastructure are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East.

The country with high birth rates and low death rates is the Near East. The huge of a desert region, the lack of water resources and the lack of infrastructure are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East. The huge of a desert region, the lack of water resources and the lack of infrastructure are the main reasons for the lack of a transport network in the Near East.