

**Neoliberal Modernizers:**

**The American Friends of the Middle East and Its Subversion of Arab Nationalism, 1951-67**

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**Abstract:**

The American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) was a civil society organization that operated various cultural and technical programs in the Middle East. This thesis analyzes its activities and interactions with Arab states, particularly Egypt, during the early Cold War era. The AFME was committed to an agenda of neoliberal modernization. Its operations aimed to improve the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the Middle East via integration into the US orbit. The American private sector, rather than state actors, would oversee this process. The AFME broke with the foreign policy orthodoxy of the US state while subverting the postcolonial ambitions of Nasserist pan-Arabism by facilitating the expansion of US corporate development in the Middle East. Arab nationalism was committed to neutrality and economic sovereignty, neither of which the AFME respected, despite its professed commitment to friendship and understanding with the strategically vital Middle East.

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## Chapter One:

### Introduction: Privatizing Arab-American Relations

The United States' relationship with emerging Arab nationalism in the early Cold War era was complex and tumultuous. President Harry Truman offered enthusiastic support following the 1952 Free Officers coup against British control in Egypt but had also proclaimed controversial support for the new Israeli state years earlier.<sup>1</sup> Initially receptive towards Arab nationalism, the Eisenhower administration saw Egypt's Cold War neutrality as a security threat by 1956.<sup>2</sup> By 1957, it actively sought to contain pan-Arab icon and Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, before returning to a policy of cooperation two years later.<sup>3</sup> The Kennedy administration initially continued this policy of friendship, before ultimately abandoning it in favour of a closer relationship with Arab nationalist antagonist, Israel. Anti-imperialism, neutralism, socialism, and anti-Zionism characterized Nasserist pan-Arabism – factors which perhaps made inevitable the tense bouts of US-Egyptian 'friendship.'

Historians of Arab-American relations during the 1950s and 1960s have been quick to emphasize the realism through which the US government conducted policy. Though such analyses omit the ideological, domestic, and orientalist underpinnings of foreign policy, the reality was nonetheless that US friendship with Arab states was motivated by hegemony. By exploring Arab-American relations from the civil society and non-state perspective, I will problematize the notion

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<sup>1</sup> Salim Yaqub, *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Hahn, "National Security Concerns in US Policy Towards Egypt, 1949-1956," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment, Second Edition*, edited by David W Lesch (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Malik Mufti, "The United States and Nasserist Pan-Arabism," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment, Second Edition*, edited by David Lesch (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 169-70.

of American hegemony as a machination of the US state and explore the ways it transcended simplistic notions of security- or resource-focused realism. American hegemony in the Middle East was not a function of a singular government foreign policy. By the 1950s a strong privatized element remained; divergent foreign *policies* linked the people, cultures, and economies of America and the Middle East.

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US government policy towards Arab states was significantly limited before the mid-1950s, by which point British influence in the region could no longer be counted on by American diplomats to preserve Western interests. Private philanthropic, missionary, educational and commercial interests largely constituted America's regional presence from the nineteenth century until Eisenhower began to take a more active role.<sup>4</sup> The region had not been a priority for Truman, but Eisenhower began his administration with a CIA coup against Iranian nationalist president Mohammed Mosaddegh in 1953, making clear his intentions to directly intervene to protect Western oil and geostrategic interests. Eisenhower cooperated with Britain in 1954 to draft an Arab-Israeli peace process while working to court Egyptian friendship. Despite siding with Egypt against British, French, and Israeli aggressors in the 1956 Suez War, a desire to contain Arab nationalism informed Eisenhower's later policy, culminating in the 1957 "Eisenhower Doctrine."<sup>5</sup> By the summer of 1958, serious doubts were emerging over this agenda. The Eisenhower Doctrine had several key objectives: secure regional Western allies via US military pacts, isolate Nasser,

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<sup>4</sup> Yaqub, 23-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 24, 39. While "Project ALPHA" worked to achieve an Arab-Israeli settlement in late 1954, the US also supported the Baghdad Pact – a security pact between Britain, Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan – while working to limit Arab membership.

and assure friendly governments that the US would protect them from subversion.<sup>6</sup> This Doctrine was premised on the prevailing opinion at that time – most notably held by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles – that Nasser was a Soviet puppet and Arab nationalism was vulnerable to Communist influence or takeover. The policy was largely used to support conservative Arab states like Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the regional ‘Arab Cold War’ against their rival, Nasser.<sup>7</sup> The first major test of the Eisenhower Doctrine came during the Lebanese civil war, during which US Marines were deployed to Beirut to prop up a pro-Western government. During this conflict, the Eisenhower administration failed to appreciate the genuine popular appeal of Nasser’s pan-Arabism. The government began to fatalistically regret its policy and lament being unable to reach out to the people of the Middle East, rather than unrepresentative governments.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the limits of foreign relations between *governments* rather than *populations* were being acutely felt.

In civil society however, efforts to create an interpersonal and intercultural foreign relations framework based upon cultural exchange and mutual understanding had existed for years. Founded in 1951, the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME) worked to subvert and improve upon the chronic shortcomings of interstate foreign policy. The group worked to revive diplomacy via private interests at a time when the US state was taking an increasingly strident role in the region. Founded by famous anti-Nazi author Dorothy Thompson and CIA official Kermit Roosevelt, the

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<sup>6</sup> Yaqub, 2; “President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Message to Congress (January 5, 1958),” in *Presidents From Eisenhower Through Johnson, 1953-69: Debating the Issues in Pro and Con Primary Documents*, ed. by John A. King, Jr. and John R. Vile (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 68-9.

<sup>7</sup> Yaqub, 2; Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Beacon Press: Boston, MA, 2009), 18.

<sup>8</sup> The following documents reflect the palpable fatalism among US officials working to ‘solve’ the Lebanese crisis through the limits of the Eisenhower Doctrine: “Memorandum of a Conference with the President, White House, Washington, July 14, 1958,” *Foreign Relations Of The United States, 1958–1960, Lebanon and Jordan, Volume XI*; “Memorandum of a Conversation, White House, Washington, May 13, 1958,” *FRUS*; Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Waging Peace, 1956-61* (New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1965), 274.

AFME's original and continuing mission statement was to promote "friendship and understanding" between the peoples of the US and the Middle East. The organization's executive was helmed by prominent American citizens who sought to oppose Communism and reach out to the people of the Middle East in a more direct, effective, and even-handed way than the US government was. The AFME worked to advance these goals via cultural programs, student exchanges, and, later, technical development projects in the Middle East.

The AFME had its roots in Kermit Roosevelt's earlier attempts to create anti-Zionist and Palestinian relief organizations like the Committee for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land (CJP) and the Holy Land Emergency Liaison Program (HELP).<sup>9</sup> Upon incorporation in 1951, the AFME's structure included an executive and Board of Directors headed by Dorothy Thompson and a National Council. It also had a network of offices throughout the US and the Middle East which were used to distribute information and promote better understanding between cultures. These offices included lending libraries and student counselling offices for the group's educational exchange program. While absolute membership numbers are not noted in annual reports, a 300 person increase in membership is noted for 1953 with a 3044 person increase by 1956.<sup>10</sup> This gives a sense of the group's influence and growth even in its inaugural years.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the group persists today under the name AMIDEST and carries out similar programs of technical

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<sup>9</sup> Hugh Wilford, "The CIA, US Citizens, and the Secret Battle for American Public Opinion in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Journal of American Studies* 51 no.1 (2015): 14.

<sup>10</sup> AFME, Inc. (1953), *American Friends of the Middle East: Second Annual Report of the Vice-President to the Board of Directors and National Council of the American Friends of the Middle East, Inc. July 1, 1952 to June 30, 1953*, New York, NY: AFME, Inc., 7. AFME Inc. (1956), *American Friends of the Middle East: Fifth Annual Report, 1955-1956*, New York, NY: AFME, Inc., 41.

<sup>11</sup> Financial reports also obscure membership since member fee totals are combined with other income like publication revenue and counselling fees, making the subtotals for each uncertain.

development and intercultural exchange makes clear its place in the broader complex of US foreign relations.

Hugh Wilford is the only scholar that has discussed the AFME in a comprehensive manner, but his work offers a limited and, I argue, misleading take on the American Friends. A 1967 *New York Times* investigation revealed that the AFME, like many other private voluntary organizations in the US, had been receiving covert CIA funding.<sup>12</sup> Though Wilford does not argue that the AFME was a co-opted CIA front organization – contending, rather, that they exerted authentic, dynamic citizen activism – he nonetheless maintains a tenuous argument about the group’s ties to the US state. He asserts that the CIA had ultimate say over AFME operations and that by the late-1950s the government “abandoned the appearance of consensus and asserted their control.”<sup>13</sup> Wilford provides no sustained evidence for this claim and admits that limited access to CIA archives impeded his research. Rendering his claims most specious however is that his work only focuses on the AFME’s domestic advocacy work during the 1950s, completely ignoring the vast source material on the group’s overseas operations in the Middle East. This thesis explores such intercultural programs, the agenda behind them, and how they deviated considerably from US foreign policy orthodoxy – despite the fact that prominent members of the AFME had ties to the US government.

I argue that the AFME actively worked to revive private diplomacy with the Middle East, broke with the US government’s Cold War policies, championed a people-to-people diplomacy program five years before Eisenhower did, advocated US study programs for otherwise neglected Middle Eastern students, implemented foreign technical training programs in the region before

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<sup>12</sup> Hugh Wilford, *America’s Great Game: The CIA’s Secret Arabists and the Shaping of the Modern Middle East* (Philadelphia, PA: Basic Books, 2013), 120.

<sup>13</sup> Wilford, “The CIA, US Citizens, and the Secret Battle,” 3, 22.

either the Eisenhower or Kennedy administration, and eschewed foreign aid programs in favour of private sector corporate development. The AFME is also significant given that they at least preceded – if not directly influenced – official US rapprochement with Arab nationalism in the late 1950s. While Eisenhower’s government had vilified Nasser as a Soviet stooge and the “Hitler of the Middle East,” this official position was abandoned almost a year after the AFME had made their friendship and respect for Arab nationalism and political sovereignty clear. John F Kennedy made a stronger effort to court Arab nationalist governments during his term in office, and the AFME maintained its pro-Arab, anti-Zionist position as the Kennedy and Johnson administrations pivoted the other way.

Wilford’s work has also obscured the complexity of the AFME worldview by emphasizing its anti-Zionist, Arabist stance. Authors like Matthew Jacobs who make brief mention of the AFME in their work similarly focus exclusively on its stance on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Though important, this aspect barely scrapes the surface of the group’s complex operations and worldview. It also obscures the nature of their ‘friendship’ with Arab states. In this thesis I argue firstly that until roughly 1956 the AFME was less ‘Arabist’ than ‘Islamophilic,’ promoting the idea of an anti-Communist Muslim-Christian alliance meant to save both civilizations from the Soviets. Secondly, even as the AFME began to adopt a stance of open fidelity towards Arab nationalism, it was with the intent of engaging in a program of economic uplift and transferring the mantle of regional economic development from Arab states to US corporations.

The role of class and capital in the AFME’s agenda are left out of the Wilford narrative, as are their imperial and modernizing impulses. The case for governmental cooptation of the AFME is far more tenuous than that of explicit industrial influence. While the AFME under the leadership of President Dorothy Thompson and Vice-President Garland Evans Hopkins promoted the

exchange of modernizing cultural elites between the US and the Middle East, by the late 1950s, under the purview of Presidents Harold B Minor and Earl Bunting the organization took a decided turn towards neoliberal industrial development. The nature of this shift and the AFME's agenda in the Middle East are key to understanding its relationship to Arab nationalism. To say the American Friends were 'Arabist' and 'anti-Zionist' is insufficient and ignores the ways in which they defined the Arab-American relationship and subverted the cause of Arab unity.

The animating questions behind this thesis are: what was the nature of the Arab-American relationship that the AFME was trying to advance? More specifically, I will ask: who stood to benefit from the group's proposals? Who would own the development process in the long term? And, to link these questions about international relations and material development: what ideas were the AFME attempting to normalize and legitimize in a decolonizing region intent on economic stability? At base, the common answer to all these questions is that the AFME's neoliberal development agenda deployed American corporations to modernize the Middle East, through policy which allowed US investors to profit from and gain access to the region's resources. The American Friends advanced ideas of commodification, corporate uplift, and American hegemony while undermining concepts of democratic or public ownership and postcolonial nationalism. Arab students and workers were increasingly cast as cogs of development in AFME projects. This created an increasingly unilateral, privatized Arab-American relationship based on the needs of US capital rather than any intercultural partnership rooted in mutual understanding.

'Neoliberal' is often associated with the reactionary policies against state economic power and welfare regimes beginning in the late 1970s and 1980s. In the realm of development, the AFME demonstrates that it was not only an approach implemented decades before but, more significantly, at a time when state modernization had become the status quo. Since the late-1950s,

many social scientists, especially Kennedy-era modernizers, viewed the state as the vehicle for modernization. Arab states like Egypt used nationalization to build modern postcolonial states, fund progressive social programs, and strengthen foreign policies based on neutrality and anti-imperialism. The NGOs of the 1960s often deferred to the development priorities of state governments, rather than the whims of capital directly. Conversely, the American Friends worked to undermine state power – particularly that of Arab nationalism. Economic regulations were chastised, nationalization was subverted, and as a result Arab economic sovereignty and public welfare were undermined for the benefit of American investors. Arab students and workers were also commodified as assets for US corporate power. The AFME did not invent the concept of boosting foreign capital in the Middle East, but they sought to revive privatized diplomacy and development at a time when Arab states were making a concerted move towards decolonization, nation-building, industrialization, and state ownership.

### *Methodology*

This thesis uses the theoretical framework of dependency. Typically applied to the US relationship with Latin America, the parallels to the American corporate hegemony exercised in the Middle East in the 1950s-60s are stark. The theory emphasizes the metropole's control of domestic affairs in the periphery via coopted economic, cultural, and social relationships and institutions, rather than by the direct military or political control associated with formal colonialism.<sup>14</sup> In Abbas Alnasrawi's formulation, dependency refers to a situation where one

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<sup>14</sup> Louis A Perez, Jr., "Dependency," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 166.

economy's performance is conditioned by the success and expansion of another.<sup>15</sup> His primary examples are foreign oil concessions in Arab states and the continuation of colonial currency blocs in the Middle East, which tethered post-colonial exchange rates and borrowing to European central banks.<sup>16</sup> Louis A Perez Jr describes dependency more bluntly, as a relationship wherein Western development schemes for 'underdeveloped' nations and regions impoverish the latter while enriching the former.<sup>17</sup> Perez uses the example of pre-revolutionary Cuba – when the island nation's economy was drowned in US capital, run by US managers and technicians, and organized around US needs.<sup>18</sup> Economic integration made internal political change difficult while public policy served US interests. Dependency thus describes a scenario wherein the metropole integrates and restructures the periphery to serve Western interests and siphons its profits. In the context of postwar decolonization, this was the arrangement that the AFME worked to establish via US corporate development and technical training after 1956 – claiming uplift and mutual benefit but delivering a system of dependence.

The use of concepts like 'core' and 'periphery' therefore refers to power dynamics more than geographical binaries. The AFME's student program is a prime example. Middle Eastern students were peripheral in the AFME's worldview and operations – domestic and overseas. In the US, they were kept at arm's length from American culture and hosted with the explicit purpose of fulfilling American national interests as their sponsors in the AFME defined them. In the Middle East, they were peripheral to the US corporations for whom they worked via AFME programs. The American Friends trained Arab students as workers and managers while constructing an

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<sup>15</sup> Abbas Alnasrawi, *Arab Nationalism, Oil, and the Political Economy of Dependency* (New York, NY: Greenwood Press, 1991), 1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2, 17.

<sup>17</sup> Perez, 166.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-3.

overseas class hierarchy of which they and American industrialists were a part. Their vision was that of an Arab managerial class who would support US corporate integration overseas, as workers were trained to build prosperity for both.<sup>19</sup> Capital was to be extracted from the Middle East, but a new economic hierarchy would be constructed in its place. The metropole and periphery were transnational, existing as functions of American corporate power.

This paper's scope will be limited to the AFME's institutional agenda for overseas projects between 1951 and 1967. I will analyze these projects and priorities through the lens of the power structures they sought to impose, specifically those based on deference to American capital and orientalist ideas of modernity and progress. Such ideas and the ways they sought to legitimize US corporate and cultural hegemony will be the focus of this thesis, rather than the economic impact of development projects on the economies of Arab states or the US.

The primary source base for this project draws largely on AFME documents and publications, as well as the writings of key members penned during their tenure at the organization. Personal papers will be drawn on to a lesser extent both due to access issues and mainly to keep the focus on the organization's direct institutional priorities and ideological drivers. This thesis is concerned with the ideas advanced by the AFME as an historical actor. While the annual reports were mainly internal documents for the Board of Directors and National Council, the group's pamphlets, books, and primers were available for sale to the wider membership and general public. Not all publications were written by the AFME executive, and analyses of those documents will reflect that. However, my operating assumption throughout is that the AFME published documents that aligned with its organizational agenda, or at the very least, that the upper-class Americans and

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Middle Easterners with whom they were consulting were generally of one mind, rendering any organizational effort to produce a ‘benign’ assortment of opinions an intensely political and elitist project.

This work will not be a social history of the AFME’s influence on US or Arab society. Such a task should be taken up in the future not only so the impact of AFME projects on the American psyche can be understood, but to give more weight to subaltern Arab voices and experiences. That this study cannot achieve such a scope is the most regrettable limitation. Histories of the non-Western world must provincialize the United States and studying the AFME is a step toward shifting the historiographical focus from US foreign *policy* towards that of international *relationships* insofar as this group claimed to be fostering interpersonal, Arab-American relations. While this project will place the AFME in the context of both US and Arab government policies and priorities, the use of English language sources – as well as the enduring scholarly favoritism towards US history – means that the American voice remains overly prominent.<sup>20</sup> While the agency of Arab workers cannot be foregrounded in this study, it is accepted as inevitable. My focus on the Western corporate power structures created by American elites is not mutually exclusive with the understanding that it was likely resisted and adapted by the Arab subaltern in the streets, on the shop floor, or through civil discourse. This thesis explores how a distinct, private US foreign policy was developed and executed from American civil society, and how it interacted with the cultural and development priorities of American and Arab nationalist administrations in the early Cold War era.

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<sup>20</sup> The exception will be the use of publications from the Organization of Arab Students in the US, whose voice is not only Arab but more reflective of grassroots ideas than the AFME’s other Middle Eastern contributors. Access to their publications is limited and will only be used where relevant. They nonetheless provide a great look at the perspectives of some Arab nationalist students and the recommendations they made regarding the project of Arab unity while in the US during the early 1950s.

The Arab nationalism of this period was not a monolith; the Hashemite pan-Arabism of the 1950s, the activism of the Iraqi Communist Party, and the Ba'athism in 1960s Iraq and Syria all rivalled Nasser's regional vision.<sup>21</sup> However, since Nasser's Egypt boasted the most political, cultural, and geopolitical influence at the time – and enjoyed the disproportionate focus of both the US government and the AFME – it will be discussed most in this paper. Syria and Iraq will also be included since they were also prominent Arab nations during this period and were closely associated with Arab nationalism and the AFME's work. Syria and Egypt formed the United Arab Republic (UAR), an organic political and economic union, in 1958 while Iraq experienced an Arab nationalist military coup the same year. In 1963, Iraq and Syria (since withdrawn from the UAR) both had Ba'athist governments come to power espousing Arab nationalist platforms while distancing themselves from association with Nasser.

Interrogating the AFME's relationship with these states will reveal how it undercut the economic priorities of Arab unity while attempting to commodify students and workers and promote American ideals. Nasser's pan-Arab project was far from ideal. Its centralized military power and political repression were not aspects the AFME should have or needed to endorse. But the reality was that the American Friends' approach was to exploit the weaknesses rather than encourage the strengths of political Arab nationalism. This was done in order to boost corporate hegemonic power rather than to foster interpersonal, bilateral friendship or any truly mutually beneficial relationship.

This study will end in 1967 for a few reasons. The first is that the post-1967 context was quite different on both sides of the Arab-American relationship. The year of the Six Day War

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<sup>21</sup> Khalidi, 19.

ushered in massive geographic and political changes in the Middle East. Israel occupied the remainder of Palestinian territory, wresting the Gaza Strip from Egyptian control and the West Bank from Jordan, while seizing the Golan Heights in Syria. Israel's victory was also seen as a huge blow against a Nasserism already weakened by protracted military involvement in the Yemeni civil war (1962-67). In the US, the Vietnam War had since become a priority and the Nixon administration was just two years away – both of which signalled major shifts from the Eisenhower and Kennedy foreign policy agendas. For the AFME itself, 1967 was the year when the *New York Times* revealed its CIA funding, marking new organizational pressures that will not be explored here. Available documents from the AFME are also much sparser after the mid-1960s.

*Argument: The Private Modernizers*

Despite radical operational changes in its early history, modernization was a constant in the American Friends' agenda. It defined 'modern' as rational, scientific, spiritual, militarized, capitalist, amenable to private property, and technologically advanced. Many of their beliefs aligned with the modernization theory that gained academic and political popularity in the late 1950s and especially in the Kennedy administration's policy agenda. Broadly, the theory, as summarized by Michael E Latham, held that societies were either traditional or modern and that the path from one to the other was universal and linear and could be controlled, guided, and accelerated. Modernization could be expedited via contact between modern and traditional societies.<sup>22</sup> The AFME's agenda echoed all of this but broke with practitioners like those in the

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<sup>22</sup> Michael E Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and 'Nation Building' in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 4.

Kennedy admiration on the key point that states would be the ones to engineer modernization. Through the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress in Latin America, the US government sought to modernize the Third World along Western lines.<sup>23</sup> Postcolonial national leaders, Nasser included, sought similar modernizing goals but used the post-colonial state apparatus to achieve them. The AFME broke with modernizers through their neoliberal development model, conducted by US corporations rather than national governments. The AFME broke with 'guided' modernization theory in practice while advancing its own agenda of private corporate modernization.

This thesis will cover four main themes that animated the AFME's early decades. Chapter two will discuss the group's cultural exchange program that deployed transnational cultural vanguards between the US and the Middle East and the proposed Muslim-Christian alliance that was used to legitimize Western cultural uplift. Chapter three interrogates the group's neoliberal turn begun in 1956 and the subsequent promotion of US capital abroad that subverted, while claiming to support, Arab unity. Chapter four examines the student exchange program that brought Middle Eastern students to the US to study. The program, initially focused on cultural transfer and uplift, evolved into a project that commodified Arab students as labour for US industry overseas. Finally, chapter five examines the AFME's technical development program and its push to roll out and legitimize a privatized, neoliberal development model in an era of interstate and international aid projects.

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<sup>23</sup> The phrase 'Third World' is a loaded one. My use of it is intended in the Cold War rather than contemporary context, to connote those newly independent, neutral states exercising various forms of postcolonial nationalism (e.g. Arab nationalism) in the postwar period. It may also be used to refer to this region as one where the US was competing for influence.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the American Friends of the Middle East produced a privatized foreign relations agenda that sought to modernize and integrate the Middle East into the Western orbit. Their foot soldiers were elite transnational vanguards, first cultural then economic. The early idea of an Islamo-Christian alliance sought to legitimize the task of modernizing the Middle East by casting the exchange of Western ideas between Christian and Muslim societies as an eternal recurrence. It tried to integrate the Middle East into the cultural orbit of the anti-Communist camp by articulating the notion of a loose partnership between nations. By 1957 this policy had morphed into a more unilateral and explicit attempt to economically integrate the region's resources under a corporate American purview. This neoliberal turn pursued development in the Middle East via private US companies, eclipsing an earlier framework of cultural exchange. While this turn featured a unique recognition of Arab nationalism, it only acknowledged the right of postcolonial nations to political, not economic, sovereignty and self-determination. This marked a missed opportunity to shed the endemic elitism in the American Friends' foreign relations model; instead, the organization doubled down by accelerating a relationship characterized by unilateral, paternalistic, neoliberal modernization. The AFME worked to facilitate American corporate access to the Middle East while legitimizing corporate imperialism by invoking orientalist frameworks of modernity and cultural hierarchies.

The AFME is a case study in interpersonal foreign relations, albeit one marked by imperial, modernizing impulses. The American Friends broke with the foreign policy orthodoxies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy governments in key ways. They rejected divisive security pacts with the Middle East in favour of broad cultural alliances that embraced self-determination, while struggling to fully respect the concept in practice. However, their most significant departure was their promotion of corporate development in the Middle East in an era of state-sponsored technical

assistance and foreign aid programs. Both the AFME and the US government were driven by modernization and the preservation US Cold War hegemony, but the former advanced it in a way that rejected a meaningful role for state actors in the process. As they chastised the blunders of the US government, they also worked to limit the role of Arab states over national economies while commodifying the workers of the region. Its publications contrasted incapable and ‘irrational’ Arab governments with American technical expertise to legitimize a privatized economy that served US capital. Arab students and workers were to be trained and managed by US businesses while advancing an Americanized vision of their national economies – a form of dependency inimical to the postcolonial vision of independence and neutrality at the core of Arab nationalism. The AFME’s vision for Arab-American relations involved the subversion of Arab nationalism and the integration of the Middle East into the US economic and cultural orbit.

## Chapter Two:

### The AFME's Philosophy of Cultural Exchange: A New Kind of American Imperialism

In its early years, the AFME focused on cultivating interpersonal diplomacy and exchange between America and the Middle East. The group's goal was to foster friendship and understanding between the people of these regions, thereby improving US foreign relations and forging a cultural alliance against the Soviet Union. While some educational and cultural exchange programs that contracted out state propaganda to private businesses and NGOs were initiated under President Harry Truman in the late 1940s,<sup>24</sup> the AFME's operations were significant because their messages often deviated significantly from the agendas of the Truman and Eisenhower governments. Begun in 1956, President Eisenhower's People-to-People Program was meant to operate at arm's length from the state, but the program was nonetheless tainted by affiliation with the US government.<sup>25</sup> It also began long after the AFME's exchange programs were underway. The AFME, much like the People-to-People program that followed it, was not an embodiment of radical, progressive, grassroots diplomacy that sought collaboration with global subaltern populations. It connected transnational social elites while advancing corporate interests in the process. However, they were also conducting an American foreign policy that was distinct from that of the US government.

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<sup>24</sup> This included letter writing campaigns, college affiliations, distributing books, magazines, and leaflets, and tourist indoctrination. Kenneth Osgoode, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 230.

<sup>25</sup> Osgoode, 237. Business leaders declined to donate to the program for this reason, causing funding issues. James R Vaughan has also discussed how, in Arab states particularly, US government cultural programs were viewed with suspicion and disdain, making such affiliation a liability: "The United States and the Limits of Cultural Diplomacy in the Arab Middle East, 1945-1957," in *Searching for a cultural diplomacy*, edited by Jessica C.E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 174.

This chapter will describe the AFME's worldview and cultural exchange program – its primary means of cultivating 'friendship' with the Middle East. There were two general factions within the AFME that supported these programs for different reasons. This chapter focuses on the dominant religiously minded members and the publications they produced during the group's early years, and how programs of cultural exchange reflected the group's industrial shift after 1956. With prominent members like Vice President Garland Evans Hopkins and Director of the Research and Publications division Erich W Bethmann firmly in the former camp, a religious bent dominated AFME rhetoric for the better part of the 1950s.

The private citizens who comprised the AFME, imperialistic Cold War nationalists though they were, introduced an alternative model of private, interpersonal diplomacy into the US foreign relations toolbox of the 1950s while challenging key features of state foreign policy orthodoxy. One of the biggest philosophical differences between the AFME and the US government during the organization's first years was the former's belief that Communism could only be defeated through an alliance of Islam and Christianity. Cast as a mutually beneficial 'partnership,' it served as an intellectual legitimization for American modernization in the Third World by portraying uplift as part of a cyclical historical process that would revitalize the Middle East while securing the West against Communism. The American Friends' dismissal of neutralism and its vilification of secularism indicated an early hostility towards Arab nationalism – the regional embodiment of the anti-imperial liberation movements which the American Friends so eloquently claimed to support. The endemic elitism of the group's exchange programs also undermined their claim to be forging an interpersonal Arab-American relationship based on equity and social justice.

### **The AFME Worldview: Friendship, Understanding, and Interpersonal Diplomacy**

For the American Friends, cultural exchange was a way to fight the Cold War more effectively than the heavy-handed methods of the US government. It sought to promote a positive image of America and its values in the Middle East while subverting foreign policy orthodoxy by changing American domestic attitudes about Muslim nations. The American Friends routinely chastised the state for the failures of US foreign policy in the Middle East and believed they could do better. The AFME ultimately sought to improve the US government's role as a cultural actor on the world stage while limiting its hard power imperialism in the long term. It worked towards this goal by taking up the mantle of foreign relations itself, via interpersonal diplomacy and cultural exchange.

The AFME's exchange programs – foreign lectures, travel sponsorships, art shows, publications, and student exchanges – were aimed at fostering understanding and friendship between the people of the United States and the Middle East. The organization set out to “interpret the problems of the whole [Middle East] to the American people” and “get the truth about America to the Middle Eastern public.”<sup>26</sup> Even in the 1960s, when the focus on cultural exchange had been eclipsed by technical training and development, a commitment to mutual understanding prevailed. According to the group's 1959-60 annual report, the “personal, human relationship” was “the most reliable constant and greatest hope for any genuine understanding between the American people and the peoples of the Middle East.”<sup>27</sup> The organization wanted Middle Eastern visitors to

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<sup>26</sup> AFME, Inc. (1952), *First Annual Report of the Executive Vice President to the Board of Directors and the National Council of the American Friends of the Middle East, Inc. May 15, 1951 to June 30, 1952* (New York, NY: AFME, Inc.), 3-4.

<sup>27</sup> AFME, Inc. (1960), *American Friends of the Middle East, Annual Report 1959-1960* (Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc.), 1.

“understand, not just observe, the United States,” and sought to “make developments within the Middle East and North Africa more understandable to Americans.”<sup>28</sup>

The lofty goal of mutual understanding was not intended to serve the same function on both sides. It was a project with domestic and geopolitical goals born out of the early Cold War. In the words of the AFME’s third annual report, Americans would be able to “act more intelligently if they are thoroughly acquainted with the situation and its background in this important area” and would thereby see the value of policy based in “impartiality and sympathetic understanding.”<sup>29</sup> Policy missteps, ostensibly borne out of successive administrations’ fundamental misunderstanding of the Middle East, could not be afforded at a time of ideological and military struggle against the Soviet bloc. Simply put, the AFME wanted to repair foreign policy via cultural exchange.

Though American attitudes about the Middle East were the group’s focus, the American Friends were also concerned with ‘clarifying’ the true values of America for the people of the Middle East. The AFME “frankly admitted” that in relations with the Middle East “we have fallen short of our own high American ideals” yet remained “confident most Americans still hold to those ideals.”<sup>30</sup> This desire to promote and defend US values made the AFME very much a product of its Cold War context.

Early organizational reports show that the AFME was working to restore an understanding of the ‘real’ America while exposing “misconceptions and false propaganda” advanced by special

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<sup>28</sup> AFME, Inc. (1963), *1962-3: American Friends of the Middle East, Inc. Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc.), 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11; AFME Inc. (1954), *American Friends of the Middle East, Third Annual Report of the Executive Vice President to the Board of Directors and the National Council of the American Friends of the Middle East, Inc. July 1, 1953 to June 30, 1954*, (New York, NY: AFME, Inc.), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 4.

interest groups.<sup>31</sup> The exact identities of such groups was not made explicit in AFME documents. However, given the debates in question, it is likely they meant Soviet propaganda or Zionist advocacy for policies more favourable to Israel than Arab states, something which was anathema to the AFME.<sup>32</sup> Statements made by future AFME President and industrialist Earl Bunting indicate that labour unions may also have been included among such ‘special interests.’ In 1948, Bunting remarked in a speech that “self-seeking individuals have been attracted into the labor movement, and some of them are imbued with foreign ideologies.”<sup>33</sup>

The AFME’s effort to correct these apparent falsehoods also revealed what they understood to be the true version of America.<sup>34</sup> According to the AFME executive, the American way meant being “the champion of freedom, the symbol of democracy, the world's hope for a better tomorrow for all men everywhere.” Acknowledging that US policy had routinely “been untrue to that concept of America,” the AFME wanted to break with state orthodoxy for the good of the national interest.<sup>35</sup> The group nonetheless accepted the standard logic of the Cold War. Like government information service programs, AFME cultural exchange initiatives were designed to promote American values. Both denied that they were propagandizing, describing their work as mere education and clarification of facts and policy at home and abroad.<sup>36</sup> By ‘clarifying’ US identity and foreign policy to Middle Eastern audiences, the AFME was fighting the Cold War in a manner

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<sup>31</sup> AFME, Inc. (1955), *American Friends of the Middle East, Fourth Annual Report, 1954-1955* (New York, NY: AFME, Inc.), 17.

<sup>32</sup> Wilford, *America’s Great Game*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Earl Bunting, “Industrial Relations Move Ahead,” *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 1, (1948): 245.

<sup>34</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Osgoode, 8.

similar to the state's approach – by selling new allies on the US 'brand' – but doing so in a way that they felt was more effective and consistent with American values.<sup>37</sup>

In 1955, AFME President Dorothy Thompson aptly summarized this approach at the group's annual conference:

The essence of American policy toward the Middle East and toward all peoples was expressed at the birth of this nation. If we have deviated from it at times, it is still in America's heart and will. We wish to live equally and impartially with all who bear us good will; to be magnanimous toward differences; to be benevolent within our means. This is not a New Look. It is an Old Look at new realities.<sup>3839</sup>

This is significant for arguments made by scholars like James R Vaughan, who argue that US public diplomacy in the Middle East was ineffective and often alienated target audiences because it mixed cultural exchange with Cold War national security prerogatives.<sup>40</sup> Yet the AFME was, rather explicitly, conducting cultural exchanges for the same purpose, without facing a comparable backlash. The American Friends were challenging the way the Cold War was being fought without questioning the need to fight it, and in a way that preserved the values they saw as core to the American mission. Reasserting these values in the Middle East was crucial.

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<sup>37</sup> It is also significant that the AFME's messaging did not constitute the definition of propaganda as the attempt to influence attitudes often through coercion and with a hidden agenda (Osgoode, 7). AFME publications were relatively upfront about the rationale behind their programs and worldview during the 1950s.

<sup>38</sup> AFME, Inc. (1961), *Annual Report 1960-1: American Friends of the Middle East, Inc.* (Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc.), 2. Thompson is most likely the one quoted in the Chairman's letter.

<sup>39</sup> 'New Look' is a reference to Eisenhower's Cold War strategy of prioritizing alliances with friendly governments, covert military operations (like coups and special forces), and a buildup of nuclear weapons as a means of deterrence through threat of "massive retaliation." This was a reaction against the protracted wars seen under Truman, e.g. the Korean War (1950-3).

<sup>40</sup> Vaughan, 162-3.

The AFME's rhetoric was passionately anti-imperial albeit in the context of its Cold War nationalism. Support for self-determination was present in the AFME's publications from the beginning. Their 1954-5 annual report stated that "the nations of the Middle East, without discrimination or favor, must have the same right to develop their way of life that we ourselves enjoy."<sup>41</sup> The AFME thus tied national liberation to what they saw as American values of democracy and a natural right to self-determination, stating that anti-colonial movements demanded equal treatment and acceptance on the world stage. The group hoped "we Americans will be somehow associated with them in the great social, economic and political revolution that is sweeping their part of the world."<sup>42</sup> This position, however, was severely undercut by colonial apologists like prominent Board member and Secretary-Treasurer Cornelius van H Engert (1951-67). A former US Minister to Afghanistan, he wrote that "the word 'colonialism' has (quite unfairly) become a term of opprobrium" and that "Moscow's 'colonialism' is far worse than any ever practised by Western powers."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, anti-imperial rhetoric remained a feature of the AFME throughout the 1950s, albeit routinely absent from its operations – especially ones aimed at bringing the Middle East into cultural alliances with the West.

Despite its Cold War lens, the American Friends disagreed with the orthodoxy that the new states of the Middle East could be compartmentalized into allies and Soviet sympathizers. The AFME appears to have been responding to the United States Information Agency's (USIA) "country focus" – which emphasized greater decision making for overseas field officers and expertise about the locale where they were stationed – when they said, "one type of policy can be

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<sup>41</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 5.

<sup>42</sup> AFME, Inc. (1959), *American Friends of the Middle East, Annual Report, 1958-9* (Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc.), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Cornelius van H Engert, "Introduction" in Erich W Bethmann, *The Fate of Muslims Under Soviet Rule*, Minaret Series no 14, (New York, NY: AFME, Inc, 1958), 4, 6.

pursued in Indonesia and yet another in Tunis.”<sup>44</sup> Ignoring the “essential unity of this area” had, according to the American Friends, produced “grievous mistakes” in past US foreign policy.<sup>45</sup> This was a key break from the orthodoxy of the Eisenhower government, which increasingly worked to reward regional allies while containing neutral states ‘sympathetic’ to the USSR. Though a patently orientalist notion that ignored national differences, the notion that the new states of the Middle East must be treated as a common cultural entity offered a radically different blueprint for waging the Cold War: through unconditional cultural fraternity, not divisive alliances.

The American Friends saw cultural contact and exchange as vital yet they viewed global civilizations as essentially discrete and different. As Thompson said at the AFME’s first annual conference:

I want to help keep America American, in the Christian tradition and western culture, as a necessity, indeed, to the continuance of any meaningful life in this country. But *because* – exactly because – this is my desire, I respect, and indeed I share in, the ambition of other civilizations – Arabs, Hindus, Persians, Indonesians – to create and maintain civilizations representative not of me, but of themselves.<sup>46</sup>

For Thompson, cultures could connect (mainly by virtue of shared religious beliefs)<sup>47</sup> but should not mix. Though advocating for anti-imperial cultural exchange, her words also betrayed the AFME’s lack of critical engagement with the tenets of Western civilization they believed to be so

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<sup>44</sup> Jason C Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices: US Cold War Public Diplomacy and the Formation of the Third World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67; Annual Report, 1953-4, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Dorothy Thompson, “Partnership in Meeting Needs” in *Proceedings of the First Annual Conference of American Friends of the Middle East, Inc. – Theme: Partnership in Meeting Needs in the Middle East* (New York, NY: AFME, Inc., 1953), 13.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 11.

vital. For the American Friends, the US needed only to reembrace its own intrinsic values – not learn from other cultures. In reality, the AFME more often asked the Third World to adopt and synthesize aspects of Western hegemony than it called for the US was to do the reverse.

While aligning closely with the conventional logic of total cold war against the Soviet Union, the AFME broke with official policy on how to fight it and over who constituted an enemy. As Kenneth Osgoode describes, Eisenhower's philosophy of cultural exchange was intended to mobilize all aspects of American society in a propaganda war against Communism. Osgoode argues that Eisenhower was not seeking a negotiated settlement through cultural programs like the US-Soviet cultural agreement or the People-to-People Program, but simply looking for a way to fight the Cold War while avoiding a hot one.<sup>48</sup> The USSR's post-Stalin emphasis on 'peaceful coexistence' and greater contacts with non-Communist states did not appear to change either Eisenhower's or the AFME's mind about the fight against Communism.<sup>49</sup> While Eisenhower hoped to permanently avoid another world war by winning the struggle for hearts and minds via propaganda, the American Friends were far less clear on this point. Their strategy for courting the Middle East was obviously focused on cultural fraternity rather than military alliances, but the evidence does not support the notion that they were an anti-war group by any means. Whether the AFME's cultural alliance was intended to stand against the Soviet Union in a cold or hot war is unclear.

### **It's Nothing Interpersonal: Exchanging Elites**

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<sup>48</sup> Osgoode, 6-7, 65, 72.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 64-5.

For all its talk of developing friendship and understanding between US and the Middle Eastern societies through interpersonal diplomacy, the AFME's cultural exchange program sent and received only prominent, influential, and well-connected individuals. The AFME's Intercultural Exchange Program included both its Travel Program and the sponsorship of guest lecturers in the US. Through these initiatives the American Friends engaged in a concerted sharing of cultural elites across America and the Middle East. During the 1950s, vanguards for American and Arab culture were gradually replaced by ambassadors of industry – both were tasked with forging friendship and understanding between the US and the Middle East. Although Middle Easterners were involved in the exchange process, like their American counterparts they were mostly from upper class backgrounds.

Inaugurated in 1952, the Intercultural Exchange Program brought “distinguished Middle Eastern personalities” to the US to give lectures across the western and midwestern states to audiences at high schools, colleges, churches, social groups, and readers of the newspapers in which their lectures were published. Hailing from Cairo, Beirut, and Amman, the guests were notably upper class, including the wife of the Egyptian ambassador to the US and an attorney and former counsellor at the Jordanian Ministry of Justice.<sup>50</sup> Other guests had backgrounds in painting, sculpting, and philosophy<sup>51</sup> with the Dean of Baghdad College, prominent social leaders and activists,<sup>52</sup> an Iraqi jurist, and the delegate to UN Human Rights Commission also being hosted<sup>53</sup> Government representatives and skilled cultural elites no doubt merited some role as informal ambassadors, but they were less than representative of Middle Eastern society and culture, and

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<sup>50</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>52</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 13-14.

<sup>53</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 13-14.

more of a testament to the biases of AFME thought. To its credit, the AFME frequently highlighted Middle Eastern women in its exchanges, despite its own male-dominated executive. Disproportionately privileged, elite, upper class Middle Easterners, the visitors neither fully represented the region nor embodied grassroots diplomacy as the American Friends claimed. The AFME's project was one in which only a vanguard of cultural elites was permitted to partake.

The AFME also sent Americans to the Middle East, mostly members from its own executive. In 1952, Board member and pastor Edward L.R. Elson went to the Middle East where he lectured at prominent colleges and universities, visited social work centers, and met with Islamic leaders.<sup>54</sup> The following year, VP Hopkins, Cornelius van H Engert, and several religious journal editors travelled to the Middle East to visit, give lectures, and report their findings on the region.<sup>55</sup> In 1956, most of the executive travelled to the region.

Part of this program was the AFME's Travel Program, wherein a more general selection of American tourists were advised about travel opportunities in the Middle East. This partially and briefly ameliorated the trend of support for elite exchange before the program was used to accelerate business connections later in the decade. The program aimed to advise and assist tourists and travel agencies by "providing them with the specialized knowledge of the Middle East at our disposal, both here and in the area itself."<sup>56</sup> This was significant partly because it showed how the AFME was branding itself as a specialist group uniquely qualified to provide information on the region.

Eisenhower's People-to-People Program differed with the AFME in timing and scope but was a similar attempt at interpersonal diplomacy. Begun in 1956, the program was designed to be

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<sup>54</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 9.

<sup>55</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 14-16.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

as autonomous and removed from the baggage of government as possible. Kenneth Osgoode argues this never materialized, but the program nonetheless strove to connect Americans with their cultural, epistemic, and academic counterparts overseas to foster understanding and goodwill.<sup>57</sup> The program attempted to make ordinary Americans into unofficial ambassadors, not just boosters of US propaganda. This was thought to be giving them a stake in diplomacy while avoiding the alienation of foreign audiences associated with other Cold War public diplomacy campaigns. Specialized committees worked to connect like-minded people, ranging from artists and scientists, to veterans and youth. The committees created sister city affiliations, led parade marches, hosted exchange students, organized travelling delegations, fostered the sharing of letters, books and magazines, scrapbook, and photos worldwide, and sponsored relief campaigns in Europe.<sup>58</sup> The larger scope and size was to be expected from a government sanctioned program, but the basis of this type of intercultural exchange to suit Cold War imperatives was something the American Friends already had five years of experience with. Via their publications, tourist program, Middle Eastern lecturers, and distribution of art and literature on both sides of the ocean, the AFME worked to bridge cultural divides. By 1958, AFME was clearly attempting to emphasize its similarities to the Program by using the phrase “people-to-people” in their organizational description, but the NGO nonetheless preceded the government on this initiative considerably. Generally, the American Friends aligned with Eisenhower’s soft power approaches (interpersonal diplomacy and ‘corrective’ propaganda) but rebuked his hard power approach to the Middle East – namely, his strategy of selective alliances.

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<sup>57</sup> Osgoode, 233.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 237-8.

## **The Muslim-Christian Alliance against Communism**

The idea of a religious alliance against Communism was the conceptual centrepiece of the AFME's cultural exchange program. The American Friends envisioned what they portrayed as a 'partnership' between the US and the Middle East centred around conceptions of shared religious values in the fight against an atheistic Soviet Communism. In its early years, the AFME sponsored Muslim-Christian convocations to fulfill the goal of creating a "better understanding of the religious aspirations of the peoples of the Middle East." Americans, the group argued, "will never properly understand and appreciate that area of the world until they understand and appreciate its dominant religion, Islam."<sup>59</sup> The philosophy behind this was largely articulated in the AFME's Minaret Series of short books and essays, which included five works between 1952 and 1958 featuring seven authors writing on the topic of Muslim-Christian cooperation. The group of authors included Americans and Middle Eastern but represented upper class and cultural elites rather than average citizens. The Muslim-Christian alliance against Communism championed by the AFME served as an intellectual justification for America's modernizing role in the Middle East by advancing notions of cyclical prosperity and mutual historical uplift. Cultural exchange was cast as a way for the US to repay its civilizational debt to the Islamic world, and effectively 're-modernize' them.

A recurring theme in the Minaret publications was the idea that Islam and Christianity were fundamentally similar, modern faiths that would "stand or fall together" in the Cold War struggle against secularism.<sup>60</sup> They stated that "our great civilizations in the Middle East and the West derive their strength essentially from the same wellsprings,"<sup>61</sup> sharing "the same roots and [...] the

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<sup>59</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Kenneth H Crandall, "The Impact of Islam on Christianity," Minaret Series no. 1 (NY: AFME, Inc, 1952), 10.

<sup>61</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 2.

same basic concepts.”<sup>62</sup> The AFME emphasized the historical relationship between Islam and Christianity, especially the mutual exchange of modern Western values. This rhetoric was partly aimed at ending the chronic interfaith hostility that the group felt had hindered the spiritual progress of both faiths.<sup>63</sup> It also repudiated myths about Islam’s backwardness by asserting that the religion was fundamentally Western. As Minaret contributor Kenneth H Crandall wrote, the West had a “cultural debt” to Islam, which had originally supplied it with core Western ideas.<sup>64</sup> Crandall credited Islam with key scientific, medical, mathematical, and sociological achievements, adding that:

While Christianity was still groping through the Dark Ages, Islam carved out an empire reaching from the frontiers of China to the Pyrenees. Along with territorial acquisitions, Islam inherited Greek philosophy through the medium of Persian and Syrian scholars, and accepted many cultural forms from these areas. Contributions also poured in from India and China, and from Arabia’s own indigenous culture. All of these [things] Islamic civilization preserved, commented on, and contributed to during its flowering in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries. It was this heritage which Islam made available to the West, at the blossoming of the high Middle Ages, which gave way in time to the Renaissance.<sup>6566</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Erich W Bethmann, “Foreword” to 1957 reprint of Crandall’s essay, i.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Crandall, 9. This is an example of a Minaret author who was not a prominent AFME member but nonetheless shared the organization’s voice. Crandall was a theology scholar who won an essay contest run by the AFME, meaning the essay was framed, edited, and endorsed by the American Friends prior to publication, with key themes being echoed by prominent members.

<sup>65</sup> Crandall, 1-3.

<sup>66</sup> Echoed in Muhammad Hashim Maiwandwal, “Muslim-Christian Relations,” Minaret Series no. 5, (New York, NY: AFME, Inc., 1954), 4-5. Maiwandwal was a former ambassador, editor, and royal press advisor in Afghanistan. Again, his essay was edited and endorsed by AFME through publication while echoing the views of key members.

The AFME's 1953-4 annual report echoed this when it spoke of how, now that "the Middle East is emerging from its own dark age of cultural stagnation, the West has a debt to repay," confident that "the peoples of the Middle East will joyfully accept back from us, refined and improved, what they originally gave to us."<sup>67</sup> The American Friends felt the West had "neglected its contacts with Islam" and thus betrayed its historical debt and fraternity to the area.<sup>68</sup> This conveniently justified efforts to export Western ideas to the Middle East – modernizing under the guise of repaying debt.

Despite their professed affinity for Islam, the American Friends' message on this front was problematic for two reasons. The first was that they were attempting to redeem 'Islamic civilization' by arguing it was fundamentally modern and Western. Islam's 'backwardness' was rejected via reference to its "empires with far reaching effects," "mightiest warriors," "foremost scientists," and advancements in math, medicine, and literature.<sup>69</sup> Islam's "highly developed civilization" of the past was seen as a function of strength, influence, and rationality, which it passed on to the West. Most interesting was how property rights were used to legitimize Islam. Contributors emphasized that while many "of the rights we read about in the western civilization were taken for granted in the Islamic state," the "right to private property [...] is made more manifest [in Islam] because the right is expressly provided for in the Quran."<sup>70</sup> The idea here was that Islam should be respected because it upheld the liberal right to own property. The AFME's repudiation of Islam's 'backwardness' was explained in a manner that endorsed the superiority of Western civilization and tied the worthiness of global societies to their adoption of its values. It never questioned Western values themselves, or more crucially, the right of superior societies to

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<sup>67</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 7.

<sup>68</sup> Crandall, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Ernest M Howe, "Bridges of Peace" in "Muslims and Christians, Partners of the Future," Minaret Series no. 9 (NY: AFME, Inc., 1955), 17.

<sup>70</sup> Maiwandwal, 6-7.

export them to ones that had ‘fallen behind.’ Instead they championed such action – or as they framed it, repaying an ‘ancient debt.’ Thus, cultural exchange was not simply about mutual understanding, but modernizing – justified by reimagining Western and Islamic civilizations in the context of a cyclical exchange.

The second shortcoming was the AFME’s inconsistent anti-colonialism, exposing the deeper project that the religious alliance was intellectually justifying. AFME publications often blamed the ‘Islamic world’ for falling behind the West, failing to hold accountable the Western colonialism they chided only vaguely. After echoing the claim that Islam made the Renaissance possible, Minaret contributor Muhammad Hashim Maiwandwal discussed how “Islam handed on its fruits [to the West] and slept” and that one “culture advanced and matured, while the other slept, hugging to itself the heritage of old.”<sup>71</sup> These arguments blatantly omitted the colonial legacy. Vice President Garland Evans Hopkins introduced his 1954 essay on the ‘Asian revolution’ by saying that “perhaps the single greatest force in the awakening of Asia from its long sleep was the Christian missions’ movement whose educators, doctors, and village workers carried with them ideas of the rights of man.”<sup>72</sup> He added that Americans and Europeans “transmitted from America many of the earth-shaking ideas that the Sun Yat Sens, the Ghandis and Nehrus, the Kamal Ataturks, the Muhammed Abduhs and the Jamal al-Din Al-Afghanis have translated into an Asian revolution.”<sup>73</sup> Agency was only given to Islam for letting progress pass by; meanwhile it was taken from anti-colonial leaders by attributing their revolutions to Western ideas. Portraying the Western

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<sup>71</sup>Maiwandwal, 5.

<sup>72</sup> Garland Evans Hopkins, “The Impact of the Asian Revolution in the Middle East,” Minaret Series no. 6 (New York, NY: AFME Inc., 1954), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

ability to modernize via cultural exchange was thus more important to the American Friends than championing the actual leaders of national liberation to whom they pledged solidarity.

This was all excused by the notion that eternal cultural transfer existed between Islam and Christianity, but this idea was a thin veil for the AFME's own imperialism. Hopkins echoed the narrative that the Middle East would "joyfully accept back from us, refined and improved, what they originally gave to us."<sup>74</sup> This justification for modernizing the 'Muslim world' was simply a new instantiation of American hegemony. The AFME embodied a distinct form of religious imperialism, which had no qualms about whitewashing colonialism or portraying postcolonial nations as less advanced, because it was simply the West's 'turn' to lift them up. The American Friends believed that Muslim nations were not inherently backward but lagging behind the West because of its historical failures. Like the West in the Dark Ages, the Middle East had lost its way and simply needed help getting back on track. When Hopkins said that the decolonizing world's "reasonable demands – and perhaps some of its unreasonable demands – must be met" and that "All vestiges of colonialism must go," he was espousing a genuine emancipatory anti-imperialism.<sup>75</sup> But it was the nature of that liberation, and the United States' role in it, especially in the context of the Cold War, that was problematic and imperialistic. The power dynamic of the 'friendship' or 'alliance' between Muslims and Christians was unequal by design, with one lifting up the other to help it modernize in the appropriate way.<sup>76</sup>

The AFME's proposal for religious unity was intensely instrumental in two ways. Firstly, it was cast as necessary to counter the Soviet Union in the Cold War. The AFME often lamented the waning US influence in the Middle East, with its reports claiming that the US was losing the

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>75</sup> Hopkins, 9-10.

<sup>76</sup> Wilford, 123-4.

moral high ground and thus its geopolitical influence. Its 1955-6 annual report observed that where “once America was the most loved nation, we are now the most hated. Where once we could influence many millions of people we can now be sure of influencing none.”<sup>77</sup> The AFME endorsed the conventional wisdom that non-aligned nations were vital assets to be secured in the East-West struggle, especially given their geostrategic value. According to the AFME, losing these nations to Communism “could well spell the end of Western civilization and the elimination of the concept of democracy from modern world history.”<sup>78</sup> The pursuit of friendship and understanding, then, was imperative during the early Cold War and the AFME’s self-appointed role was arbiter for mutual understanding and geopolitical consciousness. The organizations 1953-4 annual report cautioned that

The West needs a friendly Middle East just as surely and urgently as the Middle East needs a friendly West. For either of us the future is indeed dark unless we find mutual trust, cooperation and friendship.... this is possible, but only when the Middle East has become aware of its need of the West and the West has realized its need of the Middle East. When mutual need is recognized by both sides, friendly cooperation, which the peoples of both areas want, will be possible.<sup>79</sup>

This motif that Americans and Middle Easterners simultaneously yearned to know each other<sup>80</sup> yet were un aware of their mutual interests was another manifestation of the idea that ‘special interests’ – be they Soviet, Israeli, or otherwise – were trying to obfuscate a natural truth. This accounts for AFME’s self designation as “bridgebuilder” and why they felt two regions

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<sup>77</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Maiwandwal, 3.

apparently intimately linked by creed were experiencing a “cultural gulf... both wide and deep.” However, claims that “[m]ost Middle Easterners would like to see the gulf bridged, and welcome Western initiative for this purpose”<sup>81</sup> were more likely propagandistic wishful thinking on the part of Cold War imperialists, rather than an accurate read of the region’s cultural and geopolitical ambitions.

The Cold War context made the AFME’s cultural exchange programs and pledges of political solidarity with nascent postcolonial states less than benign. Anti-Communism was framed as mutually beneficial in that “[w]e do so in the best interests of our friends there who need our disinterested assistance in the time of transition. And the welfare of our own country dictates this course.”<sup>82</sup> This clarifies and encapsulates the nature of the proposed cultural alliance between America and the Middle East. The American Friends appeared to genuinely care about bridging estranged cultures and faiths, but domestic security was the key concern, often wrapped in the rhetoric of uplift. As Hopkins wrote quite explicitly, the Middle East had both “cultural affinity with the West, and strategic importance.”<sup>83</sup>

Secondly, the religious alliance promised to deliver spiritual revitalization to strengthen the US and the Middle East against Communism. Sensitivities about American spiritual and cultural stagnation were common during the Cold War. A common concern for Eisenhower’s public diplomacy and psychological warfare operations was countering the Soviet meme that the US was culturally barren, technocratic, materialistic, and jingoistic.<sup>84</sup> The president hoped to “humanize” Americans by showing they were also concerned with spiritual needs, something

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<sup>81</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 39.

<sup>82</sup> AFME, Inc. (1958), *American Friends of the Middle East, Annual Report 1957-1958*, New York, NY: AFME, Inc., 3.

<sup>83</sup> Hopkins, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Osgoode, 218, 249.

routinely echoed by the AFME during the 1950s.<sup>85</sup> The centrepiece of the “moral alliance” between Islam and Christianity would be the exchange of Western economic and political progress for the spiritual intensity of Islam.<sup>86</sup> Hugh Wilford notes that, as was the case for 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries, the materialism of American society greatly concerned the American Friends’ leadership. The AFME believed religious partnership and mutual understanding would abet moral crises in the US, using spiritual bridges between Americans and Middle Easterners to benefit the former. Imperialistic in their assertion that the US could impart progress on the Middle East, the American Friends also saw moral and cultural dividends for the US metropole.

Crandall wrote that the “pushing, irascible, determined ‘Christian’ of the West has much to learn from a quiet, courteous, contented Muslim of the East.”<sup>87</sup> He wanted the West to see Muslims as “members of the same world for whose development we are all responsible,” while simultaneously advocating for the West to take the lead in this development.<sup>88</sup> He referred to Islam as a “challenger and contributor to Christianity” that was now daring the West to “reestablish its own moral and spiritual foundations, to meet world problems with responsible moral decision rather than political and economic expediencies.” Islam was being used as a rhetorical device to justify Western hegemony, with regional problems posited as a test to the integrity of the West’s “Christian position.” Thus, while Islam was portrayed as an equal and modern partner with the West, the American Friends saw it as a call for American global hegemony – to re-develop, re-modernize, and ‘repay their debt’ the less prosperous Islamic world.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>86</sup> Wilford, 123-4.

<sup>87</sup> Crandall, 9.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

## Subverting Arab Nationalism

The AFME was passionately anti-imperial and often championed the cause of self-determination. These pledges were undermined, however, by the group's vilification of secularism and dismissal of neutrality – key tenets of Arab nationalism.

The religious alliance was the earliest AFME proposal that undermined Arab nationalism. Neutralist, secular pan-Arabism had become a powerful manifestation of postcolonial nationalism in many parts of the Middle East. The vision for Arab unity embodied a right to self-determination that the AFME ostensibly supported. But the basis for the Muslim-Christian alliance was the belief that the “cornerstone of each people is certainly their religion”<sup>89</sup> and the notion that the Middle East was a fundamentally Islamic region. The American Friends supported national liberation, but they had a definite preference for the hue it took. They defined the Middle East as “more a psychological than a geographical area” including all “people living between Morocco and Indonesia.”<sup>90</sup> It was the “*Islamic world* [that was] now flexing its muscles in reaction to this world which has been forced upon it. *Islamic peoples* are consolidating their causes around racial, national, religious, and secular loyalties.”<sup>91</sup> The AFME saw all anti-colonial reactions as valid, but they were ultimately the responses of Muslim people. The American Friends presented it this way to make the religious alliance tenable and better control and mould decolonization.

The alliance challenges one of Wilford's central claims. His designation of the American Friends as “Arabists” because of their anti-Zionism is, given their religious Cold War lens, patently false. AFME was more accurately an Islamophilic organization in the 1950s. The AFME wanted

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<sup>89</sup> Maiwandwal, 3.

<sup>90</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 2; Hopkins, 7.

<sup>91</sup> Crandall, 9. Emphasis added.

a Cold War policy that supported Arab states over Israel, but because they were Muslim partners not Arab ones. For most of the 1950s any support for Arab nationalism was vague and incidental; it was more accurately for the Muslim people behind the movement exercising a right to self-determination.

Early AFME reports articulated that the “primary danger” of the Cold War was the “secular materialism which denies the values and spiritual insights held by both faiths,”<sup>92</sup> with Crandall adding that Islamo-Christian infighting only empowered secularists on both sides. The main challenge for both faiths was “to penetrate the secular forces of their own cultures”<sup>93</sup> This was not only a worldview that left out secular Arab nationalism, but one which appeared openly hostile to it. Discussing the national reaction against colonialism in the Middle East, and celebrating the contributions of prominent Islamists, Maiwandwal added that the “present East-West crisis is largely attributable to the adoption of the Western concept of nationalism with its delineation of state and people.”<sup>94</sup> This was an interesting claim for AFME to publish since, as American nationalists concerned about domestic security, they certainly did not eschew the nation-state as a concept. Rather, fostering an international order based on an alliance between the US and a homogenous Islamized area appeared to be more expedient to the American Friends’ agenda than dealing with a plethora of independent, self-determining nations.

Group members also frequently expressed skepticism about Third World neutralism. Despite its professed solidarity with anti-colonial liberation movements at a time of ascendant Arab nationalism in the Middle East, the AFME nonetheless undermined Arab nationalism by dismissing its neutrality as reactionary. The American Friends never emulated the Eisenhower

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>94</sup> Maiwandwal, 6.

administration's policy of wanting to contain and discourage neutral Middle Eastern states, even repudiating the divisive pacts of the late-1950s. Yet in its early years, the AFME executive undermined Arab nationalism by brushing off its key tenet – neutralism – as a mere protest movement that was vulnerable to Communist infiltration.

Condescension towards neutralism defined the AFME's ostensible friendship towards postcolonial nations in its early years. The American Friends rejected the conflation of neutralism and Communism, but this only translated into a patronizing dismissal rather than any real solidarity or support. The American Friends felt neutrality was merely born of protest against a negligent West. As Vice President Hopkins wrote in 1954, "Neutralism could not survive thirty days in any Middle Eastern country which felt that the United States, let alone the rest of the Western nations, was its friend and ally, backing against all comers its legitimate demands for unimpaired sovereignty."<sup>95</sup> He added that if neutralism prevailed "those nations will suffer from it as much as will the West. It is not a doctrine consonant with the Asian revolution. It is a weapon against the West."<sup>96</sup> The AFME saw neutralism as authentic but vulnerable. Not to mention incomprehensible; unable to fathom that new nations would not want to join the Western orbit, they saw neutrality as protest by states fundamentally "more sympathetic to the West than to the East."<sup>97</sup> This sympathy was viewed as the product of an alienating US foreign policy. The AFME believed they could correct it but that the effects were already visible.

Despite the group's condescending portrayal of it, positive neutralism was a central pillar of many postcolonial national liberation movements, whose leaders wished to eschew subjugation to either imperial 'sphere of influence' in the East-West struggle. This would become obvious the

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<sup>95</sup> Hopkins, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 6.

year following Hopkins' writing, at the 1955 Bandung Conference. At Bandung, positive neutralism was the demand that postcolonial interstate relations proceed on equal footing between sovereign nations, in contrast to the volatile and inequitable geopolitics advanced by the US and the Soviet Union.<sup>98</sup> Representatives of new nations pledged mutual respect for sovereignty; to maintain independence and equidistance between the superpowers; and condemn formal European colonialism, the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe, and the neocolonialism of the US.<sup>99</sup> As Reem Abou-El-Fadl argues, Nasser and the Free Officers had embodied these neutralist tenets in their agenda since 1952.<sup>100</sup> The proposed cultural alliance with the Middle East was thus inherently disrespectful of the desire by Arab nationalists not to be part of an imperial camp. Even if it was less militaristic and divisive than Eisenhower's pacts, the religious alliance that the AFME proposed, with its language of uplift, sounded like anything but a benign meeting of cultures.

AFME President Dorothy Thompson wrote in 1953 that "there exists a genuine Arab *nation*," indicating the group's awareness of Arab nationalism and its power.<sup>101</sup> Despite this and her audience (the excerpt is from her introduction to the proceedings of the Arab student convention), hers is an extremely passive discussion about Arab unity. Making no pledges about advocacy or solidarity on behalf of her organization, Thompson concluded: "I do not think that anything short of war and reconquest will halt this trend toward unification, although I do not anticipate that it will fully occur for another two generations."<sup>102</sup> Quite uninspiring, this passage

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<sup>98</sup> Reem Abou-El-Fadl, "Neutralism Made Positive: Egyptian Anti-colonialism on the Road to Bandung," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 42, No. 2, (2015): 220.

<sup>99</sup> Abou-El-Fadl, 220; Mark T Berger, "After the Third World? History, destiny, and the fate of Third Worldism" in *Third World Quarterly* 25, No. 1 (2004): 12.

<sup>100</sup> Abou-El-Fadl, 219.

<sup>101</sup> Dorothy Thompson, "An Introduction to the Arab World," in *The Young Arab Speaks: The proceedings of the First Arab Student Convention*, published by the Organization of Arab Students in cooperation with AFME, (New York, NY, 1953), vi.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

does not even condemn the prospect of “war and reconquest.” Thompson’s words indicate only a begrudging acceptance of the emergent postcolonial political movement, rather than any normative support or solidarity. Given that the AFME was at this time advancing the idea of an interreligious alliance between the US and the Middle East, these statements made their relationship with Arab nationalism awkward at best and hostile at worst.

Solidarity with Palestinians was a crucial rallying point for Arab nationalists. The AFME had several initiatives aimed at relief for Palestinian refugees, but they focused on spiritual uplift rather than material aid. At the group’s first annual conference in 1953, President Thompson stated that material needs were “secondary to the need to create, share in, and preserve a community favourable to an organic way of life that has grown from deeper roots.”<sup>103</sup> Relief programs thus aimed to “help the refugees help themselves” to meet their spiritual, social, and recreational needs.<sup>104</sup> The AFME provided prayer books and helped establish playgrounds, a handcraft souvenir industry, and a Palestinian-run periodical.<sup>105</sup> The AFME believed such initiatives were vital to prevent Soviet incursion into refugee camps. While a more direct focus on material relief may have been more valuable, most pernicious were programs that exported US culture into camps. Boy Scout troops in Jordan and Syria were funded by the AFME to provide refugee youth with the “discipline, honour, service, and neatness” the group decided young Palestinians needed.<sup>106</sup> Though the AFME advocated for a more equitable US position in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the group’s own programs sought individual and moral uplift for Palestinians rather than any real solidarity with the broader cause of Arab unity or a right of return for refugees.

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<sup>103</sup> Thompson, “Partnership in Meeting Needs,” 11.

<sup>104</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 33.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 1954-5, 40-41.

<sup>106</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 34.

The AFME's professed support for nationalist movements throughout the Third World was further undercut by the organization's chronic orientalism. The AFME referred to the Middle East as a place "where communication and information media are only partially developed and history is measured not in centuries but in millennia."<sup>107</sup> Vice President Hopkins attributed the Western suspicion of neutrality to "the inability of our complex Western mentality to accommodate itself to the straightforward, simple thinking of the East." He also accused new nations of "poorly conceived" diplomacy and "political immaturity."<sup>108</sup> These were from a passage attempting to praise the active role taken by non-aligned states to end the Korean War. He ultimately lauded them for their quixotic belief that the Cold War could be resolved through peaceful settlement, expressing respect for their resolve.

While a model of interpersonal exchange and declarations of political solidarity in the early 1950s was an improvement upon the foreign policy orthodoxy that supported out of touch, pro-Western governments above popular nationalist sentiments, it similarly failed to connect with or respect Arab nationalism or positive neutralism more broadly. The AFME consistently argued that the Middle East's right to self-determination must be respected by the West. This rang hollow however. The group simultaneously envisioned the region coming into the Western orbit via a religious cultural alliance – a rebuke of secular Arab neutralism that would persist until the late 1950s.

### **Framing the Neutral Middle East: Breaking with Cold War Orthodoxy**

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<sup>107</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 39.

<sup>108</sup> Hopkins, 6.

This section will assess the AFME's key departures from the foreign policy orthodoxy of the Eisenhower government, particularly on Egypt, even before the group made friendship with Arab nationalism an explicit priority. Despite occurring in the transitional period between its religious and industrialist phases, from 1955 to 1958, the legacy of the group's cultural exchange philosophy is apparent. Since the early 1950s, when US government policies reflected a relative disinterest in the Middle East, the AFME was advocating not only the geostrategic value of the region against Communism, but also the need to engage in a cultural, non-militarized alliance with Middle Eastern states "without discrimination or favour."<sup>109</sup>

In the AFME worldview, the cardinal mistakes of Truman-era Middle East policy were ostensibly his recognition of Israel in 1948, singling out Turkey for Marshall Plan aid and eventually NATO membership in 1952, and the 1950 Tripartite Agreement wherein the US, Britain, and France agreed to sell Israel and Arab states weapons for defense and intervene in the event of territorial alterations.<sup>110</sup> These were likely what the group referred to as the "grievous mistakes"<sup>111</sup> made by the US government, since such policies failed to engage the region as a unified Islamic polity and amounted to "favoritism" of Israel at the expense of hundreds of millions of Muslims.<sup>112</sup> At the 1956 AFME annual conference, soon to be AFME Middle East Director Elmo H Hutchison said this loss of hearts and minds was "why we stand to lose completely one of our major sources of oil so vitally needed in peace and in war. It is why our national security is in

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<sup>109</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 5.

<sup>110</sup> Yaqub, 25.

<sup>111</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Elmo H Hutchison, "The Arab-Israeli Dispute: An On the Spot Report," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 428. Speech given at AFME 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, 26 January 1956.

jeopardy. It is why Communist influence is increasing in the Middle East.”<sup>113</sup> He also chided the US government’s legacy of ill-founded Arab-Israel policy:

[In 1948] we stood by under pressure of minority special interest groups while Israel, scouring the arms markets on both sides of the Iron Curtain, built a war machine, from a borrowed economy, strong enough to fight and initially defeat the combined Arab armies. We did not, however, advise Israel against a buildup of force far beyond these needs even though we were footing the bills indirectly by our liberal gifts, grants, and loans. We did nothing to curb Israeli attacks against the Arabs... we did nothing to allow the Arabs to protect themselves. Israel’s plan started to work. Nasser’s government in Egypt staggered from domestic pressure for action following the Israeli raids in the Gaza strip and in the Al Auja demilitarized zones... Militarily, Egypt was too weak to engage a major war machine. Supreme effort was being channeled into social and economic reforms; they anticipated no war and were not prepared to fight one.<sup>114</sup>

He blamed Eisenhower’s diplomacy for forcing Nasser to go to the Soviets for arms, adding that the US “must accept responsibility for placing the Arab-world on this tight-rope [and putting] our national security on another.”<sup>115</sup> The feeling was that, while Truman had alienated many Middle Eastern countries with his immediate recognition and subsequent support for Israel, Eisenhower was fuelling a similar alienation by pushing neutral states like Egypt towards the Soviet camp. Simply put, the American Friends believed that the US ignored legitimate Arab security concerns about threats that the West had created through its support of the Israeli ‘war machine.’

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Hutchinson, 429.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

As of 1956, this was a valid criticism of Eisenhower's policy towards Egypt. Following Nasser's rebuff of the administration's own brand of 'friendship' in 1955 – military aid with neocolonial strings attached – Eisenhower's administration grew skeptical that Nasser could be their strategic ally in the region.<sup>116</sup> Although the AFME had not made friendship with Arab nationalism explicit at this point, Nasser's rejection of Britain's regional security agreement the Baghdad Pact and an uneven peace deal with Israel aligned with the group's own politics. Following Israel's 1955 military raid on Egyptian bases in Gaza, the US government aligned itself more closely with Israel, denying Nasser's request for arms forcing the Egyptian president to make a deal with the Soviet Union.<sup>117</sup> As a result, the Eisenhower administration began punishing Nasser by freezing economic and food aid, withdrawing support on the Aswan High Dam project, supporting the Baghdad Pact without Egypt, and encouraging allied nation's to sell Israel weapons.<sup>118</sup> This began a three year agenda of working to contain Nasser's regional influence, tempered only by the fact that Eisenhower and Dulles remained hopeful that Egypt could serve as their anti-Communist bulwark in the area given its geostrategic value – accounting for their advocacy on Egypt's behalf during the Suez War.<sup>119</sup> While Eisenhower's Middle East policy presupposed a region divided along East-West lines that required security pacts and incentives for allies, the AFME advocated for the region's "essential unity."

Eisenhower's emphasis on alliances with pro-Western governments was anathema to the AFME's worldview, which not only saw the region as indivisible but rejected the idea that neutralism was a threat to be contained. Like the 1955 Baghdad Pact, the 1957 Eisenhower

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<sup>116</sup> Hahn, 94.

<sup>117</sup> Mufti, 165.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 166, 171.

Doctrine treated the region as polarized and saw Arab nationalism as a proto-Communist threat – until of course the US saw Nasser as the best counterweight to communist-allied Iraq in the winter of 1958.<sup>120</sup> Historian Salim Yaqub argues that the Eisenhower administration was not only actively working to contain Nasserist pan-Arabism from 1957 until 1958 but trying to discredit positive neutralism among Arab states by encouraging them to defy Communism and embrace bilateral security agreements with the US.<sup>121</sup> During these years, the Eisenhower government promoted “containment plus” among its regional allies, whereby anti-communist regimes were encouraged to route out governments that leaned towards the Soviet camp (e.g. the multinational coup attempt against the Syrian government in July 1957).<sup>122</sup> It also used the US Marines to directly ‘protect’ the pro-Western Lebanese government against Arab nationalist uprisings in July 1958, under the auspices of Eisenhower Doctrine security pacts.

The American Friends were not so reactionary. During the Eisenhower Doctrine’s reign, Nasserist pan-Arabism reached a high point in the Middle East. Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic, an Arab nationalist republican coup secured power in Iraq, and Arabist sentiments reached a zenith in Lebanon. Reflecting on these events, an AFME annual report stated: “What we were watching in essence was the assertion by small nations [...] of their right to political, national self-determination.” The same report cautioned that conflating anti-Americanism with pro-communism was “clouded [thinking] indeed.”<sup>123</sup> Hopkins wrote years earlier that, “Since they blow neither hot nor cold, the Westerner is often tempted to consider them pawns of the Soviet [...] This is certainly not the case.”<sup>124</sup> The American Friends did not see Arab nationalism as more

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<sup>120</sup> Mufti, 169-70.

<sup>121</sup> Yaqub, 2-3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>123</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Hopkins, 5.

inviting to Communism or having been co-opted by it as the Eisenhower government did in the mid-1950s.<sup>125</sup> Rather, the group supported self-determination, albeit a support intended to draw new nations into closer cultural and strategic alignment with the US. Whereas Eisenhower's military alliances were predicated upon commitment to the Western camp, the AFME saw this approach as foolish. Not only did they view the region as too culturally integrated for this, but they thought it more important to unconditionally respect national self-determination by welcoming the region into a cultural alliance. Otherwise, these nations would, out of "protest" and "self-interest," adopt neutrality and with it vulnerability to Soviet incursion.<sup>126</sup> Though the AFME and the Eisenhower government were in agreement between 1957 and 1958 that neutralism made Arab states vulnerable, the former did not attribute this to a lack of superpower allegiance but rather to overbearing Western influence and the 'pactomania' of the Eisenhower Doctrine. Rather than polarizing the region by focusing on strengthening pro-Western allies, the AFME wanted to foster informal, cultural bonds with the Middle East as a means of creating an anti-Communist bastion.

The AFME's advocacy for self-determination was clearly at odds with the covert operations and coups that comprised a key pillar of Eisenhower's New Look strategy. However, the conspicuous silence in any annual reports about the 1953 CIA-backed anti-nationalist coup in Iran,<sup>127</sup> the 1957 US-backed coup attempt in Syria, or the 1958 deployment of marines to Lebanon seem to corroborate the uncertain perception of Arab nationalism in the AFME worldview. For an organization that championed post-colonial independence, and repudiated Eisenhower's insistence

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<sup>125</sup> Yaqub, 2 discusses the Eisenhower administration's idea that by not opposing the Soviets, Arab states were being its unwitting puppets; Mufti, 168 states Secretary of State Dulles believed that the 1957 founding of the UAR was a Soviet plot.

<sup>126</sup> Hopkins, 5.

<sup>127</sup> This was perhaps because the CIA mission to overthrow democratically elected nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh was headed by Kermit Roosevelt, a key player in the founding of the AFME. Wilford, *America's Great Game*, 16.

on pro-Western alliances, the AFME's support for actual independence movements like Arab nationalism was elusive for most of the 1950s. They eschewed the Eisenhower government's notion that neutral states were a potential threat to be contained, but they nonetheless believed that postcolonial nations ought to join the Western orbit – albeit in the form of a cultural, rather than military alliance.

## **Conclusion**

The American Friends likely saw themselves as the best incarnation of Cold War policy. Their approach was neither as alienating nor heavy handed as the state and was thus seen as more effective in the long term. The US government had alienated the region through security pacts (NATO, the Tripartite Agreement, the Baghdad Pact, the Eisenhower Doctrine, etc), support for Israel, and a failure to correct the course of historical Western imperialism. The AFME used cultural exchange as a means of subverting the US state and its foreign policy orthodoxy. It sought to make Americans more aware of their national interests, while placing itself and other private citizens at the helm of this model. It also sought to modernize the Middle East by 're-introducing' it to Western values and by bringing it into the US orbit via a religious alliance while justifying this process with historical paradigms based on civilizational exchange and the stagnation of the region.

The AFME's cultural exchange programs exemplified a privatized foreign relations model that differed starkly from the agenda of the US government. Several members of the AFME executive were former diplomats or maintained government ties, and yet the group's policies actively broke with official US government orthodoxy. They sought to revive a program of private

diplomacy in the Middle East and subvert a state foreign policy apparatus that they saw as ineffectual and alienating. The group agreed with the need to fight the Cold War but differed over how to wage it. They openly admonished the security pacts designed to reward Western allies and contain neutral and ostensibly proto-Communist states, seeking instead to endorse self-determination and welcome all new nations into a cultural alliance with the West. The religious nature of this alliance was not only incompatible with Arab nationalism, but it undermined postcolonial independence. The American Friends' solidarity was at its core part of a geostrategic agenda to create an anti-Communist bastion via cultural bridges rather than divisive foreign policies.

The AFME's attempts to repudiate the notions that Islam was backward and neutralism was dangerous were orientalist and imperialistic in their own ways. The religious alliance was founded upon legitimizing America's modernizing role in the Middle East, portraying it as part of a cyclical and teleological process. By casting the region as fundamentally modern but simply 'stalled,' the American Friends worked to articulate a justification for American modernization in the region. Cultural exchange was used to advance the Middle East socially and politically. Using a vanguard of elite authors, the AFME communicated that the Islamic world needed a version of American uplift that refashioned the pursuit of Cold War hegemony as the repayment of historical debt among friends.

Elitism was endemic to the AFME's diplomacy, undercutting the group's claim to be fostering interpersonal relations between the US and the Middle East. Its version of cultural exchange was not a meeting of the grassroots. 'Prominent' individuals were brought to the US while AFME executive members travelled abroad. This did not fundamentally change following the group's industrial turn after 1956; the elites being exchanged simply became economic rather

than cultural. This signalled a new phase of American uplift in the region. Whereas modernization began as a cultural and political process of Westernization, by the late 1950s the AFME sought to develop Arab economies by facilitating US private capital flows. Cultural imperialism was soon accompanied by economic dependency in the AFME agenda.

### Chapter Three:

#### **“Dealings between friends can be put on a business-like basis”: Embracing and Subverting Arab Nationalism after the Industrial Turn**

By 1957, top-level personnel changes and a weakened religious presence in the AFME had ushered in a new operational outlook, where industrial development eclipsed cultural exchange as a priority in the group’s foreign relations model. As the AFME’s agenda became more pragmatic and focused on accommodating American industrial capital, its relationship with Arab nationalism also evolved into one of professed solidarity. Responding to a surge of newly decolonizing states in the Third World, the American Friends advanced a framework of modernization through foreign American investment, accompanied by a message that the Middle East was open for US business.

Between 1956 and 1957, President Dorothy Thompson and Vice President Garland Evans Hopkins both resigned from their posts, signalling major administrative changes. The latter’s exit weakened the AFME’s religious wing by removing its most prominent and active voice; Erich W Bethmann stayed on as head of the research division, but publications related to religious cooperation were scarce by 1958. In March 1956, Middle East Director Mather G Elliot also retired to work for the Oil Consortium of Iran, speaking to the corporate ties enjoyed by the AFME top brass.<sup>128</sup> Briefly filling the AFME’s leadership vacuum was Reverend Charles R Hulac as Executive Director (1956-7), a temporary role that combined president and VP, with Harold B Minor presiding as the Chairman of the Board of Directors (1956-7). Minor – a retired US ambassador to Lebanon, former chief at the State Department’s Middle East and Indian Affairs division, and a government affairs officer at the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) –

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<sup>128</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 43.

would later serve as AFME president from 1957-60. By 1958, he was joined by former vice president of ARAMCO James Terry Duce and Edward A. Locke, former ambassador to the Middle East and president of the Union Tank Car Company as new members on the Board of Directors.<sup>129</sup>

Religious influence had not vanished. Hulac's tenure and Pastor of the First National Presbyterian Church Dr Edward L.R. Elson's chairing the Board for two years (1957-9) as well as Rabbi Elmer Berger's presence on the Board, indicated the persistence of the strong religious base.<sup>130</sup> But the industrial wing of the AFME had considerably more influence over the group's operations and messaging. This was most clearly demonstrated during Minor's tenure and by the appointment of industrialist Earl Bunting as Board chairman in 1959 and AFME president the next year. Bunting was the former president of the National Association of Manufacturers and their life-time Honorary Vice-President – a fitting choice for an organization that had, for several years at this point, been working to expand US business interests in the Middle East.

The AFME followed a general trend among private voluntary organizations between 1945 and 1960. As Rachel McCleary describes, during this time postwar religious relief organizations were gradually replaced by secular groups with specialized technical development programmes. This new type of "volagency" sought to spread American technical expertise and valued close relations with corporations and research institutes.<sup>131</sup> However, situating the AFME in this general trend does not explain its specific trajectory or ideology. The nature of the AFME's close relationship with US corporations was more specifically one where the organization promoted the latter's integration in the Middle East. As corporate 'boosters,' the American Friends expressed

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<sup>129</sup> Annual Report 1958-9, 19.

<sup>130</sup> Berger was a Jewish Reform rabbi and a noted anti-Zionist, with prominent influence in the American Council for Judaism in the same period when he was active in the AFME.

<sup>131</sup> Rachel M McCleary, *Global Compassion: Private Voluntary Organizations and US Foreign Policy Since 1939* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 83-4.

their belief that American capital would strengthen Arab nations, American profits, and ties between the two economies. This was a key motivation for the AFME's friendship towards Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and other Arab nationalists.

By 1958, Nasser's brand of pan-Arabism had established itself as a regional force that could not be ignored – either by a reactionary US government or a by more sympathetic AFME. Similar to the thinking behind their cultural exchange programs, the American Friends framed these matters through a lens of bourgeois Cold War nationalism. The AFME continued to champion the right to national sovereignty in the Third World, supporting self-determination as a means of securing Cold War allies. However, it was clear by the late 1950s that this did not translate into a respect for economic sovereignty. In the American Friends' worldview, Arab governments had a role to play in international diplomacy – albeit one which was subordinate to interpersonal exchange – but only a very subordinate role in regional economic development. By the 1960s, the AFME's endemic urge to modernize the Middle East took the form of an accelerated, privatized development model wherein US corporations, not Arab governments, would guide economic growth. The group's skepticism towards neutralism and Arab nationalism in the early 1950s ostensibly gave way to explicit professions of friendship by President Minor in 1958. However, the AFME's overarching agenda of corporate development was inherently disrespectful of the concept of postcolonial neutrality – that is, freedom from imperial control.

In *Imagining the Middle East*, Matthew F Jacobs argues that a modernization project was carried out in the region by a variety of private American and European specialists from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s. The AFME's agenda aligns with the broader trends of elite modernization thought outlined by Jacobs, particularly that of liberal developmentalism. Identified as a phenomenon unique to the interwar period before the US government became more directly

involved in modernization,<sup>132</sup> I argue that this model of privatized development conducted by US companies in the Middle East was something the AFME sought to revive in the region at a time when US business dealings were still relatively scarce.<sup>133</sup> Like the works of Jacobs' specialists, the modernization strategy of the American Friends was implemented on behalf of US regional interests – but the AFME was unique in perceiving these interests as corporate as well as geopolitical at a time when state-led development was status quo. The American Friends believed that boosting corporate interests would benefit investors, Arab economies, and the security of the region. The AFME's efforts to revive corporate development in the context of new dynamics of US foreign aid and Arab state regulation – both of which they opposed or sought to limit – account for a neoliberal development model.

This chapter will consider how the ascendance of postcolonial states and the group's privatized development agenda largely account for the AFME's changing stance toward ascendant Arab nationalism. I argue that while economic development eclipsed cultural exchange in the AFME's operations, what remained constant were the goals of preserving US hegemony and modernizing the Middle East via the private sector, simply made more explicit after 1956. Despite an ostensibly closer relationship with official Arab nationalism, it was clear that by the late-1950s the AFME's programs were designed to service American capital via a privatized, neoliberal development agenda. Rather than responding to the strength of postcolonial Arab nationalism by overcoming problematic elitism in favour of a truly collaborative and interpersonal relationship, the American Friends doubled down on a foreign relations model that was increasingly unilateral and imperialistic. The AFME's corporate development agenda subverted Arab nationalism by

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<sup>132</sup> Matthew F Jacobs. *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 141-2.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

promoting the interests of private American capital at the expense of Arab economic sovereignty, and the social programs that nationalization was meant to support. As the US government deployed political coercion in the form of pacts, food sanctions, and support for Israel, the AFME complemented this assault on non-alignment by working to legitimize US corporate power over Arab economies.

### **Corporate Diplomacy**

Following the AFME's neoliberal industrial shift after 1956, the group's tourist program evolved into a more explicit operation to connect leaders of transnational capital. The travel program expanded to serve media correspondents, businessmen, and corporate representatives, providing services that ranged from "simple travel guidance, through background briefings, to interviews with Middle Eastern statesmen and private citizens."<sup>134</sup> This accelerated the prioritization of services focused on US business interests rather than a model of interpersonal diplomacy. The mission of promoting better understanding of the Middle East was now being used to serve US business interests. Economic elites, rather than the cultural elites of the early 1950s, were now being entrusted with the job of diplomacy.

In 1959, the AFME Travel Program officially culminated in "Operation Insight," which connected professional Americans with their Middle Eastern counterparts. The first tour lasted a month, during which participants – "American professional, civic and business leaders" – met

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<sup>134</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 2.

with their counterparts in Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, the UAR (Egypt and Syria), Turkey, and Greece.<sup>135</sup> The general activities of the tour were described in the 1958-9 annual report:

In Cairo the group was hosted at a dinner by President Minor and two other members of AFME's Board; met President Gamal Nasser and other UAR officials; met the United States Ambassador and members of his staff; discussed problems of mutual interest with their own counterparts; visited schools, clinics, business offices and engineering projects; and, were entertained in Egyptian and American homes. This general pattern was then followed in other countries visited.<sup>136</sup>

The goal was to connect the professional and powerful to create an international relationship among transnational elites. Touting Insight as an “experiment in citizen diplomacy” was thus incredibly specious. Rather, it was treating the upper classes as a vanguard tasked with communicating national interests and problems. It also legitimized the idea that the Middle East was open for American investment and that cultural diplomacy was meant to serve this goal – whether Arab states wanted it or not.

In this ‘interpersonal’ foreign relations model, members of an elite vanguard were appointed guardians of information and cultural knowledge. The AFME’s notion that “prominent Middle Easterners—leaders in their various professions” were “enabling Americans to hear directly about events in Middle Eastern countries” placed the experiences of social and economic classes on a hierarchy, tasking the influential to speak for the influenced.<sup>137</sup> Tapping “Americans outstanding in their professional field” to travel to the Middle East similarly conflated a certain

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<sup>135</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 10.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

type of expertise with ambassadorial duty.<sup>138</sup> The AFME's conclusion that Insight had given Americans "a first-hand view of the Middle East—its people, its problems and its prospects" was at best wishful thinking and at worst elitist propaganda.<sup>139</sup> During the 1950s, the AFME's elite ambassadors transformed from a transnational cultural vanguard to a legion of technocratic diplomats.

Despite preceding Eisenhower's People-to-People Program by several years, by 1958 the AFME's cultural exchange programs were not only embracing the government program's language but also its elitist methodology. In the early 1950s, prior to the state's Program, the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) tasked with delegating Emergency Fund dollars for cultural programs, was selecting highly skilled artists and athletes to showcase the value of American culture.<sup>140</sup> Later, the Business Council for International Understanding (BCIU) was created as an independent organization run by business leaders that conducted public relations projects using USIA themes. The organization was designed to create a better climate for US businesses overseas.<sup>141</sup> Prominent individuals and corporate leaders, especially from major banks, eventually headed many of the People-to-People committees.<sup>142</sup> Thus, like Eisenhower-era cultural programs that in many ways paralleled the AFME's, the American Friends' cultural exchange projects grew increasingly explicit in the use of a vanguard of elite Americans to execute an ostensibly grassroots diplomacy.

The AFME's industrial shift saw its exchange programs evolve into operations aimed at promoting and connecting American business with the Middle East. The interests of capital were

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>140</sup> Osgoode, 224.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

tasked with communicating regional issues to broader populations; they foregrounded corporate priorities while portraying the Middle East as open for business. This was not the only seismic shift in the AFME's mission however. By 1958, promoting US capital abroad was accompanied by a renewed pledge of friendship with Arab nationalism.

### **A Stronger Friendship: Explicitly Embracing Arab Nationalism**

The AFME's first five years were marked by a sympathetic but skeptical attitude towards Middle East self-determination, undergirded by the hope that regional actors would choose affiliation with a Muslim-Christian cultural alliance. This produced a tepid stance towards Arab nationalism. But by February 1958 the group had made solidarity with the cause of secular Arab unity more explicit. As the Eisenhower government pursued a policy of containment towards Arab nationalism, and routinely vilified Nasser, AFME President Harold B Minor took to the pages of the *New York Times* to advocate a balanced approach towards the regional movement. Consistent with earlier AFME publications, Minor expressed sympathy for national liberation while portraying Nasser's rise as the product of "policy and human failures of the West."<sup>143</sup> However, he also placed Nasserism in the context of what it opposed, namely the West's broken promises of granting independence, the imperial fragmentation of the region, "exaggerated support" for Israel, the plight of Palestinian refugees, the 1956 Suez invasion, and anti-Arab propaganda in US. This was a more sympathetic portrayal than US government sources entertained at this time.

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<sup>143</sup> Harold B Minor, "Changes in the Middle East: Nasser Said to Be the Symbol of Resurgent Arab Nationalism," *New York Times*, 7 February 1958.

Sympathy was also joined by a more direct endorsement of Arab unity as “natural as the running of the tides and as difficult to stop.” Minor argued that, “It will prevail ultimately... It is stronger than governments.”<sup>144</sup> Though somewhat fatalistic about the pragmatic need to recognize the movement, Minor strengthened the AFME’s overtures of friendship and called on the US government to follow suite.

Jacobs states that criticism befell Eisenhower for his containment policy toward Nasser after the 1956 Suez crisis with heightened rebuke from academics and specialists following the Arab nationalist coup in Iraq in July 1958.<sup>145</sup> The AFME was making similar albeit ‘lighter’ calls for the US to accommodate Arab nationalism years before this, but the timing of Minor’s letter makes his statements even more significant. He wrote his op-ed weeks before the creation of the United Arab Republic on 22 February 1958, a zenith in the political push for Arab unity, and at a time when Arab nationalism was officially seen as inimical to Western regional interests, and months before Jacob’s academic specialists were speaking most vociferously in favour of better relations with Egypt. Minor cautioned that American regional objectives could be salvaged only if “American attitudes can be brought more into line with justice and with the American national interest.”<sup>146</sup> He stressed that “No doctrines, pacts, power concepts or aid programs will substitute for... human understanding... or give hope of arresting the erosion of American influence” in the Middle East and Asia.<sup>147</sup> Maintaining American Cold War hegemony thus remained the AFME’s goal, but their means of achieving it was very different than official US foreign policy in that it promoted friendship directly with Arab nationalist states. Arab nationalism was a force that

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Jacobs, 126.

<sup>146</sup> Minor, “Changes in the Middle East.”

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

demanded recognition, according to Minor, and the US had no claim to stand in its way. Rather, America needed to reach out to it to save itself: “Our tears will be shed not for the Arabs, who will survive in some fashion or other, but for the loss of the Middle East to Western influence and the consequences [of this for] the East-West struggle.”<sup>148</sup>

Minor’s course correction on Arab nationalism persisted past his tenure, enshrined in the AFME’s 1963 biographical text “A Story of a Purpose.”<sup>149</sup> Arguably serving as a constitution for the group’s values and trajectory, its support for Arab unity is significant since it implies a more transcendent solidarity than a single letter to the editor did. The document states “we regard the drive toward Arab unity as valid and natural.” The added corollary that it must arise “voluntarily from the peoples themselves, free from foreign designs or pressures” can be interpreted as either a rebuke of either Soviet or Nasserist influence.<sup>150</sup> There is less evidence to substantiate the latter claim, since the AFME shied away from commenting on any regional events like the 1958 Lebanese civil war, the 1961 breakup of the UAR, the 1963 Nasserist uprising in Jordan, or the 1962-65 Yemeni civil war – all classic examples of Egypt’s influence over the affairs of neighboring states. The last example however – when Egyptian troops were deployed in Yemen – was perhaps a more egregious instance of interference warranting some distance on the part of the AFME. But by 1963, Nasser was not synonymous with official Arab nationalism any longer, with coups in Iraq and Syria putting Ba’athists in power. The American Friends could maintain clear support for the broader movement without contradiction.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> The document itself has no year inscribed, but the 1963 date written by library staff aligns with details described in the text.

<sup>150</sup> AFME, Inc., *Story of a Purpose: A brief review of the origins, basic philosophy and aims of American Friends of the Middle East, Inc.* (Washington, DC: AFME, Inc., 1963?).

The group's endorsement of Arab nationalism was also bolstered by its stance on Israel, which remained one of their clearest departures from the orthodoxy of the US government. Early in its tenure, the Kennedy administration signalled that it wanted a "fair-minded and even-handed" Middle East policy. This meant food aid for Egypt on the condition that Nasser put tensions with Israel "in the icebox" while the latter received arms shipments.<sup>151</sup> By 1963, issues over refugee resettlement and Egyptian involvement in Yemen pushed Kennedy to re-adopt a firmly pro-Israel stance which only accelerated under President Lyndon B Johnson.<sup>152</sup> The AFME, meanwhile, was consistently critical of Israel, calling the issues over Palestine "the root of tensions in the Arab heartland." While they recognized the state of Israel, the American Friends spoke against "disproportionate Western support of a state which is estranged from, and feels superior to, the rest of the Middle East" while stating that the US "cannot support 'expansionist Zionism' either in our own country or in the Middle East."<sup>153</sup> They called on Israel to recognize UN Resolutions about its territory, stated that refugee resettlement was key to any resolution, and wrote that the West "must bear a large share of the responsibility" for a solution.<sup>154</sup> In this way, the AFME maintained a starkly oppositional policy on Israel in the name of cultivating friendship with the Arab world.

"Story of a Purpose" continued the AFME's hesitant articulation of neutralism as an "unrealistic and inadequate," but potentially constructive, affiliation for new nations – until the West could persuade such nations to align with them.<sup>155</sup> As they had in the early 1950s, the

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<sup>151</sup> Douglas Little, "A Fool's Errand: American and the Middle East, 1961-1969," in Diane B Kunz, *Diplomacy in the Crucial Decade: American Foreign Relations in the 1960s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 283.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 290-2.

<sup>153</sup> "Story of a Purpose," 18.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 16, 19.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

American Friends spoke out against US government policies that failed to recognize neutralism and conflated it with Communism. What had changed since the days of Hopkins, however, was the dismissive tone towards positive neutrality, now seen as a force that could not be ignored. A 1959 speech given by Dr Fayez A. Sayegh at the Carnegie Endowment Centre,<sup>156</sup> at a time of thawing Arab-American relations, expressed a clear sense of vindication for the AFME's principled stance. He stated, "To divide the Arab World effectively, over the issue of neutralism, is no longer realistic as a hope or Judicious as a policy."<sup>157</sup> "Story of a Purpose" noted that a powerful bloc of neutral states "may well be the difference between success or failure, war or peace, in our troubled world."<sup>158</sup> This was couched in terms of Western interests, but signalled a rhetorical shift that acknowledged the growing power of postcolonial states.

The AFME's public stance on national self-determination had not changed. It recommended the "wise" and "practical" policy of "sympathy for emergent peoples." The group believed this approach was more sustainable than "ephemeral or expedient policies based on power concepts."<sup>159</sup> This position was framed in language of historical inevitability, namely that "the people will ultimately prevail" and that "enlightened nationalism" would deter Communism.<sup>160</sup> They made only vague policy proposals "bold, principled American action" against colonialism, "retroactive, corrective measures" on Palestine, and hinted that a "strategy of accommodation, assistance and free partnership with the uncommitted peoples" should replace the Eisenhower-era

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<sup>156</sup> Source published online by The University of Utah indicates this location, referring to the present-day institution The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=841940>.

<sup>157</sup> Dr Fayez A Sayegh, "American-Arab Relations: A New Phase?" address given at Carnegie Endowment Centre, NY, under the auspices of the AFME, 20 October 1959, 5-6. <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=841940>.

<sup>158</sup> "Story of a Purpose,"

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

orthodoxy of military bases and pacts.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, the American Friends' basic foreign relations framework – one based on “mutual respect and interest” and recognition of rights to “national self-determination and dignified existence” – remained constant into the 1960s.<sup>162</sup> What changed was the group's application of modernization theory. In practice, the AFME's belief in rights to national self-determination did not extend to a recognition of economic sovereignty.

Friendliness towards Arab nationalism belied the fact that the apparent ‘partnership’ being proposed was even more exploitative and unilateral than its early religious instantiation had been. Whereas the early 1950s saw the group attempt to ensnare the Middle East in a cultural alliance based on uplift, the AFME's public relations offensive of the late 1950s belied its privatized, neoliberal development plan for Arab states. Despite vocal support for political sovereignty, the American Friends did not acknowledge a right to *economic* sovereignty in the decolonizing world. Rather, the AFME worked to put US corporations at the helm of Arab economic development.

### **Empty Solidarity: Arab-American (Business) Relations**

Since its founding in 1951, the AFME worked to modernize and westernize the Middle East and save it from the Soviet orbit. By the late 1950s, this project was animated less by religious rhetoric and more by professing solidarity with the cause of Arab unity. However, these bids for friendship belied an agenda of American business integration in the regional economy. The AFME framed the economic challenges in the decolonizing Middle East as a chance for a ‘mutually beneficial’ relationship between Arab governments and American capitalists. While the former

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<sup>161</sup> Sayegh, 12-13, 9.

<sup>162</sup> “Story of a Purpose,” 16.

were said to “lack a large degree of development,” after 1956 the AFME worked to assure the American business class that Arab states were “endeavoring to develop their potentialities and improve the standard of living of their people” and that this offered investors “an unusual opportunity for profitable investment.” The “untouched” and “abundant natural resources” in the region were apparently waiting for American capitalists to develop them.<sup>163</sup> This rhetoric best explains the American Friends’ charm offensive towards Arab nationalism in the late 1950s: American investment promised to secure Arab economies from Soviet subversion while keeping these nations in the US economic orbit controlled by a private, predominantly American, industrial elite.

Two years before President Minor’s *New York Times* letter, the AFME had begun reaching out to Arab states in a way that made its new industrialist ambitions clear. Published in 1956, the express purpose of “Investment of Foreign Capital in the Arab States” was to serve as a “guide to prospective investors” interested in the region.<sup>164</sup> It aimed to clarify regulations on foreign capital put in place by Arab governments. Noting an “increasing interest” in the region among American businessmen, the document explained that “enormous natural wealth in oil,” the “potential for the establishment of large and small industries,” and high demand for consumer goods were attractive assets in the region.<sup>165</sup> Most illuminating however is the document’s supplement: a 1955 letter from a group of “outstanding” American businessmen suggesting ways to curtail what they considered regulatory impediments to otherwise ‘mutually beneficial’ Arab foreign investment climate.<sup>166</sup> These recommendations were directly endorsed by the AFME. While 1963’s “Story of

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<sup>163</sup> Aziz A Sahwell, *Investment of Foreign Capital in the Arab States* (New York: AFME, Inc., 1956), 5.

<sup>164</sup> Sahwell, 3.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

a Purpose” was ostensibly the group’s public constitution, “Investment of Foreign Capital” was AFME’s *de facto* operations manual after its 1956 neoliberal shift.

The AFME included the supplement to show how some Arab states – Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria – had already relaxed foreign investment laws and met many of the demands made by venture capitalists only a year after they penned their 1955 missive. It sent a clear message that the Middle East was open for American business. In addition to a stronger industrialist-oriented AFME executive, American business leaders now lobbied the group to promote US capital in the Middle East, leading to an agenda that effectively undermined Arab nationalism.

The businessmen’s letter describes investment as crucial to “strengthen” the Middle East in a way that would enrich its signatories while improving the standard of living in the region.<sup>167</sup> A committee of a dozen American businessmen representing the oil companies ARAMCO and California Texas Oil Co., banks, utilities, airlines, manufacturers, mineral companies, and General Motors, present at the AFME’s third annual conference, signed the recommendations in 1955. Harold Minor signed on behalf of ARAMCO and Edward Latham signed for the AFME, signalling the group’s official endorsement.<sup>168</sup> These men cast American investment as “necessary,” stating that the job of bolstering local economies “must be done through the investment of private capital in economically viable enterprises.”<sup>169</sup> They said the US was uniquely positioned to provide this capital and championed a limited role for Arab states: to clarify their laws for investors, attract capital, and respect contracts. Rather bluntly, they wrote: “the governments concerned should realize that, if they want to attract foreign investment capital, they should be careful not to exercise their rights at the expense of freely contracted agreements,” warning that “unilateral alteration or

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<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

abrogation” would threaten business relationships and, by implication, economic viability.<sup>170</sup> These businessmen and their sponsors in the AFME put national governments far below American capital on the hierarchy of relevant interests and control; national priorities were to be pursued only insofar as they accommodated foreign investors. By effectively threatening the “economic viability” of decolonizing states, the AFME made the nature of their ‘friendship’ clear.

This neoliberal notion that Middle Eastern governments should merely ensure the ease of foreign capital flow while US corporations oversaw development projects sharply deviated from the economic philosophy of Arab nationalism, and especially from the direction in which Nasser’s policy was heading by 1955. Nationalization of key industries, sequestration and redistribution of private properties, centralized administration of trade, and a mixed Egyptian economy were key features of Nasser’s post-revolution, but especially post-1956, reforms.<sup>171</sup> While, as Robert L Tignor argues, such policies were more a reaction to the 1956 Suez invasion, Reem Abou-El-Fadl explains that since 1953 Nasser and the Command Council of the Revolution (CCR) were advancing an agenda of neutralism in domestic and foreign policy that simply grew stronger in the mid-1950s. The neocolonial policies being advanced by the AFME and American business sponsors were precisely what Egypt was trying to avoid.

Abou-El-Fadl explains that the doctrine of positive neutralism adopted by newly independent Third World nations at the 1955 Bandung Conference, wherein all nations were to be on equal footing on the international stage to rebuke neocolonialism, resonated with policies

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>171</sup> M Riad El-Ghonemy, “An Assessment of Egypt’s Development Strategy, 1952-1970” in *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Modern Egypt*, edited by Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 255.

already adopted in Egypt.<sup>172</sup> Cooperation with the US on development projects were only ever done to finance Egypt's development while keeping the superpowers at a distance, and by 1955 a more explicit push to 'Egyptianize' the development process was adopted.<sup>173</sup> Abou-El-Fadl argues that Nasser and the CCR made a decisive shift towards emphasizing resource sovereignty and an independent nation-building policy reliant on Egyptian means and resources, not foreign imperial aid. While neutralist foreign policy involved negotiating with superpowers on equal footing, the concessions were always intended to support Egypt while rejecting any neocolonial strings attached. As a result, by 1955 the Aswan High Dam was the only project for which Nasser was holding out for US aid, eventually securing joint funding from the US, Britain, and the World Bank before the US withdrew support.<sup>174</sup> Thus, by the time the AFME published "Investment of Foreign Capital," they were encouraging an influx of American money and influence that Egypt deemed both unnecessary and imperialistic.

The AFME's privatized development model undermined Arab nationalist goals of economic independence, Arab unity, anti-imperialism, and public ownership. One does not have to defend Nasser's political project – marked by authoritarianism and crackdowns on political dissidents ranging from communists to Muslim Brotherhood Islamists – to criticize the AFME's agenda on these grounds. Private and foreign control of Arab industry were things even the AFME's Arab student legion in the US wanted tight controls on. The Organization of Arab Students (OAS) adopted recommendations, published in 1953, that called for Arab development projects to be funded through a regional bank with money from "Arab countries, governmental

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<sup>172</sup> Abou-El-Fadl, 235.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-7.

and private” to foster new industries and interregional trade.<sup>175</sup> The Bandung Conference adopted a similar motion for an economic development fund to be established and run through the UN.<sup>176</sup>

The OAS also stressed that any foreign investment should come from international organizations first and foremost, then private sources, then non-Arab governments – all provided that “no political implications are attached.”<sup>177</sup> This spoke to the importance among the nationalists to whom the AFME was reaching out that development be nationally-owned and that funds be as public and neutral as possible. Even Syrian businessman Dr. Nihad Ibrahim Pasha spoke against money with political ties while promoting investment in the UAR under the auspices of the AFME.<sup>178</sup> Vijay Prashad sheds light on this dynamic in *The Darker Nations*, where he describes how postcolonial national movements were often broad and interclass, leading to preservation of social and economic hierarchies during state building.<sup>179</sup> Nasser is included in this analysis, but in the context of US economic imperialism – for which the AFME was a regional booster – Nasser’s project was indeed radical and disagreeable in its emphasis on nationalization and universal public services. The organization’s private development agenda actively undermined it. The AFME’s solidarity with Arab nationalism was therefore an empty one that failed to endorse its commitments to neutralism and economic sovereignty.

The group’s new friendship with Arab nationalism by 1958 is best read as a conciliation to the movement’s influence and an attempt to exploit the gaps in Nasser’s socialist framework where possible. While Arab nationalists most often referenced Western states when rebuking neocolonial

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<sup>175</sup> *The Young Arab Speaks*, 35.

<sup>176</sup> Berger, 12.

<sup>177</sup> *The Young Arab Speaks*, 36.

<sup>178</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 9.

<sup>179</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (The New Press: New York, NY, 2007), xvii.

subversion of sovereignty, the AFME's neoliberal development agenda was nevertheless inimical to the spirit of postcolonialism. It was also explicitly hostile to Arab economic sovereignty. By seeking to subvert public oversight of national economies in favour of foreign investment interests, the group was attempting to exert obvious American influence over Arab economies and governments. It was a political agenda and a foreign relationship that was anything but 'friendly.' Thus, President Minor's 1958 overtures to Arab unity were limited by his and the AFME's prioritization of support for the welfare of American capital above the right of decolonizing Arab nations to have control of national development projects and their revenues.

An appendix to "Investment of Foreign Capital" provided the full texts of Arab investment laws to show that Nasser and other Arab statesmen were courting foreign investors, sometimes at the expense of otherwise nationalist policies. Specifically, these involved tax breaks for projects that supported "the national economy" and exemptions to laws about Egyptian employment quotas and rights of first refusal to nationals for stock ownership.<sup>180</sup> However, the attempt by the AFME to portray Egypt as going further than "any other Arab country in encouraging the inflow of foreign capital and in affording every possible facility to prospective foreign investors" was a deliberate attempt to brand Egypt as more capitalistic than Nasser's economic trajectory otherwise suggested.<sup>181</sup> Nasser's vision for import substitution industrialization was not only intended to serve social, populist, Pan-Arab, and Third Worldist goals – it was a rebuke to the neocolonialism that the AFME and its sponsors were working to foist on the Arab world.<sup>182</sup>

Reem Abou-El-Fadl places Egypt's laws on foreign capital in the context of its evolving neutralist policy orientation. To finance its pan-Arab development projects, Egypt had articulated

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<sup>180</sup> Sahwell, 11-17.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>182</sup> Berger, 17.

openness to foreign aid within the confines of its neutrality – for example, the series of projects on which it partnered with the US in 1954.<sup>183</sup> Financing for the Aswan Dam project was a primary consideration. However, by 1954 this approach had faltered due to intransigence from both private investors and Western powers. US Point Four aid came up short while Egypt’s relations with the West soured amid Israeli raids on military outposts in Gaza. Private investors failed to finance Egypt’s industrialization drive, pouring money into construction rather than industry; large banks similarly failed to invest.<sup>184</sup> Waiting for capitalism was not working, and so by 1954 the emphasis on entrepreneurship switched to state planning. In March 1955, the Council for National Planning was founded to enable the Egyptian state to spearhead public works, health and welfare services, and national development projects; industrialization, agriculture, labour, and transportation were prioritized.<sup>185</sup> Thus, while Egypt was never receptive to the type of broad influence the AFME’s sponsors wanted to give to American capital, it had also moved away from a development model based on private investment by the mid-1950s. The American Friends’ narrative was only part of the reality.

“Investment of Foreign Capital” highlighted that every Arab constitution “respects and guarantees the right to private property and its free disposition” and that free enterprise had “always been a rooted institution in the Arab counties compatible with their traditions and way of life.”<sup>186</sup> The latter claim that Arab policy did not suppress private enterprise was particularly untrue for Nasser, whose reforms sought to make property more public, and bring private profit under the purview of the state.<sup>187</sup> The CCR’s 1952 land reforms placed a cap on land ownership while

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<sup>183</sup> Abou-El-Fadl, 233, 228.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>186</sup> Sahwell, 6.

<sup>187</sup> El-Ghonemy, 255.

expropriating and redistributing existing land titles to peasants, and in 1953 the wealth and property of the previous royal family were seized to fund social welfare infrastructure. Ottoman land title was also abolished, to the detriment of Egyptian elites.<sup>188</sup> All of this came before Nasser's wave of post-1956 nationalization. By invoking private property rights, the AFME was sending a message that Arab states were both modern and open to US business. The economic 'bridges' being forged between the US and the Middle East undermined central tenets of the Arab nationalism that the AFME pledged solidarity with. Arab unity was a goal respectable enough to recognize, but responsible economic development could only be entrusted to the American private sector.

Accurate or not, emphasizing Arab affinity for foreign capital and private property was a continuation of the AFME's effort to portray the Middle East as a fundamentally modern and Western region that was in a natural civilizational downturn. The American Friends had simply replaced the Muslim with the Arab as the object of American uplift. The AFME thus misrepresented the political reality of Arab nationalism to sway investors and uplift the region – ostensibly the only way to reverse its economic stagnation.

Amidst a backdrop of decolonization, pushing private investment in Arab states amounted to neocolonial exploitation. The businessmen who signed the 1955 supplement made it clear that “too much bureaucratic supervision of, and participation in, privately financed enterprises” would discourage their investment, placing undeniable pressure on Arab nations in need of funds – thereby exerting pressure on behalf of American capital. Meanwhile, the AFME assured these investors that the “dire need for capital” in Arab states would “make unlikely any possibility of

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<sup>188</sup> Reem Abou-El-Fadl, 227.

burdensome governmental restraint or interference beyond maintaining the economic integrity of the country.”<sup>189</sup> Not only was state sovereignty portrayed as an inconvenience to the free flow of capital, but it betrayed a knowing exploitation of nations who needed funds. This was the crux of the AFME’s neoliberal, privatized development plan: the power of nascent Arab governments would be curtailed in favour of benevolent, American corporate control. Though the relationship was cast by the AFME and its business associates as a necessary and mutually beneficial one, it was only Arab nations that would need to make sacrifices. American capitalists were willing to ‘help’ the decolonizing world with their investments – but only once the “security of his principal” and reasonable expectations of a “fair profit” were assured.<sup>190</sup>

The AFME was exploiting the precarious economic landscape in Arab states, but also continuing a historical trend of dependency through foreign oil concessions. As economist Abbas Alnasrawi argues, the investment of multinational oil capital did the most to “complete and deepen” the dependency status of all Arab states, whether they produced oil or not.<sup>191</sup> By the 1950s, renegotiations of colonial era concessions imposed tax rates of fifty percent on oil profits, but often saw royalty amounts reduced while oil monopolies still held decades long concessions.<sup>192</sup> The Iraqi Petroleum Company for example boasted a concession lasting from 1925 to 2000. Iraq was the oil producing state with which the AFME had the closest ties, but the group’s corporate sponsors – including ARAMCO and California Texas Oil Co. – were likely looking for any new regional inroads they could find. For non-oil producing states like Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Tunisia, or Morocco, agriculture, construction, food processing, and furniture were the key emerging

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<sup>189</sup> Sahwell, 46.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-7.

<sup>191</sup> Alnasrawi, 2.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

industries – often part of import substitution industrialization plans to shield these markets.<sup>193</sup> Among the 1955 supplement's signatories, those concerned with such domestic industries were few; manufacturers were well represented but so were industries new to the region that did not yet have a significant presence.<sup>194</sup> This indicated a further disconnect between the interests of Arab nationalist governments and American investors.

While Minor and the supplement's signatories had spoken in favour of US businesses engaging in joint ventures with local companies, this did not preclude a unilateral approach to Middle East development. Though they believed "local capitalists... should be encouraged to participate in, and profit from, the economic growth of their homelands," Arab businesses would not hold nearly as much capital or power as their American partners.<sup>195</sup> The AFME thus continued to promote connecting elites between the US and the Middle East, but now the focus was on economic, rather than cultural elites.

While these joint ventures would at least include local capitalists, though not Arab states, even that relationship smacked of uplift and the prioritizing of American interests. Minor wrote that joint ventures would afford US investors "greater protection of capital" and produce a "greater incentive to the local people."<sup>196</sup> Based on similar comments made in the supplement to Sahwell's "Investment of Foreign Capital," this can be interpreted as an incentive to invest only once sufficient local capital was secured, but the language betrays a further sense that American capital was not only improving the region but inspiring its economic elites. As in the early 1950s, a sense of cultural, civilizational, and perhaps racial superiority permeated the AFME's relationship with

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 14, 17.

<sup>194</sup> Sahwell, 54.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>196</sup> Minor, "American Stake in the Middle East," 439.

other bourgeois elites overseas. Both groups were to be vanguards, but Americans had the duty to carry more of the burden because of their position in the cyclical ebb and flow of modernity between the two civilizations.

*Denouncing Foreign Aid, Promoting America*

Eschewing Arab regulatory power and economic sovereignty on the one hand, the AFME also cemented its neoliberal credentials by rebuking foreign aid. The AFME's faith in American capital as a transformative force in the decolonizing Third World translated into a disdain for intergovernmental aid. In 1947, before his tenure as AFME President nearly a decade later, Earl Bunting articulated ideas the group would adopt after its neoliberal turn, specifically regarding aid. His writing is best viewed as a private sector perspective that would become AFME orthodoxy once industrialists like Bunting assumed power in the organization during the late 1950s. He cautioned against seeing foreign reconstruction aid as "a charitable operation" and suggested:

For the sake of our future relations with the countries to which such aid will be extended, we ought to develop a business-like method of doing this job. Dealings between friends *can* be put on a business-like basis with mutual benefit. Whatever we can do in putting foreign reconstruction loans through either the World Bank or private banking sources will develop a much sounder basis for harmonious future relations with the countries involved.<sup>197</sup>

Bunting wrote at a time when postwar reconstruction, rather than 'development,' still constituted an international priority. But just as Bunting's missive came at a time when Marshall Plan aid to

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<sup>197</sup> Earl Bunting, "Industry's Answer to the Police State: A Program of Action," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 December 1947, 140. Speech delivered at the Congress of American Industry in New York.

Europe was a centrepiece of US foreign policy, the AFME's adoption of an extreme 'business approach' to relations with Arab states signalled a partial rebuke to Eisenhower's economic strategy in the Third World in the late 1950s.

As Michael R Adamson argues, the Eisenhower government's eventual expansion of grants and loans to the Third World remained moderate compared to what decolonizing nations wanted. They did however depart from the previous 'trade not aid' mentality. After the Soviets began to extend grants and loans to the Third World in the late 1950s, the US followed suit while generally maintaining that private investment was superior to government aid.<sup>198</sup> Though the emphasis was placed on Latin America, this governmental shift represented a new orthodoxy that the AFME did not concur with. In 1957, then AFME Board Chairman Minor explicitly said in a speech, "One hopes that we can develop the theme of TRADE – NOT AID in the Near East.... Aid can be a useful handmaiden of policy, but is certainly no substitute for policy."<sup>199</sup> The results for states like Egypt, with which the Eisenhower government inaugurated a food aid program, suggested otherwise. The \$1 billion spent between 1958 and 1966 paid for half of the nation's wheat supply and made possible Nasser's first five-year national development plan.<sup>200</sup> Perhaps the clearest example of the AFME pushing a neoliberal development plan – advocating that dollars flow not between governments, but corporations – demonstrated its belief that the private sector was better

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<sup>198</sup> Michael R Adamson, "'The Most Important Single Aspect of Our Foreign Policy'?: The Eisenhower Administration, Foreign Aid, and the Third World" In *The Eisenhower Administration, the Third World, and the Globalization of the Cold War*, edited by Kathryn C Statler and Andrew L Johns (Boulder, CO: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 55-6, 60-1.

<sup>199</sup> Harold B Minor, "The American Stake in the Middle East: Can the Decline of American Prestige There Be Arrested?" in *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 25 March 1957, 439. Emphasis in text. Speech delivered to Economic Club of Detroit.

<sup>200</sup>Jacobs, 177.

equipped to stimulate economic prosperity, even if it lacked any public oversight. However, this ideological disposition was about more than economic capacity for Middle East nations.

In the same speech, Minor reiterated the AFME orthodoxy that US Middle East policy should be conducted through the lens of the US interests while working to “reassert American leadership in the region.” Aid was evaluated through the same framework, with Minor portraying it as ineffective and arguing it “isn’t a weapon we can successfully use.”<sup>201</sup> Aid was not conceived of as money that could be used for either national development projects or as repatriation of wealth acquired through Western imperialism. Rather Minor not only argued that private interests should take the lead in development efforts but explicitly framed such a program as primarily beneficial to investors. His speech advocated for “a very important place for American business in the Near East in the future.” He focused on making companies aware of the trade opportunities with the area and remarked that 1957 was “a good time for business and industry to study the Near East in the hope of sharing in the surge of development which will come.”<sup>202</sup> It is obvious from these passages that Minor not only placed American business interests above Arab national welfare, but that he did not even conceive of regional resources, assets, or development revenues as something that Arab nations owned or to which they were necessarily entitled. Economic development was cast analogously to a *terra nova*, an empty frontier where American capitalists could take and control as they saw fit. The AFME promoted private sector development based on the belief that investors, not local governments, had the right to control development projects.

It is tempting to interpret the AFME’s role as a corporate booster in the Middle East as a product of self-seeking profit motives. I do not rule this out, but it was one facet of a larger ideology

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

wherein economic elites served as vanguards of American hegemony; they worked to promote economic integration of the Middle East into the Western orbit. The AFME's position on the extreme trade liberalism side of the 'trade vs aid' debate was made most clear with the establishment of the Pakistani-American Chamber of Commerce (PACOC) in January 1957. The Chamber was ultimately a way to better facilitate Pakistani-American business contacts through one unified, independent organization. The AFME's role in providing funds, assistance, and the initiative to start the project<sup>203</sup> demonstrate that they wanted the US relationship with the Middle East to be a business relationship, where private and corporate interests had considerable power over projects and outcomes. PACOC was cast as a project that had improved both "trade and understanding between the two countries," but while understanding had originally been a political tool for unification against the Soviets it was by the late 1950s being used as a way to foster trade among US and Middle Eastern businesses.

Another way that the AFME promoted the Middle East as open for American investment was through its "Basic Facts" series published in the mid-1960s. Covering topics related to Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia it gave the impression of a brief but comprehensive breakdown of the Arab world. However, the information contained in the series made the most reasonable target audience of investors and tourists. Each edition ranged from 15-20 pages and gave an overview of the topic nation's history from antiquity to the present, its geography, demographics, cities, climate, and tourist sites. Perhaps less interesting to the average American reader however were the surveys of national industries, agricultural output, oil development, irrigation and major infrastructure projects, statistics on education, and an account of the major

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

national banks, labour unions, and news outlets.<sup>204</sup> Seemingly innocuous publications meant to promote the AFME's central goal of 'cultural understanding,' the "Basic Facts" series further demonstrates how 'friendship' was being sought via promoting the Middle East as a prospective region for investment. The series is best understood as handy primers for businesses interested in development projects but unfamiliar with the region and its key economic characteristics. Intercultural understanding had gone from a project conducted between international cultural elites to one carried out by and for American economic elites.

The American Friends engaged in a Gramscian process of projecting a bourgeois, common sense hegemony of ideas via these vanguards. While an assessment of the group's cultural impact in the Middle East cannot be made here, the AFME nonetheless worked to manufacture consent among Arab polities for the integration of US corporations into regional economies. They executed a neoliberal agenda by portraying Arab states as modern, capitalistic, and pro-business while casting regional resources primed for private development. This ignored the commitment of new Arab governments to economic sovereignty while casting the process as mutually beneficial; they did not hide their agenda because they believed it was effective and just for all parties. In reality, the process undermined Arab nationalism by working to shift economic control away from Arab states and over to the foot soldiers of American capitalist expansion.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>204</sup> Erich W Bethmann, *Basic Facts on Syria* (Washington, DC: AFME, Inc., 1964); Erich W Bethmann, *Basic Facts on Iraq* (Washington, DC: AFME, Inc., 1964); Erich W Bethmann, *Basic Facts on the United Arab Republic* (Washington, DC: AFME, Inc., 1964).

The industrialist shift undertaken by the AFME after 1956 ushered in key changes to the organization's operations, but the underlying driver of elitist modernization remained the same. The American Friends claimed that their cultural exchange programs would promote friendship and understanding between the US and the Middle East via interpersonal diplomacy. Yet these exchanges were conducted by and for a vanguard of cultural elites in either region. By 1957 the emphasis had merely shifted to economic elites. The rhetoric of modernization, always present, had become more explicit, technical, and corporate while 'exchange' became more akin to a unilateral relationship controlled by American capital. The Muslim-Christian alliance that animated the AFME agenda from 1951-56 sought integration of the Middle East into the Western orbit via a 'partnership' based on shared modern values and opposition to Communism. It was to be secured through the work of private citizen vanguards, who belonged to a transnational cultural elite. The neoliberal development agenda begun after 1956 sought this integration through corporations and industrial leadership, promising a far more unilateral and directly exploitative relationship than before.

At a time when Arab nationalist forces – opposed to neocolonialism and foreign economic coercion – were most powerful, the AFME was encouraging the submission of Arab states to the American capital. Though ostensibly for the 'mutual benefit' of both sides, only Arab nations would be required to make sacrifices. The AFME's model of Arab-American foreign relations was significantly more neoliberal than the political development orthodoxy of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Rebuking both strong state control of the economy and programs of intergovernmental aid in favour of corporate ownership of development and revenues, this amounted to privatized development. The AFME promoted American corporate hegemony at the expense of Arab

nationalism by advertising the Middle East as open for business and, later, commodifying Arab students and workers as cogs in the process of privatized development.

## Chapter Four

### **Ambassadors Commodified: The Student Exchange Program**

Among the AFME's major operations throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the student exchange program best embodied the group's transition from cultural exchange to industrial development. Originally using visiting students to promote mutual understanding in the US, the program culminated in a concerted focus on technical training by the 1960s. It would serve the dual functions of pedagogical uplift and commodification of students. The role of students in the AFME's program differed from that of similar development organizations in the 1960s. While Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) and British Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) sent students to assist with Third World development projects, the AFME was more concerned with bringing Middle Eastern students to the United States to study and, later, to train for jobs in their home country. The AFME's integration of some Middle Eastern students into the program's infrastructure was also a key difference, though they were not exempt from the trend of treating citizens of the Third World more as objects of uplift than active participants in a mutual process.

The AFME established a sophisticated system of overseas counselling services in the Middle East, used to screen students and send their applications to US universities. Throughout the 1950s, the AFME's overseas student exchange infrastructure became well-established, with student counselling centres opened in Baghdad and Teheran by 1954, Damascus and Cairo in 1956, and Karachi in 1957.<sup>205</sup> These centres conducted personal interviews and offered orientation

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<sup>205</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 23; AFME, Inc. (1957), *Annual Report, 1956-7* (New York, NY: AFME, Inc.), 1.

courses to students applying to US universities. The AFME effectively had say over not just who would study in America but what skills they would learn and bring back to their home countries.

The American Friends saw their educational program as “one of the most effective instruments [for] cultivating new and better relations with the Middle East.”<sup>206</sup> In the early 1950s, the group’s annual reports referred to students from the Middle East as “future leaders of their countries,” writing that Americans should “come to know them better and they should know and understand us better.”<sup>207</sup> Despite this tone of reciprocity, it would be Middle Eastern students doing the intercultural legwork while in the US, being viewed as “unofficial ambassadors”<sup>208</sup> in addition to future leaders. To this end, the AFME secured limited funding for students and provided various accommodations to help them adjust to life in the US. The belief was that, as a result, students would bring home what they learned in the US to develop the Middle East economically and politically. Students’ presence in the US was ultimately instrumental and ephemeral, quite explicitly in the service the AFME’s Cold War objectives of uplifting and safeguarding the region.

Although other US educational exchange programs were well-established by the time the AFME was founded in 1951, none focused on relations with the Middle East. As a result, Middle Eastern students faced unique challenges when applying to US schools. Thus, the American Friends took up the mantle of educational exchange in the region, becoming an increasingly key player in the educational exchange process between the US and the Middle East. By 1959, “[m]ore and more frequently students who applied independently to American institutions of learning were referred by the schools to AFME for orientation and screening.”<sup>209</sup> In its 1958-9 annual report, the

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<sup>206</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 18.

<sup>207</sup> Annual Report, 1952-3, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 19.

<sup>209</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 31.

AFME reported that a total of 992 students had been admitted to American schools under its auspices, roughly one quarter of the total foreign students who went to study in the US from the countries where the group operated.<sup>210</sup> By its second decade, the AFME student program had accrued significant, and eventually US government-sanctioned, influence over the infrastructure and outcomes of US-Middle East student exchanges. This and the fact that the organization, as AMIDEAST, continues to run a student exchange program in the region to this day, makes the nature of their influence a significant object of study.

I argue that AFME-sponsored Middle Eastern students in the US represented both unofficial ambassadors and objects of uplift, and eventually a cog in the US corporate development process. As the student exchange program merged with AFME's agenda of technical development in the 1960s, the peripheral and instrumental status of Middle Eastern students in America was further accentuated. The AFME endorsed the educational policies and priorities of Arab governments by making US institutions more receptive to the characteristics of Arab grading systems. However, this accommodation was part of a process that undermined Arab nationalism's statist development agenda by commodifying students and advancing the AFME's neoliberal agenda. This signalled the group's failure to forge a truly bilateral cultural relationship with the Arab world; instead the organization opted to facilitate a process of western corporate imperialism. Arab students went from being used to improve policy in the metropole, to being cogs of economic uplift in the periphery. The student program embodied both the potential and failure of the AFME's model for intercultural relations.

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<sup>210</sup> Teresa Brawner Bevis, *Higher Education Exchange between America and the Middle East through the Twentieth Century* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 117. Statistics provided by Bevis indicate that Egypt, Iran, Iraq, and Syria sent a total of 3955 students to US schools in the 1959-60 academic year. A lack of reported data on the AFME's end makes a sustained comparison of these figures difficult.

### **The AFME's Place in the US Educational Exchange Framework**

While the concept of educational exchange far predated the AFME, the group worked to complement existing exchange programs in its own way. Founded in 1890, the Rhodes scholarship enlisted young Canadians and Americans among the students acting as unofficial ambassadors abroad, a concept the AFME later reverse engineered for Middle Eastern students in the US. In 1910, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was created to foster international understanding and friendship via education. A decade later the Institute for International Education (IIE) was created under the leadership of former Secretary of State, Elihu Root, Columbia University President Nicholas Murray Butler, and Stephen Duggan Sr., Professor of Political Science of the College of the City of New York, to fulfill this goal in cooperation with the US State Department.<sup>211</sup> By 1925, the State Department was making the exchange of students, science, and culture a priority, but the focus of these programs throughout the 1930s and 1940s was with Latin America.<sup>212</sup> Following World War II, the logic of fighting the Cold War by sending Americans abroad and inviting foreigners to the US was embraced by many American politicians and statesmen, most notably by Senator J. William Fulbright.<sup>213</sup> Signed into law in 1946, the Fulbright Program became the US government's main vehicle for international student exchanges

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<sup>211</sup> Glenn Wesley Leppert, "Dwight D Eisenhower and People-to-People as an Experiment in Public Diplomacy: A Missing Element for Understanding Eisenhower's Second Term as President" (PhD dissertation, Kansas State University, 2003), 142.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 143-4.

and, over the next few decades, would facilitate the worldwide exchange of hundreds of thousands of students.<sup>214</sup>

Against the backdrop of these well-established programs, it may seem odd that the AFME felt the need to replicate them with their own version. By the early 1960s, however, the AFME's student program was filling a crucial gap in an educational exchange network that neglected the Middle East. According to the group's 1962-3 annual report, the admissions officers and registrars at US colleges and universities were unable to accurately assess foreign students from the Middle East given their near exclusive experience with students from Western Europe and Latin America.<sup>215</sup> Because Middle Eastern grading systems were different than what US schools were used to, the "problem of proper evaluation" was deemed "severe."<sup>216</sup> That the AFME was eventually tasked with operating the Middle East and North Africa chapter of the Fulbright program in the early 1970s is a testament not only to the group's growing influence in its first decades, but to the real gap it had filled in the region.<sup>217</sup>

Its pamphlet "Basic Facts in Education in the Middle East" made clear that certain university admission policies were inconsistent with the infrastructure of some Arab exchange processes and made recommendations to this effect. For example, since the Iraqi Ministry of Education required the US I-20 immigration form before their Ministry of Defense would authorize a passport, the publication noted that "the requirement of some universities for tuition deposits before issuance of the I-20 is unworkable under Iraqi law."<sup>218</sup> Explaining that grading

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<sup>214</sup> Bevis, 110.

<sup>215</sup> Annual Report, 1962-3, 6.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Bevis, 111.

<sup>218</sup> AFME, Inc., *Basic Facts on Education in the Middle East North Africa* (Washington, DC: AFME, 1966), 19. Emphasis in text.

systems in Jordan were often harsher in practice than official grading scales indicated, the AFME warned that schools may “penalize qualified students unduly.”<sup>219</sup> The AFME believed that the US foreign study infrastructure was inhospitable to Middle Eastern candidates, and they worked to illuminate these shortcomings and bring more students into the US.

The AFME was unique since its exchanges were exclusively focused on foreign students whereas government programs strove for bilateral exchange. Even when the organization’s primary goal was cultural exchange in the early 1950s, mutual exchange would have been counterproductive. Arab educational institutions were fewer and their expansion was part of a concerted effort to increase domestic skilled labour. Creating its own student program also signalled the AFME’s desire to actively conduct their own distinct foreign policy, as opposed to joining or lobbying the state to change existing ones.

### **Accommodating Students**

The AFME worked to make students comfortable during their stay in the US. At times, this included integrating them into its educational exchange infrastructure. Such attempts at collaboration were peppered throughout an increasingly unilateral relationship between the AFME and Middle Eastern students.

Once students arrived in the US, the American Friends ensured several forms of accommodation for them. The AFME’s annual reports from 1954 to 1957 document grants from the Doris Duke Foundation earmarked for professional development conferences. The grant was roughly \$1000 annually and given to nine students each year until 1958 when twenty students

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 24.

received it.<sup>220</sup> By the early 1960s, the group was able to secure scholarship amounts of \$200-250,000 for its students, with some scholarships of \$40,000 targeted to Jordanian students sharing homes with Americans off campus.<sup>221</sup> By the 1962-3 academic year, the scholarship amounts secured totaled roughly \$48,000, signalling the AFME's shift from academic to technical training.<sup>222</sup>

By 1960, the AFME was also accommodating housing in a way that was consistent with the principles of cultural exchange. The Venture in International Student Assistance (VISA) program was aimed at “deserving students [who] are virtually penniless” and facing obstacles associated with adjusting to “an entirely new cultural environment.” Providing these lodgings were “sympathetic and responsible Americans” near college and university campuses willing to “adopt” Middle Eastern students during their stay.<sup>223</sup> The AFME felt that the “rewards were reciprocal: in terms of mutual understanding and good will, it benefited the foster group and its community as much as it did the student grantee.”<sup>224</sup> Though not perhaps an ideal living arrangement for culturally overwhelmed students, depending on how tolerant they were of possibly overbearing American hosts, it nonetheless spoke to the enduring value of cultural exchange in the American Friends worldview and their genuine desire to ensure that students were able to be at least financially comfortable during their stay. However, having posted surpluses of \$155,260 in 1960 and assets of \$138,086 in 1961, it appears very likely that the AFME could have been more

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<sup>220</sup> Annual Reports: 1955-6, 26; 1956-7, 7; 1957-8, 26.

<sup>221</sup> Annual Reports: 1959-60, 6; Annual Report, 1960-1, 6; AFME, Inc. (1962), *Annual Report, American Friends of the Middle East: 1961-2* (Washington, DC: AFME, Inc.), 4.

<sup>222</sup> Annual Report, 1962-3, 7.

<sup>223</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 7.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

generous toward its students.<sup>225</sup> This was indicative of the tensions emerging between the original commitment to cultural exchange and the pragmatist turn of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

The “problems of adjustment” for students to American academic and social life were a key concern for the AFME.<sup>226</sup> While the notion that the US was a “strange land” for Middle Eastern students was no doubt exaggerated by the essentialist American Friends worldview, attempts to address problems of integration were nonetheless valuable to students. The AFME often worked with the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors (NAFSA), with whom they coordinated a grant that would help recipient advisors to understand the problems faced by students upon arriving in the US or once they returned home.<sup>227</sup> The use of “Amgrads” – Middle Eastern students who had since returned home from their studies in the US – as counsellors was one of AFME’s most collaborative programs. Amgrads “advised and briefed” students who were about to leave for school in the US and shared their experiences with American life.<sup>228</sup> This was the closest AFME got to a collaborative, grassroots model of non-state foreign policy since it was actively involving Middle Eastern students in the process of intercultural exchange. While cultural exchanges via tourism, guest lecturers, and publications were notoriously elitist, these interactions with students were much less so.

While the need to make sure student ‘ambassadors’ were comfortable enough to remain in the US and foster intercultural understanding made sense, the fact that it was neither hands-off nor intensely micromanaged is significant. The overseas counselling service provided departing students with “the advantage” of orientation courses used to prepare students for successful

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<sup>225</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 26; Annual Report, 1960-1, 24. Adjusted for inflation, these figures amount to roughly \$1,283,969 and \$1,130,486 in 2018 dollars.

<sup>226</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 19.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

diplomatic engagements in the US while screening out others to prevent “unhappy experiences in America.”<sup>229</sup> However, the AFME determined who was deemed unprepared. A process based around matching students with “schools carefully chosen for their individual academic needs”<sup>230</sup> simultaneously increased students’ odds of admission while giving field offices enough personal information to screen out candidates who were not ideal in their eyes. The use of “orientation classes” alongside individual counselling services also afforded AFME officials a chance to mold prospective students while smacking of pre-indoctrination.<sup>231</sup>

The AFME made some efforts to temper its own power over the screening process. By April 1955, the AFME’s role in the exchange of Iraqi students to the US was codified when the American Consulate required each applicant for a student visa to visit the AFME office for counsel and appraisal.<sup>232</sup> The group reported “All students accepted for placement are interviewed and counseled by the resident AFME field officer and his staff assistant (a local national who has himself been educated in the United States).”<sup>233</sup> While this assistant was selected unilaterally by the AFME and was thus most likely to be in accord with organization’s ideological presuppositions, it at least signalled a spirit of collaboration with students. In their 1962 survey of Iraq’s grading system, AFME representatives recommended: “Universities in the US might consider, in addition to any local assessment facility offered, the appointment of one of their alumni from Iraq who might be asked to interview applicants and submit their evaluation directly to the University.”<sup>234</sup> The student program thus demonstrated the AFME’s ability to be more

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<sup>229</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 30.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>231</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 12.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> AFME, Inc. (1964), *Report 1963-4: American Friends of the Middle East, Inc*, Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc., 7.

<sup>234</sup> AFME, Inc., *Grading Systems in Iraq: A Survey Prepared May, 1962* (Washington, D.C.: AFME, Inc., 1962), 1.

collaborative than some of its NGO peers. However, by this point, other issues with the student program had begun to rear their head.

### **Unofficial Ambassadors, Permanent Investments**

The student program clarifies key points about the American Friends' corporate development agenda: they not only wanted to modernize Arab economies but to mould the minds of future leaders. By steeping students in American culture and teaching them about democracy, the AFME's hoped to modernize students too. By the 1960s this had turned into a process of commodification, signalling the AFME's failure to forge truly intercultural or bilateral relations with the Middle East.

In 1954, the stated task of the group's Department of Student Affairs was to help Middle Eastern students "fulfill their 'ambassadorial' role."<sup>235</sup> The American Friends envisioned a Middle Eastern student ambassador who "not only represents his nation abroad, but also presents to his own people an accurate picture" of the US.<sup>236</sup> The AFME wanted to use mutual understanding to make US foreign policy more intelligent and to bring the Middle Eastern public into closer alignment with America by correcting their 'misconceptions.' The cultural bridges that these "unofficial ambassadors" were building were part of an imperial, nationalist, Cold War project to align Islamic and Christian nations in the fight against Communism. Thus, any 'relationship' being forged between Americans and Middle Eastern students was in the service of AFME's own vision for an intercultural alliance.

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<sup>235</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 20.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

The AFME helped establish four student organizations in the US – for Arab, Iranian, Afghani, and Pakistani foreign students. While these organizations exercised “full responsibility for the selection and implementation of their own projects,” the AFME provided most of their funding.<sup>237</sup> The Organization of Arab students was the largest and only student group whose operations and finances were completely autonomous from the AFME.<sup>238</sup> The conventions held by these organizations were where students performed their ambassadorial duties by informing Americans about the Middle East and working to better understand Americans, all the while gaining “a more mature understanding of their own cultures.”<sup>239</sup> This final point not only echoed the AFME’s general mission statement of creating cultural awareness between Americans and Middle Easterners, but also their characteristic language of uplift. The idea that Western and Islamic cultures existed as natural entities, but that both sides needed to be reminded of this fact by the AFME in the face of special interests, thus permeated the student program as well. It asked that everyone stay in their cultural lane. They did not want students to become Americans, but to remember they were Middle Eastern and Islamic. And yet, these distinct cultures could always stand to benefit from American political and technical methods.

A relationship with students based on uplift had emerged by the late 1950s. The student organizations were described in the 1957-8 annual report as a way to “[a]ccustom the students to habits of democratic cooperation.”<sup>240</sup> The American Friends argued that “the students are taking home these techniques of organized activity that aid them in asserting their leadership qualities.”<sup>241</sup> This “laboratory experience in working democracy” was, according to the group, an

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<sup>237</sup> Annual Report, 1954-5, 20.

<sup>238</sup> Annual Report, 1953-4, 19.

<sup>239</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 23.

<sup>240</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 19.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

“indispensable element in [students’] overall education in the United States.”<sup>242</sup> Foreign students, then, were not just future leaders with whom Americans should be better acquainted in order to safeguard future relations, but leaders who the American Friends felt they had a key role in shaping. This echoes what Frank Gertis describes as the “psychological modernization” behind Western public diplomacy and cultural and educational assistance programs in the Third World.<sup>243</sup> The drive to modernize by manufacturing new leadership also paralleled the beliefs of intellectuals in the Kennedy administration like Walt Whitman Rostow. He articulated that infusions of Western capital to the Third World were effective only insofar as they were accompanied by domestic reformers intent on creating modern nations with which the West could contend.<sup>244</sup> The student program was thus a political development project based in pedagogical uplift to design a new class of leaders. The ostensibly ‘soft’ cultural project of student organizations was one piece of a broader modernization project, complementary to the group’s plan to reinvent the Middle Eastern economic landscape along lines of private American capital. However, budget cuts of fifty percent to the student organizations by 1956 indicated the group’s changing agenda and turn away from cultural exchange.<sup>245</sup> The AFME envisioned a new role for many students – workers, rather than ambassadors.

The role conferred on Middle Eastern students – agents of cultural exchange – ostensibly meant that the longer they remained in the US interacting with Americans the better. But by the early 1960s it was clear that the desire to create a skilled workforce for the Middle East had

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<sup>242</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 16.

<sup>243</sup> Frank Gertis, “Bandung as the call for a better development project: US, British, French and Gold Coast perceptions of the Afro-Asian Conference (1955),” *Cold War History* 16 no.3, (2016): 257.

<sup>244</sup> David Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 195-6.

<sup>245</sup> Annual Report, 1955-6, 21.

eclipsed this original goal. The group's shift from cultural to economic modernization also meant the breakdown of already mild collaboration with students. According to the 1959-60 annual report, the "Middle Eastern student who establishes permanent residence here after graduation represents *the loss of a national investment* not only by his mother country but, in a real sense, by the United States as well."<sup>246</sup> Viewing Middle Eastern students as investments signalled the commodification of students by the increasingly pragmatist and industrialist American Friends. Students' presence in the US was to be temporary – otherwise they were useless. The conceptual reinvention of Middle Eastern youth from intercultural bridgebuilders into objects of benevolent American uplift and even agents of US industry signalled the breakdown of any potential for bilateral or intercultural relations through the AFME.

By 1957, the presentation of students' "culture and national aspirations to the American people" still mattered, but the AFME increasingly saw education as insufficient.<sup>247</sup> This inaugurated an emphasis on job placement, a process which further commodified the student ambassadors. The student exchange program was supplemented with the Student Placement Service, an initiative designed to "help qualified Middle Eastern graduates find jobs with American concerns operating in their countries of origin."<sup>248</sup> This would become a signature characteristic of the AFME's overall development agenda: conducting technical skill training under the auspices of American capital. The central criticism of this model is not that it failed to make any positive contributions, but rather that the process was owned by and designed to benefit US enterprises while providing jobs and skill building to Middle Eastern students with that goal in mind. The AFME worked to accommodate interested companies, happy to "aid the many American firms

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<sup>246</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 4. Emphasis mine.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>248</sup> Annual Report, 1956-7, 7.

which are anxious to increase the number of local nationals holding high-level positions in their overseas plants or offices.” It reported that many firms had already expressed “keen interest,” and that the National Association of Manufacturers was willing to cooperate.<sup>249</sup>

Whereas the AFME had made a point of sharing administrative power over the student program with actual students, the industrial shift of which the job placement program was a part offered no such division of ownership. By 1958, the AFME’s overseas student counselling offices took on the additional task of appraising “the professional qualifications of graduate students” to help them explore “career opportunities in their homeland, and, on a selective basis, provides practical on-the-job training in the United States in appropriate fields.”<sup>250</sup>

By its second year, the justification for the renamed Student Career Service changed to appear more mutually beneficial to foreign students: it not only gave them jobs but prevented them from becoming “restive” in home countries that could not accommodate their new skillset.<sup>251</sup> Concern with cultural alienation was a recurring one, and casting employment as its solution was telling. The AFME expressed its task as though it were walking a tightrope: the organization went to great lengths to ensure students felt comfortable in the US, but then worried they would lose touch with their own culture and refuse to leave. The group thus provided reorientation to departing students.<sup>252</sup> Alienation meant a ‘loss of investment’ in educational and technical skills transfer to the Middle East, but AFME’s language implies this was not the entirety of the problem. As discussed, the American Friends viewed the US and the Middle East through a very essentialist, civilizational lens. They saw religious and cultural affinities, while natural, as impermanent and

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 12.

<sup>251</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 22.

<sup>252</sup> Annual Report, 1963-4, 7.

vulnerable to subversive propaganda or simply overexposure to a foreign country. While promoting cultural *exchange* was a key pillar of the AFME philosophy, the organization never went as far as advocating for acculturation in any form. It was the task of the American Friends to preserve these cultural differences. They did not want to see American and Middle Eastern cultures meld or come together, but to better understand and improve each other. They welcomed students to America but did not want them to become Americans. This was driven by the need to secure skilled labour to develop the Middle East, but it also undercut stated objectives of cultural bridgebuilding. Among the rationale for the student associations was the ability for students to maintain “closer ties with the homeland” via “continued contact with their own countrymen,”<sup>253</sup> corroborating that despite the open-arms overtures the AFME made towards Middle Eastern students, their status in the US was always peripheral as well as instrumental.<sup>254</sup>

### **Endorsing While Subverting Arab Nationalism: Sending Students Back Home**

The AFME’s student exchange program embodied the organization’s shift from cultural exchange to Americanized industrialization, and from suspicious to accommodating of Arab nationalism. By examining the exchange program’s infrastructure and juxtaposing its agenda with that of Arab educational policies, it becomes clear that by the 1960s the AFME was making a concerted effort to legitimize and respect the political authority of Arab nationalist governments. However, this was done with an eye for equipping the Middle East with a labour force of commodified students, and advance Arab-American relations not through cultural or religious

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<sup>253</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 16.

<sup>254</sup> How Muslim- or Arab-Americans fit into the AFME worldview is unclear from the available evidence. However, it stands to reason that had the American Friends wanted to use these demographics as rhetorical devices to promote the idea of a deeper, more intimate, more acculturated alliance, they would have.

fidelity but business interests. While many Arab heads of state, Nasser especially, were modernizers, the AFME's brand of neoliberal modernization effectively worked to undermine Arab nationalist projects.

Aspects of the student program were not solely based in the American Friends' ideological predilections but reflected a deference to the education policies of Arab regimes as well. The temporary status of foreign students had a basis in Arab study abroad policies. As early as 1954, a report from an AFME-funded tour of the Middle East by foreign student advisor at Columbia University Mark L Peisch reported that educators and government officials in the Middle East "preferred students to remain in [the US] not longer than four years... since three or four years out of the country added to the difficulties of readjustment and placement in a career."<sup>255</sup> In their "Basic Facts on Education in the Middle East and North Africa" booklet, the AFME provided a breakdown of each country's policy landscape and made recommendations to American admissions officers based on this. It similarly highlighted that Middle Eastern, particularly Arab nationalist, governments did not want their students to remain in the US upon completion of their degrees. The governments of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt – all at this point some variety of Arab nationalist – required students to "establish that they intend to proceed to the US solely to pursue a course of study and to return... upon its completion."<sup>256</sup> The latter two nations even required students return to home and work for their respective governments once their studies were

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<sup>255</sup> Mark L Peisch, "A Foreign Student Adviser Reports on the Middle East" (New York: AFME Inc., 1954), 15. Peisch's report also argued that the "educational objectives of the foreign student in the United States must be justified by the needs and conditions in the student's home country" and noted that the "number of students who do not return home [...] presents a threat of some consequence to the future success of such an exchange program" (18, 15). The report is thus significant in that it demonstrates that AFME did not adopt this language of foreign student ephemerality as early as they could have. They funded Peisch and published his report, but the text makes clear that it is in the voice of someone at a distance from the AFME itself. The AFME's own endorsement of these ideas by the late 1950s was accompanied by a related endorsement of official Arab nationalism and its development policies.

<sup>256</sup> *Basic Facts on Education*, 20.

complete.”<sup>257</sup> Thus, AFME’s desire for Middle Eastern students to be temporary and peripheral within the US was not entirely their own, but a matter on which their development philosophy aligned with Nasserist and Baathist governments, though for different reasons.

By 1960, many Middle Eastern governments had made a concerted effort to build up higher education by devoting substantial revenue to its development.<sup>258</sup> This was a response to the lack of trained professionals required by these states to pursue their economic development plans. In Egypt, President Nasser offered free tuition to students in Egypt and neighboring states who studied in his country, successfully raising educational standards as a result.<sup>259</sup> Free tuition was a staple of the educational agendas in many Arab states. Iraq added a dozen new institutions in the 1950s and increased its number of enrolled students fifty-fold from 1932 levels, with help from UNESCO and US government support for technical and vocational surveys and training.<sup>260</sup> Oil revenue was used to fund similar initiatives in the Gulf states and Iran. Study abroad programs increased in many of these states as a means of equipping youth with skills they could bring back home, often promising government jobs as a result. As postcolonial historian Rochona Majumdar explains, for many prominent non-aligned leaders – like Nasser and likeminded Arab nationalists – rapid industrial development and 'catching up' to the West were prioritized as national goals.<sup>261</sup> This brought nationalists and the AFME into rough alignment over the need to develop a pool of skilled industrial labour; the key difference was over the statist modernization of Arab nationalist development versus the AFME’s neoliberal model.

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 76, 88.

<sup>258</sup> Bevis, 118.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>261</sup> Rochona Majumdar, *Writing Postcolonial History* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2010), 7.

This difference of focus was manifest on the matter of students' subsequent employment. Whereas Arab governments were offering students work with the state directly, the AFME focused on training them through American companies. This belied a fundamental difference of opinion over who should 'guide' the process of modernization and industrial development: national governments or American businesses. By 1958, the AFME compiled applications with students' "qualifications, aptitudes, and preferences" which were then circulated by the US National Association of Manufacturers to "members with business interests or affiliations in the Middle East." This included the Ford Foundation and the International Oil Consortium of Iran. AFME field offices also distributed applications to local industries and businesses.<sup>262</sup> The AFME envisioned students, newly trained in US schools, returning home to work for US corporations, a development model cast as helping the local economy while conveniently boosting the investment prospects for American shareholders.

Such programs were based on the premise that education alone was overemphasized in the Middle East, and that vocational schools were "organized along academic rather than industrial lines" while being too lengthy to accommodate immediate goals.<sup>263</sup> The problem here was not that this training precluded public service or was somehow not valuable. Rather, it signalled who the AFME felt should lead and own the process of development in the region: American capitalists. There is no evidence the American Friends lobbied for improvements to public vocational institutions or for more exchange with the US. They felt instead that the urgency of skills training meant that the private sector's production methods were the best option for developing the Middle East. In this way, the AFME philosophy intimately intertwined the economic prosperity of the

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<sup>262</sup> Annual Report, 1957-8, 22.

<sup>263</sup> AFME, Inc., *Trained Manpower for the Middle East and North Africa*. Washington, DC: AFME Inc., 1963?, 11. Date stamped by library, not in text.

Arab world with the success of American investments. This proposed relationship of dependency worked to undermine Arab nationalist goals of state employment and likely – given the rhetoric examined in chapter three – the power of the Arab state itself.

The AFME believed that students should only go to the US for “specialized training” or graduate study rather than undergraduate work, signalling the degree to which students were investments that the American Friends wanted to make with minimal risk.<sup>264</sup> It was generally thought that graduate students were “more likely” than undergraduates “to return [...] and contribute to the further development of their homeland.”<sup>265</sup> Also important was guiding students “away from courses of study which would prepare them for professions not in demand in their homeland.”<sup>266</sup> This was later cast as a problem of students pursuing degrees “beyond their reach or potential,”<sup>267</sup> but it nonetheless aligned with the industrialization plans of Arab governments. The Egyptian government also discouraged undergraduate study abroad and asked that students studying abroad be “under the age of 35 and be in fields of study which the UAR has deemed to be of value to the development plans of Egypt.”<sup>268</sup> While this was again an issue where AFME’s agenda endorsed and aligned with the educational policies of Arab nationalist governments, it is unclear in which directions pressure was exerted. Respecting the political authority of Arab governments was part of the AFME’s post-1958 endorsement of Arab nationalism, but respect for economic sovereignty was not. Industrial modernizers though they both were, the American Friends and Arab nationalists had different objectives. Both wanted to develop the region, but while the AFME wanted to do so by entrenching the region in the realm of American corporate

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<sup>264</sup> Annual Report 1958-9, 14.

<sup>265</sup> *Basic Facts on Education*, 27.

<sup>266</sup> Annual Report 1959-60, 4.

<sup>267</sup> Annual Report 1962-3, 6.

<sup>268</sup> *Basic Facts on Education*, 86.

production, Nasser wanted to build a postcolonial state that fostered notions of Arab unity and public development.

Arab nationalists saw the social role of education very differently than the AFME. The Organization of Arab Students (OAS) wrote in 1953 that “Education, the school, is perhaps the most significant force in creating an enlightened generation with a deep sense of unity.”<sup>269</sup> Leaders like Nasser saw modernization, development, and education as priorities for the state and saw positive neutrality from the spheres of either superpower as necessary if true Arab independence and human dignity were to be achieved.<sup>270</sup> For Nasser and other postcolonial leaders, they would assume the role of national teachers over the subaltern, as part of their development towards becoming citizens.<sup>271</sup> Truly intercultural relations and friendship did not mean the AFME had to endorse this elitism, but it did mean that delivering corporate teachers to the region undermined broader national projects. The vision that the AFME wanted to impose on the region, then, was incompatible with the Arab nationalist project. Despite this, the American Friends appeared to accommodate the educational agendas of Arab states.

The AFME’s relationship to the OAS in the 1950s belied the American Friends’ early desire to maintain an arm’s length relationship with Arab nationalists. The first OAS convention in 1952 was intensely focused on the project of Arab unity. Members spoke on Palestine, the “reawakening urge for *unity*,” pooling regional resources and establishing a regional bank, and accepting foreign investments only “provided that there are no political implications attached to

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<sup>269</sup> Abdul Rahman Khalid, “Prospects for Arab Unity” in *The Young Arab Speaks*, 59.

<sup>270</sup> Michael E Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and US Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 76, 78.

<sup>271</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Legacies of Bandung: Decolonisation and the Politics of Culture,” in *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, No. 46 (November 18, 2005), 4812.

it.”<sup>272</sup> They spoke of the importance of “active neutrality” – something the AFME at this time rebuked – in order to secure the interests of the Arab state from imperial power and stated that Arabs were required to “lead this neutralist role for the purpose of attaining a balance of power and promoting world peace.”<sup>273</sup> While the proceedings of this convention were published with support from the AFME, the document makes it clear that “neither the experts and advisors, nor the American Friends of the Middle East Inc., nor indeed any other group, bears any responsibility whatsoever for any of the resolutions adopted at the Convention... or for the ideas or thoughts expressed in the text of this booklet.”<sup>274</sup> Contributions to the text by President Thompson, VP Hopkins, and National Council member Millar Burrows took either a dismissive, condescending, or ommissive stance on the very nationalism about which their Arab students were so passionate.

By the 1960s, however, not only was AFME endorsing Arab study abroad policies, it was also promoting learning about Arab unity in US undergraduate courses. In 1964, AFME published “A Selected Basic Bibliography on the Middle East,” which provided suggestions to the Association of Liberal Arts Colleges on sources for college courses on the Middle East. Under “Middle East – General” it lists five titles directly related to Arab nationalism and several more that likely cover it.<sup>275</sup> Other prominent themes covered in the text are economic development, national histories, and Islam. As discussed in chapter three, this change of heart can be attributed to the weakening of AFME’s religious wing, the ascendance of Arab nationalism in the late 1950s

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<sup>272</sup> Kamal A Shair, *The Young Arab Speaks*, ii. Author was Chairman of the Convention and the document was published in cooperation with AFME.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, iii-iv.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

<sup>275</sup> Erich W Bethmann (preparation), “A Selected Basic Bibliography on the Middle East: Suggested for the Association of Liberal Arts Colleges” (Washington, DC: AFME, 1964), 1-4.

as a force that could no longer be dismissed, and to the growing prioritization of American business interests in the Middle East.

The AFME's relationship with Arab states was thus one of endorsement and deference to official national policies while undermining the broader project of Arab nationalism by converting students into skilled labour for the Americanized corporate development nexus that the AFME envisioned for the Arab world. By failing to respect economic sovereignty as they did political authority, and by promoting job placement and training through American firms rather than the Arab state or vocational institutes, the American Friends effectively undermined Arab nationalist goals more than they accommodated them.

## **Conclusion**

Though some students had been integrated into the AFME's administrative apparatus and others, as ambassadors, were encouraged to impart their cultural knowledge to Americans to increase the latter's understanding of the Middle East, paternalistic projects of political pedagogy and uplift were part of the AFME's imperialist cultural agenda. Teaching students about democracy and forging new leaders was a way to shape Arab-American relations on the AFME's terms. By the late 1950s the relationship between the American Friends and their students had become more unilateral as Middle Eastern youth were commodified by the AFME as cogs in a corporate development agenda for the region. US institutions took on the role of educating students while American companies trained them overseas so that they could grow Arab economies in the service of American capital. As the American Friends embraced a role for students that was ephemeral within the US, its commodification of students overseas undercut any potential that the

student exchange program had to build truly bilateral, intercultural Arab-American relations. The story of the AFME's student program was thus one of failure and missed opportunity at the hands of privatized development policy.

## Chapter Five:

### **Uplifting Arab Workers and American Businesses: Technical Training for a Modern, Americanized Arab Economy**

By the 1960s the American Friends' centrepiece program was overseas technical training. While Middle Eastern students studying in the US were the focus of the group's job placement program, the organization later became more broadly concerned with creating a skilled industrial workforce in the region. While this ostensibly aligned with Arab nationalist development priorities, the deference to US corporations to carry out development projects meant the AFME's contention that "the Middle East will control its own economic destiny" was dubious at best.<sup>276</sup> The technical development program was designed to benefit US industry by linking the fate of local labour to the success of American investments in the region.

While the US government under President Truman had established the "Point Four" Program as a means of sharing US technical expertise and assistance with Third World allies, allocations to the Middle East, except for Turkey, were relatively small with few projects undertaken in the 1950s.<sup>277</sup> The Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy administrations were most concerned with technical aid for Latin America, Africa, and South Asia, neglecting the Middle East in their interstate development agendas.<sup>278</sup> The AFME's technical development program is historically significant because it pioneered a model of neoliberal development at a time when Western governments were committed to using state resources to control the decolonizing world's economic and political 'transition.' Modernization theory – at the core of most Kennedy-era

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<sup>276</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 10.

<sup>277</sup> Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East*, 164.

<sup>278</sup> McCleary, *Global Compassion*, 61.

foreign development projects – reined supreme as the ideological status quo in the early 1960s. Using the US as a model, the theory held that state resources could be used to guide ‘developing’ countries towards a modern socioeconomic status. Even the AFME’s contemporaries were partial to this development philosophy, with the Peace Corp and the VSO being state or state-funded projects marshalling Western volunteers to oversee modernization, and CUSO a Canadian non-state actor that was similarly deferential to certain types of development plans put forth by foreign governments. The AFME’s codification of corporate power and wisdom in its strategy for technical uplift thus signalled a break with the status quo of early development NGOs.

Though the AFME aligned with Kennedy administration modernizers on key points about the use of American industrial expertise and technical planning to ‘guide’ the ‘developing’ world, its privatization of the process marked a key difference. Discussing this departure and critiquing the AFME’s privatized approach should by no means be read as an endorsement of contemporaneous state-led programs. Since the passage of the 1951 Mutual Security Act, the US combined humanitarianism, economic development, and military aid in an imperial project to secure liberal hegemony over the Third World during the Cold War.<sup>279</sup> However, by placing corporations and their interests ahead of the interests of the US and Arab states, the AFME championed a neoliberal vision of uplift that would not gain widespread political popularity for several more decades.

The historiography of American international development in the 1960s has also focused on state programs while excluding the Middle East as a subject of analysis. Michael Latham’s work on modernization, books like *Staging Growth* (2003), and Jason C Parker’s work on public

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<sup>279</sup> Ibid.

diplomacy and development in the Third World are most limited by their statist parameters.<sup>280</sup> They examine development in an international context insofar as examining its effects on the global periphery. This, somewhat inevitably, leaves intact the US as a main actor in the narrative while excluding regions that were not a priority for its government. Kennedy's emphasis on modernization and development was heavily applied to Latin America and Asia, meaning the Middle East was perceived by organizations like the AFME as open for corporate development.

For a group claiming to promote an American respect for post-colonial independence, the AFME had a funny way of showing it. The technical training program was the most explicit incarnation of the AFME's endemic modernization agenda. It championed a model of neoliberal development wherein US corporations oversaw the training of Arab workers while the latter were expected to be cogs in a machine that entrenched American capital in the Middle East and emphasized using temporary labour for specific national projects. This broke with the statist development models of Western countries – namely the US and UK governments and the Canadian NGO CUSO – as well as Arab nationalist states and their emphasis on economic sovereignty. It ran contrary to Egypt's plan to expand cooperative enterprises wherein Arab farmers would wield power in the developing Arab economy rather than American investors. The AFME thus continued to undermine the Arab nationalist precepts of economic sovereignty, anti-imperialism, and pan-Arab integration. Continuing to promise mutually beneficial arrangements, the American Friends consistently delivered a system of dependency.

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<sup>280</sup> *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, edited by David C. Engerman, Nils Gilman, Mark H. Haefele, and Michael E. Latham (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); Parker, *Hearts, Minds, Voices*.

## The AFME's Technical Training Program

The AMFE's inspiration for a technical training program for Middle Eastern youth was partly derived from the belief that education alone was insufficient for the demands of the local economy. This discourse was couched in the language of Arab irrationality and the need for American uplift. The American Friends believed that individualized skills training of Middle Eastern workers, under the auspices of American companies in the US and abroad, would save the region from both Soviet incursion and economic stagnation. Having trained manpower that "protects American investments in this important marketing area" was also a priority.<sup>281</sup>

The AFME regarded its role in the Middle East as a "point of contact" for American businesses unfamiliar with the area. The group's 1962-3 annual report emphasizes the need to help US companies take the "bold step" of investing in "new markets" they were unfamiliar with.<sup>282</sup> The AFME's asset was its knowledge of the area, which it would use to facilitate foreign capital investment. Because the nascent industrial landscape of the Middle East was "untested," the AFME would use its presence in the region to help businesses "keep abreast of the rapidly changing local conditions in these areas."<sup>283</sup> For the American Friends, the Middle East represented "a marketplace that warrants increasing exploration by American business and industry."<sup>284</sup>

By 1959 the AFME had established the Individual Resources Development Program (IRDP), first as a pilot project in Iran and then later expanded to include on-the-job training programs in the United Arab Republic. The IRDP aimed to provide "guidance and assistance" to

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<sup>281</sup> Annual Report, 1960-1, 10.

<sup>282</sup> Annual Report, 1962-3, 8.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

the “new generation” of Arab youth. This was deemed essential in order to impart on them the “skills and experience [they] *must* have.”<sup>285</sup> This phrasing reflected the AFME’s belief that American technical methods and economic processes were the only viable path to modernity, and private US enterprises were the gatekeepers of this process. This rhetorical slight of hand effectively cast American corporate technical advancement as inevitable and necessary, dismissing alternatives without even mentioning them.

The American Friends would “arrange and manage” practical training that fit the “specific requirements” of the countries where they operated.<sup>286</sup> The program was jointly designed and coordinated by the AFME and a California-based consulting firm called Transworld Management Corporation, also known as ‘Tramancor.’ There is little detail available about Tramancor apart from its description in AFME documents as dealing with overseas employment and technical training.<sup>287</sup> The program was touted as “a working experience with the materials, methods and techniques of American industry that are applicable to the needs of the region.”<sup>288</sup> The idea was that what the US had the Middle East needed, and the AFME would facilitate this skills transfer via American corporations at home and abroad.

In the US, student training at domestic businesses sought to build various scientific, technical, and administrative skills while US companies abroad facilitated industrial training for specific, immediate projects that required skilled labour.<sup>289</sup> Such projects and training were meant to align with ‘national priorities,’ but what exactly constituted this was largely decided by the

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<sup>285</sup> Annual Report, 1962-3, 5. Emphasis mine.

<sup>286</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 8. The date is stamped on the publication by the library and is not in the text itself. But it aligns with the years during which these programs were being carried out, as stated in annual reports.

<sup>287</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 6.

<sup>288</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 9.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11; *Trained Manpower*, 10.

AFME, Tramancor, and participating US businesses – filtered through a common belief in American industrial superiority. Technical skills training was not inherently problematic, but the system through which the AFME sought to impart it was one that subverted public programs and legitimized the interests of US capital in the region.

### *The Problem with Education*

The IRDP was largely premised on the trope that the pursuit of educational degrees by Arab students had become a decadent and irrational endeavor. Through its rhetoric, the AFME legitimized a neoliberal development strategy wherein the interests of US capital took precedence over Arab empowerment. The sentiments expressed in the AFME's 1958-9 annual report were that Middle Eastern students problematically "revered [academic degrees] as 'ends in themselves'" while failing to consider the professions needed in their home countries.<sup>290</sup> Seeing education as an "ultimate attainment" was deemed a dangerous "trap."<sup>291</sup> The AFME believed "overeducation" produced a worker "dissatisfied and not qualified to handle the duties of his assignment."<sup>292</sup> Seeking a more "balanced" approach including specific individualized training, the AFME portrayed degrees as irrational, indulgent, and unpatriotic. By the early 1960s, the organization that had encouraged educational opportunities for Middle Easterners in the US was now dramatically vilifying the students deemed to be using them incorrectly. Students were cast as members of a self-appointed national elite who did not understand "the less glamorous but essential practical techniques which must be mastered if a job is to be *accomplished*, not just *talked*

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<sup>290</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 16.

<sup>291</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 3.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

*about.*”<sup>293</sup> Conversely, the student who returned home after studying in the US was portrayed as having embraced “the professional and civic responsibilities which lie ahead of him.”<sup>294</sup> Overeducated, irrational, and decadent graduates were implicitly contrasted with patriotic skilled workers who went home and developed the economy by simply understanding what they could “offer the business, industrial or professional community in his homeland.”<sup>295</sup> A shift had clearly occurred. The AFME’s promotion of graduate studies in the US was reconfigured into one that would produce the desired skillsets that the American Friends felt were needed in the Arab states.

Arab governments were also chastised, ostensibly for programs aimed at universal education. The publication “Trained Manpower for the Middle East and North Africa” stated that “No developing nation today can afford the luxury of aimless education and training” and that such policies must be applied selectively “to achieve national ambitions at the earliest possible date.”<sup>296</sup> The American Friends claimed to understand the needs of Arab nations better than Arab nations. Developing states were described as ‘confused’ for making educational and economic policies that encouraged the “dangerous trend” of conflating education with training and assigning the latter a “secondary importance.”<sup>297</sup> While Arab educational policies were portrayed as irrational and ignorant, the solution was made clear in AFME publications: American technocrats. As Arab authority was delegitimized, American industry was championed as having “a deserved reputation for highly advanced technical and administrative ‘know how’ in the various procedures, techniques and materials that result in more productive industrial and business activity.”<sup>298</sup> This passage not only demonstrates who the AFME was manufacturing consent on behalf of – the

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<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> Annual Report, 1961-2, 9.

<sup>295</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 17.

<sup>296</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 2.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>298</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 8.

pragmatic, effective leaders of American industry, juxtaposed with ostensibly flippant, irrational Arab governments. It also showed how little the AFME's own rhetoric embodied a truly mutually beneficial development strategy.

It is worth stressing that the private, corporate development model for which the AFME was advocating was a choice, and one less grounded in regional realities than implied. Their own publication "Basic Facts in the Middle East and North Africa" elucidates the trend discussed by Teresa Brawner Bevis that educational institutes, including technical and vocational training schools, were proliferating in Arab and especially Gulf states. These were, in the case of Iraq, supported by US government surveys and international aid from UNESCO.<sup>299</sup> The "Basic Facts" document acknowledges the alternative models of development, citing the cases of vocational schools in Egypt and dollars from UNESCO, USAID, and the Baghdad Pact to fund programs in Iran.<sup>300</sup> The public model was certainly not beyond criticism, but it does indicate that the AFME knowingly had a choice between calling for an improvement or expansion of that system or promoting development through private industrial wisdom. That they choose the latter and defended it by framing the problem in an orientalist discourse of irrationality reveals the neoliberal modernization agenda they hoped to entrench in the Middle East.

The American Friends' justification for their neoliberal development model paralleled the logic of modernization theorists, though they differed on the key point of state-led development. The AFME believed in the modernization theory tenets that there was a universal path towards development, specifically the American one, and that contact between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies would propel the former nations forward.<sup>301</sup> This, as well as the notion that economic

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<sup>299</sup> Bevis, 118-120.

<sup>300</sup> *Basic Facts in the Middle East and North Africa*, 83, 11.

<sup>301</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 4.

development could be planned and controlled, align with the American Friends' own rhetoric to mark them as modernizers who took a different means to achieve the same end. Permitting Arab economic sovereignty and institutions would relinquish this control while placing it in the hands of political actors who did not have the technical wisdom and industrial insight that American businesses were believed to possess. American capitalism, as the apex of Western modernity, was the AFME's choice for administrator of Middle Eastern economic growth, rather than either the US or Arab state.

The AFME's technical training agenda embodied the group's typically intersecting animi of Cold War nationalism, economic uplift, and privatized development. Its 1958-9 annual report betrays the Cold War motivations for Americanized technical training, in addition to the well-cited belief that irrational Arab priorities promised "little chance of healthy economic growth" given the apparently "minor attention" given to developing personnel with practical, on-the-job training.<sup>302</sup> It noted that given 'strenuous' Soviet competition through trade missions, financial assistance and technical exchange, the Western economic development model was at risk of losing credibility. The report states,

Unless the West, and particularly the United States, offers convincing evidence that its own methods for achieving 'high economic productivity' can be successfully adapted to Middle Eastern conditions, then economic development in the area will fall increasingly under Soviet Bloc influence. The latter clearly have no inhibitions in promoting their own road to 'higher productivity.'<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 17.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

Cold War hegemony inspired all the AFME's programs, and for the IRDP specifically it undergirded the drive for privatized development. American capitalism was seen as superior to Arab development plans yet also on the defensive. The Middle East had to be secured as an economic sphere of influence in order to lift it up, reap the rewards of its resources, and prevent the Soviets from undermining the ability to do so.

### *Setting Up Shop, Subverting Arab Development*

The details of the Individual Resources Development Plan (IRDP) were telling. Despite the AFME's belief that this project was a "far-sighted and realistic approach" to development, the program's parameters encouraged short-term skills training and a culturally specific, Americanized approach to economic growth.<sup>304</sup> There were two training paths offered by the IRDP: 1) for recent Middle Eastern graduates from US schools, training at companies in the US for specialized technical, executive, and administrative positions; and 2) local tradecraft training by US companies in the Middle East designed to "rapidly" produce the skilled labour needed for local rural economies.<sup>305</sup> The first stream was limited to select, "qualified and motivated" individuals and was explicitly "not an operation aimed at en masse training."<sup>306</sup> Training was in fields related to construction engineering, petroleum research, water treatment and development, building and materials specification, city management, transportation, shipping, auditing, governmental budgeting, and hospital and payroll administration.<sup>307</sup> Many of these sectors were

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<sup>304</sup> Annual Report, 1958-9, 17.

<sup>305</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 8.

<sup>306</sup> Annual Report, 1961-2, 11.

<sup>307</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 10-11.

being emphasized and developed in non-oil producing Arab states, signalling co-optation of Arab development plans given the AFME's emphasis on job placement at US companies overseas.

It also echoed the creation of a class of colonial 'collaborators' who would endorse and benefit from the American exploitation of their nation's resources. The blame for this, however, should be left squarely on the system of dependency facilitated by the AFME and its corporate sponsors on the decolonizing Arab world and its youth, for whom stable jobs were things they could not pass on. Louis A Perez Jr. notes that this was a common feature of dependency, especially for Latin American men and women who were complicit in their own subjugation because they participated in a system that functioned based on the assent and acquiescence of the local populace in that system.<sup>308</sup> Perez distinguishes this from compulsion or coercion, but the dynamic he describes, and the context it takes advantage of, is patently coercive. This was especially true for the AFME's program in the decolonizing Middle East.

Local tradecraft training, on the other hand, sought to build industrial skills that the AFME felt education could not provide.<sup>309</sup> This project called for small mobile training centres conducted in cooperation with local and American businesses with an emphasis on versatile training to meet immediate rural industrial demands.<sup>310</sup> It aimed to decentre labour concentration from large cities in order to meet the needs of local industries. The AFME saw this labour base as fluid and to be trained for "urgent and temporary" demands only. This included major public works projects that "cannot wait for completion of several years of technical training" and which did "not justify the erection of costly school facilities which later remain idle or remove trained labour from locations

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<sup>308</sup> Perez, 166-7.

<sup>309</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 9.

<sup>310</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 11.

where they are then most needed.”<sup>311</sup> This not only subverted the Arab nationalist model of educational and vocational training being rolled out in Egypt, but also created a precarious workforce by design.

The impetus to build local skills and redistribute development resources away from industrial centres to meet the needs of smaller areas was a useful check on the agendas of rapid development otherwise advanced by the AFME and the UAR. However, any charitable defense of the AFME’s agenda – that it fostered mass employment while enabling Arab workers to spur economic development, gradually equipping them with the skills to “organize and build their own shops” in the process – would be specious.<sup>312</sup> Firstly, the technical training process described in AFME documents was inefficient as a means of empowering Arab workers in any meaningful way. Despite photo inserts in publications like “Trained Manpower in the Middle East and North Africa” that foregrounded and valorized the Arab worker, the AFME’s actual programs treated these men as cogs in a development machine. The ‘versatility’ of the tradecraft training program meant workers were trained for specific project demands rather than learning a generalized skillset. The training centres could be “easily altered to produce whatever levels of skills are currently required by the surrounding economy,” but if each specified training course was to take four to five months as stated, the process of creating broadly skilled workers was hardly faster than that of the vocational institutes which the AFME disdained.<sup>313</sup> To boot, there would be “no attempt to establish or compete with formal trade schools or to issue ‘diplomas’” through the tradecraft program, making it reasonably harder for workers to verify their skillset for projects beyond the

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<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>312</sup> *Trained Manpower*, 12.

<sup>313</sup> Annual Report, 1963-4, 13.

ones immediate enough for the AFME to train them.<sup>314</sup> The AFME's plan implied a trained local workforce that served on temporary projects while lacking long-term bargaining power in an economy designed by and for the interests of American capital.

Technical training was not a process designed to benefit Arab labour. Despite championing the tradecraft program's ability to produce a "skilled labor force to man the developing industry of the area," it was American businesses that would manage their training and employment.<sup>315</sup> This was once again cast as a mutually beneficial arrangement that in truth promoted corporate American power over the Arab economy. The deal was that Middle Eastern students would receive skilled administrative training and the opportunity to work for an American industry back home. These industries would meanwhile, through the employment of local skilled labour, "gain an area receptivity that facilitates business operations in the region."<sup>316</sup> This was clearly an uneven relationship in terms of economic power, since precarious Arab labour was translated into American profits and economic hegemony.

It is interesting to contrast the AFME's views about corporate development overseas with the portrayals of domestic American capitalism by prominent members like Earl Bunting. Writing in the late 1940s, Bunting's opinion about US economic management reflected the growing postwar consensus that emphasized "industrial peace" rather than unchecked corporate management of the economy.<sup>317</sup> It is easy to historicize the American Friends' worldview and project current political attitudes backwards, making it necessary to distinguish their definitions of capitalism at home and abroad in the early 1960s. At the time a businessman, Bunting betrayed a

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<sup>314</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 11.

<sup>315</sup> Annual Report, 1959-60, 11.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*, 10-11.

<sup>317</sup> Earl Bunting, "Industrial Relations Move Ahead," 232.

distinct annoyance with the power of American unions, but nonetheless argued for “cooperation” between labour and management in the pursuit of “national unity, progress, and prosperity.”<sup>318</sup> His statement that “Reactionary management has no rightful place in the plant today” was consistent with the general mood of Western welfare states in the postwar era, where the power of labour was acknowledged and accepted by industrialists and policymakers.<sup>319</sup> Though “revolutionary troublemakers” were also vilified by Bunting, he nevertheless accepted the reality of organized labour and described a factory’s workforce as its “greatest asset.” The man who would preside over the AFME and helm its technical training program just a decade later wrote that American “employees need not only a healthful, comfortable place in which to work, but an environment where they will find more than material rewards.”<sup>320</sup> This respect for labour was not, however, extended to Arab workers. Aside from the cushy jobs being created for a Western educated management elite, the temporary industrial work of the tradecraft training program did not lend itself to the stable work environments that made unionization possible. It is likely that the modernization ethos of the AFME conceived of industrial peace as possible only at a later ‘stage’ in a nation’s development – as expressed by Bunting’s line, “It is only in a democracy that good industrial relations have any meaning.”<sup>321</sup> A more cynical take would be that industrialists conceded only what they had to, and in the industrializing Middle East they met less organized opposition to contend with.

The ideology of mutual benefit was not simply a smokescreen for profit motives, but rather an intellectual justification for imperial uplift. Referring to the need to train skilled industrial

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<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

labour in the Middle East, the AFME's 1961-2 annual report stated: "On Americans—with whom the export of techniques has perhaps always been altogether too much a matter of unconscious pride—must fall much of the burden of solving this problem."<sup>322</sup> This 'white capitalist's burden' saw American uplift as a remedy for both economic stagnation and Arab irrationality.

### *Rebuking and Subverting Arab Nationalism*

Competition with Egyptian technical training institutes notwithstanding, it is worth reiterating that the AFME's privatized development agenda undermined Arab nationalist ambitions for a postcolonial state. That the AFME's technical training program was targeted at Nasser's UAR is telling given that it was the epicentre of statist, socialist, pan-Arab development. The Egyptian government had created a bank to issue loans for capital investments while directly funding infrastructure, electricity, and oil development projects.<sup>323</sup> Following the Suez War, concrete, foreign oil, tobacco, pharmaceutical, banking, and insurance firms were all nationalized. Nasser's first five-year plan following the 1961 "Socialist Laws" similarly extended public control over the finance, transport, and commerce sectors.<sup>324</sup> This and progressive taxation were part of a nationalist agenda that provided publicly funded healthcare, education, and higher minimum wage for Egyptians.<sup>325</sup> Latham notes that many Western observers disliked Nasser's statist approach, and the AFME's industrial sponsors were likely among them – especially given that it was manufacturing, oil, and banking interests that Nasser was taking on. But while the Kennedy government continued to supply Egypt with food aid, the AFME worked to subvert the Arab

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<sup>322</sup> Annual Report, 1961-2, 4.

<sup>323</sup> Latham, *Right Kind of Revolution*, 80.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>325</sup> *Ibid.*

nationalist priorities of the UAR (which included Syria from 1958-1961, during the program's early years).

The sense of inevitability in the AFME's rhetoric, that a system dominated by foreign capital and worker disempowerment was necessary, belied the group's rejection of available alternatives. Under Nasser, the number of agricultural cooperatives in Egypt expanded greatly, boasting two million members by 1965.<sup>326</sup> The system mandated redistributed land be used for cooperatives, with public health, family planning, and village councils being additional aspects of a program designed to make life better for Egyptian fedans.<sup>327</sup> Though not fully able to curb the power of former landowners, the cooperative system presented a robust alternative program for economic development: one of worker ownership. It more directly addressed concerns about rural growth but was also applicable to urban areas – yet the AFME never explored or attempted to adapt the cooperative model. Even the US government's foreign assistance program integrated cooperatives into its aid framework. Noting that one quarter of USAID's technical assistance was contracted out to universities, colleges, businesses, and professional organizations, a 1963 report to Congress stated that there was a fourfold increase in programs designed to “help private citizens organize savings and loan institutions, credit unions, rural electric cooperatives, housing and farm credit co-ops.” US cooperatives often delivered these programs.<sup>328</sup> USAID also touted private sector development, but the AFME's failure to embrace the cooperative model in the context of

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<sup>326</sup> James B Mayfield, “Agricultural Cooperatives: Continuity and Change in Rural Egypt,” in *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic: A Reassessment of Revolution and Change*, edited by Shimon Shamir (Boulder: CO, Westview Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>328</sup> United States Agency for International Development, “The Foreign Assistance Program – Annual Report to the Congress for the Fiscal Year 1963,” US Government Printing Office, iv. The US cooperatives listed in the report are the Credit Union National Association, the National League of Insured Savings Associations, the Cooperative League of America, and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

both Egyptian and American policy landscape of the 1960s further situates them as a capitalist interest group. While they may have believed they were helping Arab workers, they lacked any collaborative development framework to prove it. Instead, they undermined Arab nationalist development by rolling out a competing neoliberal model in the region.

The IRDP must also be seen through a Gramscian lens of legitimizing corporate hegemony over Arab economic sovereignty. The AFME's training program was consciously promoting the superior "techniques, methods, and materials of American business and industry" in the Middle East.<sup>329</sup> Calls to "adapt American values and concepts to the changing requirements of the Middle East and North Africa" betrayed the group's overt cultural imperialism.<sup>330</sup> Its 1962-3 annual report celebrated the emergence of "well engineered facilities more carefully geared to the economic potential" while contrasting them with the region's poorly planned "show case industries."<sup>331</sup> The "industrial landscape of North Africa and the Middle East blossoms with new industries and businesses," it said, an attempt to promote privatized development as a superior method to that of public or national economic policy.<sup>332</sup> The AFME propagated assumptions of Arab incompetence and the inevitable need for foreign capital and technical skills training. Placing US companies in the driver's seat of development undermined Arab nationalist policies that championed the public sector. In a decolonizing economy maneuvering nascent industrial development, this amounted to neo-imperial coercion.

### **Neoliberal Departure: Comparisons with the Peace Corp, CUSO, and the VSO**

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<sup>329</sup> Annual Report, 1960-1, 10.

<sup>330</sup> Annual Report, 1963-4, 5.

<sup>331</sup> Annual Report, 1962-3, 9.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid.

The American Friends' corporate development strategy deviated from that of their Western contemporaries. In the US, UK, and Canada, similar development groups were either state-run or deferential to the development plans of national governments. This marked the AFME as an outlier in the development world for its promotion of private corporate interests in development projects. Ironically, the American Friends were the only one of the four organizations surveyed here that did not attempt an interpersonal development strategy based on Western voluntarism and collaboration with Third World governments. Modernization was more inconspicuous among the state-affiliated NGOs of the 1960s, but their status as brokers between not just people but governments contrasts with the AFME's neoliberal agenda of deference to corporate expansion as a model for development for in the Middle East. Juxtaposing the AFME's technical development program with those of the Peace Corps, the VSO, and CUSO demonstrates its aberrant status as a neoliberal development organization.

As discussed in chapter three, foreign aid was also a key difference between the AFME and the US government, especially during the tenure of Kennedy's cabinet of modernizers. Walt Rostow – economist, key architect of modernization theory, and Deputy National Security Advisor, Director of Policy Planning, and Counselor of the State Department under Kennedy - advocated for injections of US foreign aid to developing nations in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. This was believed to induce a “take-off” into self-sustained growth among these nations.<sup>333</sup> While Rostow and Kennedy persuaded Congress to increase aid levels to 80% above those of Eisenhower, the AFME's documents do not indicate any support for the idea that foreign aid was

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<sup>333</sup> David Little, *American Orientalism*, 195-6.

a necessary part of the modernization process.<sup>334</sup> Coordinating American capital investment was sufficient for them.

The JFK administration's development strategy resembled the AFME's in that it promoted Americanized, modernized, interpersonal development. But whereas the US government pushed a guided, interstate model of modernization, the AFME worked to facilitate neoliberal development via private enterprise. Although both subscribed to the tenet of modernization theory that averred contact between developed and traditional societies would improve the latter, the AFME was more passive about it. They believed that cultural and economic contact between Arab and American elites would inevitably improve, modernize, and lift up the Middle East. Americanization was a passive process compared to the guided approach used by JFK and his associates.

A key example of Rostow and Kennedy's guided modernization was the "Alliance for Progress" with Latin America. Begun in March 1961 it was no doubt a coercive and hegemonic deal but one animated by interstate agreements and the delivery of public dollars to the southern hemisphere. The Alliance aimed to foster a 'peaceful revolution' in South America by offering funds from the US government, Inter-American Development Bank, and IMF in exchange for national development plans that met the approval of the JFK administration, its accompanying social scientists, and partnering international lending institutions.<sup>335</sup> Growth rate targets, education reforms, health and housing policies, industrialization, land reform, and income distribution were all conditions that needed to be met to receive this aid.<sup>336</sup> It also required participating nations to induce private investment. Latham argues that the Kennedy modernizers sought to put Latin American on a path to liberal, capitalist democracy and keep it in the Western orbit by offering an

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 70.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 69.

alternative to Fidel Castro's model for regional unity.<sup>337</sup> This American mission thus sought to export capitalist modernity, but through interstate institutions and public dollars, rather than corporations alone. The AFME's neoliberal development model had more faith in American corporate wisdom, feeling it was enough to simply introduce them into the region unconditionally.

In contrast to the Alliance, the Peace Corps was the Kennedy government's effort to download development projects to American volunteers. A federally sponsored program, the Peace Corps was intended to foster better international relations rather than large infrastructure projects per se. Young American volunteers would live and work alongside the people of developing nations to cooperate on national projects. The idea behind the Peace Corps had been circulating the US Congress since roughly 1957, cast as a truly people-to-people development program aimed at conveying goodwill to decolonizing states.<sup>338</sup> Interpersonal diplomacy was a concept the AFME had championed as early as 1951, yet the group never extended it to development projects the way the Peace Corps did, instead simply de-emphasizing its cultural exchange programs in favour of technical training. The Peace Corps was a state-driven development project aimed at creating interpersonal relations and mutual understanding – all in the service of securing American hegemony in the Third World.<sup>339</sup> Much like the AFME, the Peace Corps wrapped itself in the banner of anti-colonialism while propagating policies of imperial coercion.<sup>340</sup> While the Peace Corps deployed American citizens to breed familiarity with and impart skills on the citizens of the Third World, the AFME used corporate pedagogy to teach Arab students and workers the skills needed for an Americanized economy. This subtler, persuasive approach to cultural hegemony

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<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>338</sup> Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*, 113.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

contrasted with the more direct, coercive approach of US aid programs where material relief was often conditioned on political alignment.

The US government's foreign development strategy also encouraged private investment in addition to state dominated programs. Its 1963 report to congress noted that USAID was moving away from foreign grants towards loans and committed to encouraging private sector development, echoing the AFME's logic that US companies offered the "know-how, management, and marketing skills needed to make the capital effective."<sup>341</sup> This was done through bilateral agreements between the US and host countries, the creation of development banks and cooperatives, surveys, pilot projects, and loans to US companies abroad.<sup>342</sup> Like the American Friends, successive US governments promoted the restorative power of global capitalist development, and yet programs like the Peace Corps and P.L.480 subsidized food aid to the Third World showed the desire to use state power to directly advance foreign relations.<sup>343</sup> The AFME and the US government both worked to secure private investment interests as a means of strengthening overseas economies and securing US hegemony abroad. What makes the AFME's philosophy of modernization unique is its rejection of the idea that the state was needed to do this, or that collaboration with local governments was necessary.

The British VSO worked to preserve the "spirit of imperial adventure" among young Britons while forging new post-colonial relationships.<sup>344</sup> Founded in 1958, it preceded the Peace Corps by several years. Rejecting the propagation of a technocratic development ethos, the VSO

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<sup>341</sup> "Foreign Assistance Program," 11.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> McCleary, 77-8.

<sup>344</sup> Jordanna Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* (Global, Area, and International Archive, University of California Press, 2012), 57.

sought to revitalize youth, Britons, and post-colonial citizens alike, by harnessing their power and involving them in the development process.<sup>345</sup> The integration of Third World youth in their process, and the desire to foster interpersonal and anti-imperial friendship, were shared by the AFME.<sup>346</sup> However, while the VSO tried – and failed, according to Jordanna Bailkin – to replace colonial paternalism with shared adolescence, the AFME never truly sought to connect Middle Eastern youth with young Americans in a substantial way. They were deployed as temporary ambassadors in the US, and by the late 1950s this gave way to an emphasis on sending Arab youth back home to work for American companies. Visions of interpersonal diplomacy, only ever reserved for elites in the first place, were out of vogue for the AFME by the late 1950s. The ‘technocratic juggernaut’ development path was not a problem for the AFME, embracing it by the time the VSO came into existence.

The VSO shared a corporate aspect to its development program via its 1960 apprenticeship program. Sponsored by Rolls Royce and Shell, it sought to give British workers a stake in the process of Third World development and “democratize overseas service.”<sup>347</sup> This was at odds with founder Alec Dickson’s vision of international youth revitalization, speaking to a trend shared by contemporaneous NGOs wherein industrial pragmatism was replacing idealism in development work. The VSO’s apprentice program and its later graduate program foil the AFME’s own interlacing ideas about youth, labour, and exchange in key ways. Unlike the American Friends, Dickson’s idealized model of cultural exchange was explicitly anti-elitist and eschewed the role of expertise in development.<sup>348</sup> Dickson wanted youth from the former colony and metropole to

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<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-5.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 78, 91.

help each other, with little concern for marshalling skills or tangible development; he believed transnational youth engagement was valuable given their shared social rank.<sup>349</sup> ‘Youth’ denoted potentiality and malleability for Dickson, but the graduate volunteer program of 1962, half funded with government funds, marked a concerted shift to skilled British volunteers engaged in overseas technical development.<sup>350</sup> This brought the VSO more into alignment with the Peace Corps in terms of state sanctioned technical development.

Echoing the AFME’s corporate ties on the one hand, the VSO was also increasing its state ties in the early 1960s. The UK government’s Department of Technical Cooperation, and later as the Ministry of Overseas Development, was funding more of VSO’s programs, signalling a public-private relationship and the use of government dollars to fund non-governmental projects.<sup>351</sup> While corporations were involved in some VSO programs, their interests were not at the forefront; the emphasis was state development agendas.

Founded in 1961, Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) was a nationalistic group committed to anti-imperialism in the Third World, albeit with an anti-American rather than anti-Communist worldview.<sup>352</sup> CUSO’s program experienced an overhaul that paralleled AFME’s neoliberal shift: the idealistic student volunteers of the 1960s were slowly replaced by technical experts paid formal wages overseas. These early students were also elite Canadians – hailing from Middle class, English-speaking, urban and suburban, privately-educated backgrounds.<sup>353</sup> Unlike the Peace Corps, CUSO was a private organization that sought to maintain a clear distance from

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<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>352</sup> Ryan Edwardson, "Kicking Uncle Same Out of the Peaceable Kingdom: English-Canadian 'New Nationalism' and Americanization," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 37, no.4 (2002): 138, 139.

<sup>353</sup> Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Canada’s Global Villagers: CUSO in Development, 1961-1986* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013), 28.

the Canadian state in order to bolster its anti-imperialist credentials, receiving government funding only in its second decade.

CUSO developed an increasingly free market focus by 1970s, wherein pragmatism and the career prospects of Canadian technicians took precedence over anti-imperial sentiments. Such “pragmatic idealism” foreshadowed broader domestic shifts in Western welfare states, as concerted shifts from Keynesian economic frameworks to neoliberal ones were underway by the late 1970s. The AFME’s shift, however, predates CUSO’s by roughly a decade, marking their significance among mid-twentieth century NGOs in both ideology and operations. However, CUSO was never nearly as neoliberal as the AFME.

Their deference to state sovereignty *overseas* was a key difference between the AFME and its Canadian colleague. CUSO deployed Canadian volunteers to execute the development strategies of new national governments in India and Africa. CUSO exerted influence but not in the abrupt and overbearing way that the AFME did by deploying US companies into the Arab postcolonial development process. CUSO’s assistance required Third World countries to have a “demonstrated development plan aimed at self-sufficiency and a greater social enlargement for its people in the foreseeable future,” which introduced an element of coercion given CUSO’s relative power and the culturally specific way they no doubt defined these concepts.<sup>354</sup> But their development model was nonetheless miles more collaborative, and more deferential to the economic sovereignty of new states than the AFME’s.

This should not imply that CUSO was better across the board, since in terms of rural and local development the American Friends had some much sounder opinions – in rhetoric if not

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<sup>354</sup> CUSO Information, *CUSO '69*, (Ottawa, 1969), 1.

practice. CUSO deployed Canadians – first student volunteers in the 1960s and then paid technical experts in the 1970s – to implement Third World development plans, with the latter being paid local wages by host governments.<sup>355</sup> The AFME at least included Arab students and labour in the development process, equipping them with skillsets, albeit ones imparted by and for American corporate benefactors. Nor did CUSO appear to be concerned with the distribution of development, deferring to the largely rapid, urban development plans of nationalist governments, in contrast to the AFME who at least attempted to de-center industrialization by facilitating rural skills training. The salient point was that while CUSO was forging somewhat problematic relationships with Third World government via ‘Canadian saviors’ overseas, the AFME was, by the late 1960s, barely engaging in a project of building foreign relations – rather it was working to open up the Arab world for American exploitation and control.

All four of the organizations surveyed represent a Western response to decolonization. Formal development strove to preserve spheres of cultural and economic influence in the Third World. All demonstrated that Western nationalism was the force behind pledges of anti-colonial solidarity. The AFME always portrayed anti-imperialism as fundamental to the true American identity – who they *really* were – despite straying from the path domestically and internationally. Anti-imperial overtures were mainly used as a way to secure American hegemony in a new geopolitical landscape, and ensure the Soviets lost the opportunity to sway new nations first.

The American Friends’ three contemporaries embodied a voluntarism that the US organization never claimed to possess. The American Friends collaborated with students on some cultural programs, but when it came to technical development projects they recast youth as cogs

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid.

in a machine of American corporate benevolence. The AFME approached technical uplift with deference to the skillset and wisdom of US capitalists, rather than the needs of Third World national governments. It would be through corporations – not state, citizen, or NGO – that Arab workers would be led to modernization.

While Latham's emphasizes the modernization ethos at the heart of the Peace Corp – the literature on the other NGOs fails to interrogate how they fostered a system of neo-imperial dependency between the Third World and the West. The AFME provides an explicit example of this phenomenon and the broader historiography on development in the era of decolonization must better grapple with how non-state actors both kept new states in the Western cultural orbit while siphoning economic dividends from them. This notion of dependency, wherein Western capital effectively de-develops the postcolonial world while enriching the 'former' metropolises, must be better articulated – especially in cases where it is less obvious or explicit. Comprehending how foreign capital and its private sponsors legitimized corporate power by undermining postcolonial movements like Arab nationalism is a vital part of the history of Arab-American relations.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Conclusion: What Are Friends For?**

The American Friends of the Middle East was an organization of contradictions. It spearheaded programs of interpersonal exchange between the US and the Middle East, yet only involved social elites in the process. It championed the right to self-determination for decolonizing states yet dismissed geopolitical neutrality and encouraged new states to consolidate around religion. It professed anti-imperialism while working to ensnare new nations in the West's cultural and economic orbit to modernize them. It spoke of friendship with Arab nationalism and respect for political sovereignty yet violated resource sovereignty by inviting US corporations to manage Arab development. It valorized Middle Eastern students and workers yet commodified them as cogs in an Americanized development process. It subverted US foreign policy orthodoxy while conducting American imperialism in a new form.

The American Friends were neoliberal modernizers. All their programs during the 1950s and 1960s strove to lift up the Middle East by placing it on the cultural, political, and economic path to modernity – specifically via American ideas and techniques. However, they repudiated the role of states in the modernization process, a significant departure from the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and their NGO contemporaries alike. They wanted to improve the US government's foreign policy via understanding of the Middle East, but ultimately envisioned a cultural role for the state in international affairs. It eschewed security pacts and militarization in favour of cultural alliances between Western and Islamic civilizations that could stand against Communism during the Cold War. Notably, the group's leaders envisioned a crucial role for the AFME in this process.

The AFME rejected interstate foreign aid as ineffective, another major rejection of a foreign policy staple. They advocated for trade with and private investment in Third World instead. Strong advocates of political sovereignty, the American Friends routinely disrespected the economic sovereignty of the Arab states to whom they professed friendship. The group's publications envisioned a limited role for Arab states in the national development process, entrusting this responsibility only to the technical wisdom of US overseas corporations. Resource development, vocational training, and employment policies were chided as ineffective and irrational; the AFME encouraged the idea that capital should be withheld unless Arab governments relinquished their economic sovereignty and eschewed regulatory checks on development. The AFME consistently worked to legitimize the presence of US corporate integration in the Middle East, while holding orientalist notions of political backwardness and economic incompetence. The group's message was that the Middle East was open for business – the only thing that could bring the region prosperity and security from Communism.

The AFME's tumultuous relationship with Arab nationalism was rivalled only by the US government's. The group worked to undermine pan-Arabism by exploiting gaps in Nasser's socialist framework rather than working collaboratively to strengthen it. As a vibrant postcolonial movement in the Middle East, Arab nationalism adhered to the precepts of self-determination, neutrality, anti-imperialism, regionalism and Third Worldism, and economic sovereignty. Early on, the AFME advocated that US policy should better respect these new forces. But they routinely dismissed neutrality, vilified secularism, and by the 1960s demonstrated disrespect for economic sovereignty. The idea of a Muslim-Christian alliance, though less coercive and divisive than the security pacts of the US and Britain, was an attempt to bring the Middle East into the Western orbit against the Soviet Union – anathema to the doctrine of neutrality and independence. Even

after President Harold Minor's direct pledge of friendship with Arab nationalism, neutralism was still regarded with skepticism and as merely as useful tool for future Western agendas. Any true spirit of mutual respect was absent from the AFME's foreign relations framework as they routinely sought to use the Middle East for Cold War ends.

Nasser's Arab socialist vision specifically implemented this via universal public services and economic nationalization. This meant expanded education, healthcare, agricultural cooperatives, state regulation, and control of key industries. The AFME's development agenda, most of it directly aimed at the UAR, was inimical to this vision. Whereas Egypt had preceded Bandung commitments to rebuke neocolonialism, the American Friends worked to invite US capital investment in the region – conferring leadership of the Arab development process to corporations. The Organization of Arab Students similarly rejected plans that involved foreign capital or political ties. Whereas Nasser's policies promoted a system of public enterprise, the AFME not only believed that American technocrats were the only ones qualified for Arab development but also entitled to the resources and rewards of an ostensibly *terra nova* Middle Eastern economic landscape. Educational and vocational institutes were chastised as irrational and decadent, while students and workers were commodified as cogs in a system of neoliberal corporate development. While Egypt offered public service jobs for graduates and produced a system of cooperatives for fedans, the AFME trained Arab industrial workers only for specific projects, offering them relative precarity without the accreditation or the blanket skillset they would otherwise receive via formal training.

Its relationship with Arab students most clearly demonstrated the AFME's potential for establishing collaborative, grassroots relations with the Middle East and the missed opportunity to do so. Students in the US were used as ambassadors in order to enlighten Americans about the

region, but the American Friends also hoped to modernize young Arab minds via pedagogical processes of political uplift. Student organizations were touted as ‘laboratories of working democracy’ that would mould students into liberal Western leaders. By the 1960s, the student program was aimed at commodifying students into labour for US companies in their home countries. As a manager class, certain students could both legitimize and entrench US capital in a way that was inimical to the economic independence sought by Arab nationalists.

The American Friends’ development agenda for the Middle East offered dependency – a tethering of Arab development to US capital and economic investment. Integration of Arab economies into the US corporate development nexus was only one element of this. The AFME’s function during the late 1950s and 1960s was to both facilitate capital investment in the Middle East and to legitimize the presence of American corporations there. Orientalist depictions of irrational Arab governments, valorizations of US industrial wisdom as vital for modernity, and language of uplift and security against Communism were all staples of AFME publications. The American Friends worked to manufacture consent on behalf of US capital by intellectually justifying economic modernization as it had with religious cultural modernization years earlier.

The AFME complemented the grander project of American imperialism in the Third World, albeit in a way that deviated considerably from that of the US government during the early Cold War. Its cultural exchange programs preceded the analogues of the Eisenhower administration by several years and primarily deviated with them on how they conceived of the Middle East. In its early years the AFME saw the region as essentially Islamic while eschewing pacts that rewarded Western allies and sought to contain neutral states. Neutrality was vulnerable but not dangerous to the American Friends, and Eisenhower’s security agreements caused more harm than good. The group thus championed a foreign relations model build on interpersonal

cultural alliances, which implied a reduced role for the US state and a greater one for private brokers like the AFME.

In the Kennedy era, the AFME's most salient departure with the government was its anti-Zionism. However, its most endemic departure was its repudiation of interstate development policies. There is no evidence that the AFME attempted to extend projects like the Alliance for Progress or the Peace Corps to the Middle East, preferring to conduct development on its own terms: by facilitating private corporate development. The American Friends subscribed to the broader strokes of modernization theory but emphatically disagreed that that state governments, be they US or Arab, should guide the development process. While Kennedy and Rostow engaged Latin American governments in interstate modernization agreements with the promise of US dollars, the AFME used US corporations to subvert Arab state power and sovereignty over local economies. An American neoliberal imperial project was underway in the Middle East at a time when state power was seen as vital modernization by both US officials and Arab nationalists. Private American 'friends' sought to subvert a foreign development system they saw as fundamentally ineffective, irrational, and impossible; the only path to development was through the technical wisdom of American industrialists.

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Friendship and understanding. This was the mission statement maintained by the American Friends throughout its first two decades. This thesis has argued that both themes were marshalled to implement an imperialistic American foreign policy via the private sector. Friendship was a smokescreen and understanding was selective. Each were employed to subvert regional aspirations and integrate the region into the US cultural and economic sphere of influence.

That imperialism animated Western relations with the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s may sound unsurprising. But the role of private organizations in this process has been severely under-explored, especially in the Middle East. The AFME is also instructive as a study in missed opportunities. What the American Friends could have done and chose not to do is as important to analyze as what they did.

Several AFME programs provided glimmers of collaboration and mutuality. The concept of a cooperative cultural alliance had potential; the group's mistake was contorting it into its vision for a religious, pro-Western bulwark against a Soviet sphere that many Arab states did not want to rule out cooperation with. Devolving diplomatic power from governments to people would have been a fascinating notion if the AFME had meaningfully experimented with it. Instead they worked to vest power in the hands of economic and cultural vanguards, skewed always towards Americans. In theory, the idea of demilitarized foreign relations occurring at the grassroots between the people who will be affected by international decision making is closer to what Bandung-era Third Worldists wanted for the future: international relations on equal footing, based on solidarity and a rejection of imperial power. Arguably, the maintenance of state structures left many colonial power dynamics in place and AFME's subversion of the state may have been meaningful if it did so to democratize diplomacy.

The direct use of Middle Eastern students in elements of the AFME's student exchange infrastructure also demonstrated missed potential. Amgrads, student counsellors, and young ambassadors were novel concepts marshalled for a greater project of psychological modernization and economic colonialism. Yet the concept of integrating those for whom educational programs are intended is sound. Similarly, the idea to decentre industrialization via rural tradecraft training implied, on its surface, a respect for economic democracy. Postcolonial modernization agendas

typically embraced rapid industrialization and Arab nationalist states like Egypt were no exception. Ensuring vulnerable communities were not left behind would have been a positive contribution to the Arab development process. Instead AFME skills training was for precarious, temporary work in the service of US companies and ignored the cooperative model that was being deployed for the same nation's agricultural sector. Had the AFME's goal of solidarity gone beyond political sovereignty and extended to economic sovereignty for Arab states and workers, it may have been a more compelling case study in international development and foreign relations that truly broke the mould.

The doctrine of mutually beneficial exchange between cultures was a staple of the AFME's rhetoric in the Middle East. An outright if unconscious lie though it was, it nonetheless articulated what the animating principle of foreign relations ought to be. If imperialism is rejected, it logically follows that when foreign relations are not benefiting all parties in an equitable fashion, they should be improved upon or abandoned. The American Friends did neither, because they failed to see that exporting private capital overseas continued to benefit only a single transnational class. Their corporate imperialism was thus characterized by the language of uplift, necessity, and burden; the mere conception of a better foreign relations framework was precluded by the logic of capital.

Development charities today can learn from these lessons. NGOs are inherently reactionary to issues of state neglect, filling gaps imperfectly with limited resources. Their lack of public oversight and transparency, however, means they can easily replicate power structures or create new ones, be they colonial, imperial, class, racial, or gendered. Collaboration, solidarity, mutualism, and a modicum of justice are the ideals that should guide international relations of any variety. The AFME provides some ideas for how these might be attempted, but mostly offers an instructive case study for how they have been openly and unabashedly subverted.

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