

# THE ARAB WORLD AFTER DESERT STORM

M U H A M M A D F A O U R



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*To my late father, Hajj Ali Faour,  
who made the education of his children  
the mission of his life*



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## Foreword

 Ask an American or a European what the Gulf War accomplished and the reply is likely to be along the lines of "Evicted Iraq from Kuwait," with perhaps some further reflection on the destruction of Iraq's military might or the rejuvenation of the Middle East peace process. Ask an Arab and the reply is likely to be very different and almost certainly much longer.

For the Arab world, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent defeat of Iraq by the U.S.-led coalition have had complex and sometimes profound effects. Virtually all aspects of Arab life have been touched to some extent: politics and economics, demography and ideology, interregional and extraregional relations, religious tension and ethnic strife.

Trying to sort out these effects and decide which are evanescent and which enduring is an exceedingly difficult task, especially with the Gulf War only two and a half years distant. Muhammad Faour, however, has risen to the challenge. As the reader will discover, the author has combined diligent research with thoughtful analysis to produce a book that is both exceptionally informative and provocative. Drawing on his own experience as well as a broad range of Arabic and English-language sources, Faour examines the changes that have occurred since the end of the Gulf War and speculates on the changes that are likely to occur in the coming three to five years. Not all of these developments necessarily result from the Gulf War, since a number of them were in train well before the war began. The picture he presents, though it contains both light and dark, is in essence a bleak and unsettling portrait of the present and future of the Arab world.

Operation Desert Storm emerges from this book as the equivalent of an enormous earthquake that has rearranged various features of the Arab landscape, and the aftershocks of which are rumbling still throughout the region. Political structures that tottered before the war—such as the largely ineffective system of regional cooperation—have collapsed or been all but abandoned, while old disputes have been brought again to the surface. Similarly, vulnerable ideological constructs—pan-Arabism is the preeminent example—have finally fallen apart. And even the more robust elements of the Arab world—the economies of the rich Gulf states, for instance—have been shaken.

At the same time, however, other prominent features of the Arab landscape seem to have escaped more or less intact. The essential authoritarianism of most Arab regimes has not given way to demands for democracy (a somewhat ironic strand of continuity given the predictions of many Western observers on the post-Gulf War future for Arab democracy). Popular disaffection too is unabated; indeed, it may have increased. Unless regimes commit themselves to democratization, warns Faour, political instability seems certain to worsen, with militant Islamic movements spearheading the forces of dissent.

Focusing on six key Arab states—Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia—the author brings out the differences among countries and subregions as well as showing the similarities among them. As noted above, Faour's diagnosis of the Arab world as a whole is not encouraging, although he finds some reason for guarded optimism at least as far as the Israeli-Arab dispute is concerned. By pointing up the current divisions among Arab states and the military limitations of even the best-armed of them, and by accentuating the destabilizing social, economic, and political forces at play across the region, he argues that the Gulf War has made the continuation of the present status quo more dangerous for the Arabs than a potential negotiated settlement with Israel. Hence, the peace talks begun in Madrid in September 1991 have continued despite the kind of political events that probably would have halted previous attempts at such dialogue.

This book represents the outcome of research undertaken while the author was a Peace Fellow in the Jennings Randolph fellowship program of the United States Institute of Peace. As is true for all Jennings Randolph fellows, Muhammad Faour's views are, of course, his own. They are derived from the totality of his experience in analyzing the Middle East, not merely from the research he conducted on the effects of the Gulf War. His commitment to informed

and open debate about the causes and consequences of conflict is one which the Institute shares wholeheartedly, even though it does not take a position on the opinions he expresses. The Institute was created by Congress to strengthen the nation's capacity to promote the peaceful resolution of international conflict. We believe that this timely, informative, and stimulating study of one of the world's most strife-torn regions is a valuable contribution to that effort.

Charles E. Nelson, Acting President  
United States Institute of Peace



## Acknowledgments

 This book began as a research proposal on the impact of the 1990 Gulf crisis on the Arab world. By offering me a Peace Fellow award in 1991–92, the Jennings Randolph fellowship program of the United States Institute of Peace gave me the opportunity to carry out this research in a friendly, intellectually stimulating atmosphere. Many thanks go to the board of directors of the United States Institute of Peace, its former president Samuel Lewis, and its current acting president, Charles Nelson. Special thanks are due to the staff of the Jennings Randolph fellowship program—Michael Lund, the director of the program, Otto Koester and Joseph Klaits, the program officers, and Barbara Cullicott, the program administrator—for their technical assistance, moral support, and friendliness.

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