

United Arab Republic

<p> ٤دجتم لا ةي برع لا ةي روهم چ لا <i>Al-Gumhūriyah al-Arabiyah al-Muttahidah</i> <i>Al-Jumhuriyah al-Arabiyah al-Muttahidah</i> United Arab Republic </p>	
<p> </p>	
<p>Flag</p>	<p>Coat of arms</p>
<p> Anthem <i>Oh My Weapon</i>^[1] </p>	
Capital	Cairo
Language(s)	Arabic
Religion	Secular (1958–1962) ^[2] Islam (1962–1971)
Government	Confederation
President	
- 1958–1970	Gamal Abdel Nasser

Historical era	Cold War
- Established	February 22, 1958
- Secession of Syria	September 28, 1961
- Renamed to Egypt	1971
Area	
- 1961	1166049 km ² (450214 sq mi)
Population	
- 1961 est.	32203000
Density	27.6 /km ² (71.5 /sq mi)
Currency	United Arab Republic pound
Calling code	+20

The **United Arab Republic** (Arabic: *جمهورية العربية المتحدة* *Al-Gumhuriyah al-Arabiyyah al-Muttahidah*/*Al-Jumhuriyah al-Arabiyyah al-Muttahidah*), often abbreviated as the **U.A.R.**, was a sovereign union between Egypt and Syria. The union began in 1958 and existed until 1961, when Syria seceded from the union. Egypt continued to be known officially as the "United Arab Republic" until 1971. The President was Gamal Abdel Nasser. During most of its existence (1958–1961) it was a member of the United Arab States, a confederation with North Yemen.

The UAR adopted a flag based on the Arab Liberation Flag of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952, but with two stars to represent the two parts. This continues to be the flag of Syria. In 1963, Iraq adopted a flag that was similar but with three stars, representing the hope that Iraq would join the UAR. The current flags of Egypt, Sudan, and Yemen are also based on Arab Liberation Flag of horizontal red, white, and black bands.

Origins of the Union

Beginning in 1957, Syria was close to a communist takeover of political power; it had a highly organized Communist Party and the army's chief of staff, Afif Bizri, was a Communist sympathizer. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser told a Syrian delegation, including President Shukri al-Quwatli and Prime Minister Khaled al-Azem, that they needed to rid their government of communists, but the delegation countered and warned him that only total union with Egypt would end the "communist threat". According to Abdel Latif Boghdadi, Nasser resisted a total union with Syria, favoring instead a federal union. However, Nasser was "more afraid of a Communist takeover" and agreed on a total merger. The increasing strength of the Syrian Communist Party, under the leadership of Khalid Bakdash, worried the ruling Ba'ath Party, which was also suffering from an internal crisis from which prominent members were anxious to find an escape. Syria had had a democratic government since the overthrow of Adib al-Shishakli's military regime in 1954, and the popular pressure for Arab unity was reflected in the composition of parliament.

When Bizri led a second Syrian delegation composed of military officers on January 11, 1958, and personally discouraged Syro-Egyptian unity, Nasser opted for a total merger. Only Syrian advocates of unity, including Salah al-Din Bitar and Akram al-Hawrani had prior knowledge of the delegation; Quwatli and Azem were notified a day later and considered it tantamount to a "military coup".^[3]^[4] Established on February 1, 1958, as a first step towards a pan-Arab state, the UAR was created when a group of political and military leaders in Syria proposed a merger of the two states to Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Pan-Arab sentiment was very strong in Syria, and Nasser was a popular hero-figure throughout the Arab World following the Suez War of 1956. There was thus considerable popular support in Syria for union with Nasser's Egypt. The protocols were signed by leading Egyptian and Syrian officials, although Azem did so reluctantly.^[5] Nasser became the republic's president and very soon carried out a

crackdown against the Syrian Communists and opponents of the union which included dismissing Bizri and Azem from their posts.^{[3] [6]}



Nasser signing unity pact with Syrian president Shukri al-Quwatli, forming the United Arab Republic, February 1958

Nasser's final terms were decisive and non-negotiable: "a plebiscite, the dissolution of parties, and the withdrawal of the army from politics". While the plebiscite seemed reasonable to most Syrian elites, the latter two conditions were extremely worrisome. They believed it would destroy political life in Syria.^[7] Despite these concerns, the Syrian officials knew it was too late to turn back. Mounting public pressure for union with Egypt was becoming too great to ignore.

Early history

Syrian elites saw the merger as the lesser of two evils. They believed Nasser's terms unfair, but given the immense pressure the government was under, they knew they had no choice. Despite these concerns, they believed Nasser would use the Ba'ath as the primary method of controlling Syria. Unfortunately for the Ba'ath, it was never Nasser's intention to share an equal measure of power. Nasser established a new provisional constitution proclaiming a 600-member National Assembly (400 from Egypt and 200 from Syria) and the disbanding of all political parties, including the Ba'ath. Nasser gave each of the provinces two vice-presidents, assigning Boghdadi and Abdel Hakim Amer to Egypt and Sabri al-Assali and Akram al-Hawrani—a Ba'ath leader—to Syria. A new federal constitution was adopted.^[8]

Though Nasser allowed former Ba'ath members to hold prominent political positions, they never reached positions as high in the government as did Egyptian officials. In the winter and spring of 1959-60, Nasser slowly squeezed prominent Syrians out of positions of influence. In the Syrian Ministry of Industry, for example, seven of the top thirteen positions were filled by Egyptians. In the General Petroleum Authority, four of the top six officials were Egyptian. In the fall of 1958, Nasser formed a tripartite committee, consisting of Zakaria Mohieddine, al-Hawrani, and Bitar to oversee developments in Syria. By moving the latter two, who were Ba'athists, to Cairo he neutralized important political figures who had their own ideas about how Syria should be run within the UAR.

In Syria, opposition to union with Egypt mounted; Syrian army officers resented being subordinated to Egyptian officers, Syrian Bedouin tribes received money from Saudi Arabia to prevent them from becoming loyal to Nasser, Egyptian-style land reform was resented for damaging Syrian agriculture, the Communists began to gain influence, and the intellectuals of the Ba'ath who supported union rejected the single-party system. Nasser was not fully able to address problems in Syria because they were new to him and instead of appointing Syrians to run Syria, he handed this task to Amer.^[9] In Egypt, the situation was more positive, with a GNP growth of 4.5% and a rapid growth of industry. In 1960, he nationalized the Egyptian press, reducing it to a personal mouthpiece.^[10]

Foreign relations

The union was interpreted as a major threat to Jordan. Syria was seen as a source of instigation and shelter for Jordanian plotters against King Hussein. Egypt's own status as a state hostile to Western involvement in the region (and thus to the close relationship between the British, in particular, and the Jordanian and Iraqi monarchies) added to the pressure. Hussein's response was to propose to Faisal II of Iraq a Jordanian-Iraqi union to counter the UAR, which was formed on February 14, 1958. The agreement was to form a unified military command between the two states, with a unified military budget; 80% of which was to be provided by Iraq and the remaining 20% by Jordan. Troops from both countries were exchanged in the arrangement.

In neighboring Lebanon, president Camille Chamoun, an opponent of Nasser, viewed the creation of the UAR with worry. Pro-Nasser factions in the country, mostly comprising Muslims and Druze, began clashing with the Maronite population who generally supported Chamoun, culminating in a civil war by May 1958. The former favored merging with the UAR, while the latter feared the new country as a satellite of Communism. Although Nasser did not intend to covet Lebanon, seeing it as a special case,^[11] he felt obliged to back his supporters through giving Abdel Hamid Sarraj the task of sending them money, light arms, and training officers.^[12] On July 14 Iraqi army officers staged a military coup against the kingdom of Iraq—which had just previously united with Jordan to form the rival Arab Federation. Nasser declared his recognition of the new government and stated that "any attack on Iraq was tantamount to an attack on the UAR". The next day US marines and British special forces landed in Lebanon and Jordan, respectively, to protect the two countries from falling to pro-Nasser forces as well. To Nasser, the revolution in Iraq left the road for Arab nationalism unblocked.^[13] Although most members of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) favored joining Iraq with the UAR, the new president Abdel Karim Qasim disagreed. Said K. Aburish states reasons for this could have included Nasser's refusal to cooperate with and encourage the Iraqi Free Officers a year before the coup or Qasim viewed Nasser as a threat to his supremacy as leader of Iraq.^[14]

Later in July, the U.S. Government convinced Chamoun not to seek a second term and this allowed for Fuad Chehab to be elected Lebanon's new president. Nasser and Chehab met at the Lebanese-Syrian border and the former explained to Chehab that he never wanted unity with Lebanon, but only that the country not be used as a base against the UAR. Resulting from this meeting was the end of the crisis in Lebanon, with Nasser ceasing to supply his partisans and the US setting a deadline for withdrawing from the area.^[15]

The most supportive Arab state of the UAR was initially Iraq. Iraq sought to join the union between 1960 and 1961, and then reunite the union after 1963 with the proposal of Egypt, Iraq, and Syria reforming the UAR. A new flag was proposed, three stars symbolizing the three states constituting the union. However, the union was not to be. Yet Iraq continued to use the three-star flag and later adopted it as the national flag of Iraq. The three star flag remained Iraq's national flag (with some modifications) until 2007.



Economic nationalization

In June 1960, Nasser tried to establish economic reforms that would bring the Syrian economy more in line with the exceedingly strong Egyptian public sector. Unfortunately, these changes did little to help either economy. Rather than shift growth toward the private sector, Nasser embarked on an unprecedented wave of nationalizations in both Syria and Egypt. These began in July 1961, without consulting top Syrian economic officials.^[16] The entire cotton trade was taken over by the government, as well as all import-export firms. On July 23, 1961, Nasser announced the nationalization of banks, insurance companies, and all heavy industry. Nasser also extended his social justice principles. The land limit was reduced from 200 to 100 feddans. Interest rates for farmers were dramatically reduced to the point of elimination in some cases. A ninety percent tax was instituted on all income above £10,000. Workers and employees were allowed representatives on management boards. They were also given the right to a twenty-five percent share in the profit of their firm. The average workday was also cut from eight hours to seven without a reduction in pay.^[17]

Collapse

Despite the economic difficulties, what truly produced the demise of the UAR was Nasser's inability to find a suitable political system for the new regime. Given his socialist agenda in Egypt, the Ba'ath should have been his natural ally, but Nasser was hesitant to share power. Though Amer allowed some liberalization of the economy in order to appease Syrian businessmen, his decision to rig the elections of the National Union (the single party which replaced the Ba'ath), with the help of Colonel Abdul Hamid Sarraj (a Syrian army official and Nasser sympathizer), sent Ba'ath leaders into a frenzy. The Ba'ath won only five percent of the seats on the higher committees, while the more traditional conservative parties "won" a significant majority.^[18] Sarraj was appointed head of the National Union in Syria, and by the spring of 1960 had replaced Amer as the chair of the Syrian Executive Council. Under Sarraj Syria was ruled by a brutal security force designed to suppress all opposition to the regime.

The immense increases in public sector control were accompanied by a push for centralization. Nasser abolished regional governments in favor of one central authority, which operated from Damascus February through May and Cairo the rest of the year. As a part of this centralization, Sarraj was relocated to Cairo, where he found himself with little real power. On September 15, 1961 Sarraj returned to Syria and resigned his post on September 26.^[19] Without any close allies to watch over Syria, Nasser was blind to the growing unrest of the military. On September 28 a group of officers staged a coup and declared Syria's independence from the UAR. Though the coup leaders were willing to renegotiate a union under terms they felt would put Syria on an equal footing with Egypt, Nasser refused such a compromise. He initially considered sending troops to overthrow the new regime, but chose not to once he was informed that the last of his allies in Syria had been defeated.^[20] In speeches that followed the coup, Nasser declared he would never give up his goal of an ultimate Arab union, though he would never again achieve such a tangible victory toward this goal.

Geography

If ranked today, the United Arab Republic would be the 25th largest nation on the planet (Egypt being the 30th and Syria being the 88th). It was comparable in size to South Africa (then known as the Union of South Africa), and twice the size of France.

Following the dissipation of the All-Palestine Government, the United Arab Republic further exerted control over the Gaza strip, until the Six Day War.

Notes

- [1] Egypt 1960–1979 - nationalanthems.info (<http://david.national-anthems.net/eg-79.htm>)
- [2] Baer, Gabriel (2003) [First published 1964]. *Population and Society in the Arab East* (<http://books.google.com/books?id=fdXq5fyxnwUC&pg=PA75>). Volume 11 of *The International Library of Sociology: The Sociology of Development* (Reprinted ed.). Routledge. p. 75. ISBN 9780415175784. . "According to the temporary constitution of the U.A.R. of March 1958, the provisions concerning a state religion or the president's religion were repealed, to be reintroduced into the National Charter of the U.A.R. (Egypt) in May 1962."
- [3] Aburish 2004, pp. 150–151
- [4] Podeh 1999, pp. 43
- [5] Podeh 1999, pp. 49
- [6] Podeh 1999, pp. 44–45
- [7] Palmer 1966, pp. 53
- [8] Aburish 2004, pp. 162–163
- [9] Aburish 2004, p. 185
- [10] Aburish 2004, pp. 189–191
- [11] Aburish 2004, p. 164
- [12] Aburish 2004, p. 166
- [13] Aburish 2004, pp. 169–170
- [14] Aburish 2004, p. 172
- [15] Aburish 2004, p. 173
- [16] Stephens 1971, p. 338
- [17] Stephens 1971, pp. 329–30
- [18] Stephens 1971, p. 337
- [19] Stephens 1971, pp. 338–9
- [20] Stephens 1971, p. 340

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