



المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات  
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Concept Note

# Eleventh Gulf Studies Forum

December 2024

## Track 1: Arab Gulf States and the Palestine Question

The Palestine question has occupied a centre stage in Arab politics since the early years of the twentieth century. As the conflict over Palestine intensified due to increased Jewish immigration in the 1930s and the rise of Arab resistance, the Palestine question began to echo more forcefully in the Arab Gulf. In 1942, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden acknowledged that his country would never be able to formulate a coherent policy in the Middle East unless the question of Palestine was resolved.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. From the Nakba to the October War (1948-1973)

The echoes of the conflict in Palestine began to reverberate in the Arab Gulf beginning in April 1936 with the protests in Jaffa against the British government's decision to approve an increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine, paving the way for the Great Palestinian Revolt. The British feared that developments in Palestine would negatively impact their presence in the Gulf. In Kuwait, a fundraising campaign was launched to support Palestine; in Bahrain, leaflets were distributed calling for the rescue of Palestine from Zionist gangs; donations were also collected in Dubai, Sharjah, and elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> The Nakba of 1948, and the rooting of the cause of Palestine in Arab consciousness as the central Arab issue, contributed to Arabs' sense of themselves as a single nation. The attempts to save Palestine in 1948, in which most of the independent Arab countries at that time (Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia) took part, were a clear and practical embodiment of the notion of an Arab national security, even though the Arabs ultimately lost the war and failed to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel.

After the Nakba of Palestine and the subsequent forced displacement of nearly 750,000 Palestinians, the Arab Gulf states, most of which were still under British protection, began to attract large Palestinian communities, whose social, political, economic, and developmental role soon became apparent. Numerous educated and experienced Palestinian elites headed to these Gulf countries, especially Kuwait, in search of work, and they played a prominent role in developing education, media, and government services at a time when these countries were preparing to launch a major development and modernization process, which accelerated when oil revenues began flowing into the Gulf states. The Palestinian community also played a major role in shaping Gulf public opinion on the Palestinian issue.<sup>3</sup>

During the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt in 1956, Gulf involvement in the Arab conflict with Israel became more prominent. Saudi Arabia joined the rest of the Arab world in supporting Egypt,

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<sup>1</sup> Rosemarie Said Zahlan, *Palestine and the Gulf States: The Presence at the Table*, Muhammad Shia & Umar Said al-Ayyubi (trans.) (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2011), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed al-Rumaihi, "Factors of Social and Economic Development in the Gulf in the Eighties," in: Rashid Khalidi et al. (eds.), *Palestine and the Gulf* (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1982), p. 97.

providing financial aid, cutting diplomatic ties with France and Britain, to whom they also cut off oil supplies. The subsequent emergence of the “Arab Cold War” between Egypt and Saudi Arabia and Saudi Arabia’s consent to the Eisenhower Doctrine<sup>4</sup> made no dent in these countries’ position on the Palestine question, and the situation remained unchanged until the June 1967 War.<sup>5</sup>

The 1967 war marked a watershed development in contemporary Arab history wherein Israel seized and occupied during the war the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, East Jerusalem, Sinai, and the Golan Heights. This conundrum overshadowed the original problem, which was the establishment of the State of Israel and its occupation of 78 percent of the area of historic Palestine in 1948. At the Arab Summit held in Khartoum in August 1967, Saudi Arabia, Libya, and Kuwait established the “Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development” to support Arab countries that had lost their lands in the war with Israel. During the summit, all Arab countries pledged not to make peace with Israel, not to negotiate with it, and not to recognize it.

The October War of 1973 saw direct Gulf involvement in the Arab war effort against Israel. Saudi Arabia sent forces to support the Syrian front, and Kuwait sent forces to both the Syrian and the Egyptian fronts. On 17 October, Kuwait convened a meeting of the Arab oil-exporting countries, which included all the Gulf states with the exception of the Sultanate of Oman. Those who attended the meeting agreed to reduce oil production; Saudi Arabia and Kuwait announced that they would reduce their oil production by 10 percent, and Kuwait announced that it would halt all of its oil exports to the United States.<sup>6</sup> This decision came in response to the air bridge that the United States had established between itself and Israel beginning on 14 October, while there was a notable increase in the volume of donations by the Arab Gulf states to the Palestine Liberation Organization, which the Arabs recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people at the Eighth Arab Summit in Rabat in 1974.

## 2. Settlement Processes and the Marginalization of the Palestinian Question (1977-2023)

In November 1977, Egyptian President Mohamed Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem. This was followed by the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978, which established a separate peace between Egypt and Israel apart from any solution to the Palestinian issue. The following year saw the fall of the Shah’s regime, and Ayatollah Khomeini announced the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which further complicated the situation in the Arab Mashreq. The new government in Tehran announced its intention to export the revolution and bring down Western-allied regimes. With support and assistance from the Arab Gulf states, Iraq subsequently declared war on Iran. The

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<sup>4</sup> This was a policy announced by President Dwight D Eisenhower in January 1957, aiming to provide financial and military assistance to Arab countries wanting to resist communism.

<sup>5</sup> Zahlan, pp. 63 - 64.

<sup>6</sup> Ignoring the threat to Western economic interests, President Richard Nixon demanded on 19 October that Congress approve \$2.2 billion in military aid to Israel. Two days later, Saudi Arabia issued another statement announcing that it had decided to halt oil exports to the United States due to its increased military support for Israel. Ibid., pp. 102 - 103.

war lasted eight years, decimating the capabilities of both countries and relegating the Palestine questions to the margins. The marginalization of the Palestinian issue, the PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon in 1982, and the shift of the centre of gravity within the Palestinian national movement to the occupied territories were among the drivers of the first Palestinian Intifada.

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 was a turning point in contemporary Arab history which divided the Arab world into two camps, one opposing Iraq and the other supporting it. After Iraq's defeat in the war to liberate Kuwait, the PLO was isolated in the Gulf because its head, Yasser Arafat, supported Saddam Hussein in the war.

Given the PLO's isolation, its loss of an arena for confrontation in Lebanon in 1982, the collapse of the socialist camp and the exhaustion of the First Intifada five years after its outbreak, the PLO had no choice but to accept the proposals by the United States after the Gulf War at the Madrid Conference (1991). It was this process that led to the Oslo Accords in September 1993, and to the normalization of relations between Israel and many Arab and Islamic states in Asia and Africa that had heretofore supported the struggle of the Palestinian people. However, Israel's failure to adhere to its obligations and its attempt to impose its vision of a permanent solution at Camp David in 2000 led to the outbreak of the Second Palestinian Intifada (the al-Aqsa Intifada).

The events of 11 September 2001 and the United States' declaration of what was termed the "War on Terror" impacted the Gulf states' attitudes toward many issues in the region, including the Palestinian issue. The Arab Peace Initiative proposed in 2002 by Prince Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, Crown Prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, was adopted by the Council of the League of Arab States at its fourteenth regular session in Beirut. This initiative proposed the possibility of establishing normal and direct relations with Israel if it withdrew from the Arab territories occupied in 1967 and granted the Palestinian people their legitimate rights.

In 2005, Israel's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza was intended to block the road map that had been announced by US President George W Bush to resolve the Palestine question. The following year, the first Palestinian legislative elections in the West Bank and Gaza, were won by the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas. In 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip after a conflict with the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), prompting Israel to impose a siege on the Gaza Strip and further perpetuate the Palestinian division between the West Bank and Gaza. In the same year, the Bush (Jr) Administration convened the Annapolis Peace Conference; however, Israel not only thwarted the conference's decisions but, as the Bush Administration was handing over power to the new US Administration in December 2008-January 2009, launched a military assault on the Gaza Strip. In response, Qatar sought to hold an Arab summit on Gaza in Doha to formulate a position on the latest Israeli aggression. However, the boycott of the summit by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states revealed deep divisions among the Arab Gulf states over the Palestinian issue. These divisions began to crystallize particularly after the Israeli war on Lebanon in July 2006, for which Saudi Arabia held the Lebanese resistance responsible.

During the Arab Spring revolutions of 2011, attempts to return the Palestine question to the centre of regional and international attention met with little success, despite that Israel launched more than one assault on Gaza in that decade (2012, 2014, and 2019). When Donald Trump came to power in 2017, there were escalated attempts to liquidate the Palestine question; in 2018, the US Embassy was moved to Jerusalem, which was recognized as the unified capital of the State of Israel in defiance of international law, and in January 2020, what became known in the media as the “Deal of the Century” was announced, after which Arab regimes rushed to normalize relations with Israel. On 15 September 2020, representatives of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain went to the White House to sign peace agreements with Israel dubbed “the Abraham Accords”, while the Al-Aqsa Flood operation and the war of extermination Israel has launched since then have had no effect on this ongoing normalization process.

Given the importance and current relevance of the topic, Arab Gulf states’ relationship to the Palestinian issue will be one of the two discussion themes at the Eleventh Gulf Studies Forum, which is scheduled to be held in December 2024. The Forum invites researchers of all backgrounds interested in this topic to present peer-reviewed research papers addressing the aforementioned ideas or other ideas of relevance to the topic within the framework of the following main issues:

- Gulf states’ positions, and their development, on the Palestine question.
- Relations among Gulf States and their impact on the Palestine question.
- Gulf states’ relations with the Palestinian leadership, the national movement, and its representative bodies.
- Justifications and reasons for Gulf-Israeli normalization.
- The US factor in Gulf-Israeli relations.
- The implications of Gulf-Israeli normalization for the future of the Palestine question.
- Gulf security and the Palestine question.
- Popular positions in Gulf countries on the Palestine question.

## **Track 2: The Gulf City as a Structure and Social Agent**

In the last decade or so, the cities of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula have been the subject of numerous studies, some more general in nature, and others that deal with specific cities. This interest is undoubtedly linked to the fact that several cities in the region have gained broad international attention due to the rapid growth in their architecture and urban planning, rendering them global points of attraction. This happened at a time when major historical metropolises of the Arab Mashreq have been suffering genuine crises in relation to planning, demographics, and policies.

Research interest in Gulf cities is due not only to their growth and global rise, but also to the prevailing sense that Gulf cities have formed in the context of the rentier Gulf state's reliance on consumption and importation, and that their developments have aimed primarily to attract the global flow of goods and capital. These cities have therefore drawn largely from globalization and the importation of architectural and urban styles, which means that they lack an internal source of permanence.<sup>7</sup>

Most research on Gulf cities has been concentrated in the fields of architecture and urban studies (the latter of which focuses on sustainability), and to a lesser extent in history, sociology, and cultural studies, with very little in political science.<sup>8</sup> There is a clear trend in some of these studies to “de-exceptionalize” the cities of the region, that is, to test notions that see them as following economic, political, and cultural trajectories common to other world metropolises. This trend is endorsed by the editors of the book, *The New Arab Urban: Cities of Wealth, Ambition, and Distress* (2019), who hold, nevertheless, that there is much in the experience of these cities to learn and draw inspiration from to enrich the global theoretical literature on cities.<sup>9</sup> By this logic, the study of Gulf cities is a pursuit of vital global importance.

## 1. The Effectiveness of the Gulf City: Internal Context, Globalism, and Globalization

One of the main factors contributing to the global rise of Gulf cities has been their openness to modernity and globalization, and the states' reliance on Western architects and planners. However, this tendency has created a fundamental knowledge gap, or what some researchers see as contradictions between the cities' basic design, which was led by these architects, and the social, political, and cultural environment of Gulf cities.<sup>10</sup> In this context, the gap is associated with the architects' lack of knowledge of the region's traditional architectural and urban heritage, as a result of which the present is no longer continuous with the past. It may also be attributed to architects' and planners' failure to be attentive to what the current architectural and urban structure will mean for the future and for future generations of Gulf citizens.<sup>11</sup>

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7 Some academics argue that contemporary Gulf city planning lacks elements of sustainability. See: Ali A. Alraouf, “Contemporary Gulf Cities' Urbanism: The Dilemma of Unsustainable Developments and Energy Conservation,” in: Giacomo Luciani & Rabia Ferroukhi (eds.), *The Political Economy of Energy Reform: The Clean Energy Fossil Fuel Balance in The Gulf States* (Berlin/London: Gerlach Press, 2014), pp. 183 - 204.

8 See, for example: Yasser Elsheshtawy, *Dubai: Behind an Urban Spectacle* (London: Routledge, 2009); Nelida Fuccaro, *Histories of City and State in the Persian Gulf: Manama since 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Mehran Kamrava (ed.), *Gateways to the World: Port Cities in the Persian Gulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Ahmed Kanna, *Dubai: The City as Corporation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Pascal Menoret, *Joyriding in Riyadh: Oil, Urbanism, and Road Revolt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Farah Al-Nakib, *Kuwait Transformed: A History of Oil and Urban Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Florian Wiedmann & Ashraf M. Salama, *Demystifying Doha: On Architecture and Urbanism in an Emerging City* (London: Routledge, 2013). For traditional references that preceded contemporary literature, see: Hassan Al-Khayyat, *Al-Madīna al-ʿArabiyya al-Khalījīyya* [The Arab Gulf City] (Doha: Center for Documentation and Humanitarian Studies, Qatar University, 1988).

9 Harvey Molotch & Davide Ponzini, “Introduction: Learning from Gulf Cities,” in: Harvey Molotch & Davide Ponzini (eds.), *The New Arab Urban: Cities of Wealth, Ambition, and Distress* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), pp. 2 - 4.

10 Esmat Zaidan & Ammar Abulibdeh, “Master Planning and the Evolving Urban Model in the Gulf Cities: Principles, Policies, and Practices for the Transition to Sustainable Urbanism,” *Planning Practice & Research*, vol. 36, no. 2 (2021), pp. 193 - 215.

11 Wiedmann & Salama, p. 1.

This analytical trend generally refers to what happened to Dubai after the 2008 global financial crisis, when it was described as a “bubble”, that is, a temporary phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> However, Dubai quickly recovered from the setback, which leaves us with as a research problem worthy of special attention through which hasty judgments needs to be avoided.

The global nature of the Gulf city lies in its existence at the heart of dualities that have controlled the social dynamics in the region, most prominently its place in opposition to the desert, the other main end in these dualities. Some may argue that the Gulf region has never had major metropolises in the same manner as in the Arab Levant, and that this lack of urban experience with historical metropolises is precisely what has made the Gulf city so open to Western models.<sup>13</sup> However, contrary to this simplistic perception, Gulf cities have played a fundamental role in the region’s social development by embracing a lifestyle different from that of the desert, with most being coastal cities with connection to the sea rather than to the desert and, by extension, to the particular cultural, economic, and social ties. Thus, as sociological formations, Gulf cities have been a positive factor in development, and not merely a theatre in which this development takes place.

No one can claim that all the cities of the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula reflect a global character. While this is true of the region’s major cities, some of which are home to large populations, other cities (some of which are significant in the region’s history) still adheres to the traditional style, or, at least, have not taken on a global character. These cities are also undoubtedly worthy of study and attention.

At the same time, Gulf cities that have taken on a global character have begun to resemble other global cities, especially in Asia (Malaysia and Singapore, for example) in architectural and urban structures. In this global resemblance, some Gulf cities differ from cities in the same Gulf region that still experience apparent historical or cultural continuity with the past. This matter is worthy of attention when studying Gulf cities from a contextual and comparative perspective. What are the similarities and differences among Gulf cities, and the similarities and differences between them and other cities of the world? Is this similarity or difference related to the “globalization” of urban planning, projects for integration into the global economy and its urban and architectural impacts, or histories that differ demographically, geographically, culturally, politically, and economically?

## 2. The Gulf City as a Feature of the Nation State

With the emergence of the modern state, capitals and other cities have played a fundamental role in nation formation. Not only have they been home to major human concentrations in the region,<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Yasser Elsheshtawy, “Little Space, Big Space: Everyday Urbanism in Dubai,” *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 1 (Fall/ Winter 2010), pp. 53 - 74.

<sup>13</sup> Al-Khayyat, pp. 321 - 324.

<sup>14</sup> For example, Weidmann and Salama note that Doha’s population more than tripled in less than 15 years, from 400,000 in the late 1990s to nearly 1.7 million in 2013. See Wiedmann & Salama, *Demystifying Doha*, p. xxii.

but this fact is itself a result of their being the seat of central authority, the central bureaucratic apparatus, and the modern economy. The emergence of the modern state in the region coincided with the discovery of oil there in the 1930s, which had a radical impact on the city. Within a few decades, the region witnessed a historic social shift, from tribal societies and coastal trade to cities whose economies were integrated into global networks. At the same time, tribalism and coastal affiliation continue to enjoy importance because they are a type of symbolic capital, which continues to leave its mark on cities' construction and planning. Hence, Gulf cities have become major magnets for individuals, ideas, goods and commodities, services, academic institutions, and social development both for their citizens and for immigrants, in addition to their openness to the world in a way that has enabled them to outdo cities with long histories in the region.

Although the centrality of cities as demographic, economic, political, and development centres of gravity is a phenomenon that encompasses the entire Levant, it manifests much more forcibly in the Gulf capitals, which have acquired political and socio-political value, and have thus become the agent which is reshapes the entire society.

Our intention here is not to discuss the dynamics of social development in the Gulf, but, rather, the transformation of the city into a framework of affiliation and an imaginative element which led to what might be termed "the emergence of an urban awareness".

Similarly, the rise and rapid growth of a number of Gulf cities into global symbols cannot be separated from the national Gulf state's quest to create a national brand, a quest in which major cities and capitals have played a significant role. Regardless of the content of this brand, the phenomenon of Gulf cities cannot be understood solely as a manifestation of globalization. Nor is it, in the view of some, merely a post-oil era survival strategy which is pursued by creating a new economic environment and a sustainable life of affluence and prosperity.<sup>15</sup> Rather, the Gulf city is part and parcel of the dynamics of the national state and its project to create a national brand and symbolic signs (semiotics) of its own. In this, Gulf cities resembled soft power and cultural diplomacy projects, such as the hosting of major international events, the construction of museums, and record-breaking landmarks. All this soft power is embraced by cities. Here, it should be pointed out that the hosting of major world events has acted definitively to develop Gulf cities and their urban infrastructure. Therefore, these cities seemed to live in a never-ending state of "transition", a permanent workshop, which reflects the fact that they are constantly looking to a different future.

When Gulf cities became global points of attraction, they became incubators, sources, and bridges for a worldwide movement which includes the flow of information, capital, symbols, elements of power, and demographics. As a result, the project of the national state in the Gulf to "manufacture" some of its cities and export them to the world as national brands has led to these cities becoming transnational points.

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<sup>15</sup> Steffen Wippel et al., *Under Construction: Logics of Urbanism in the Gulf Region* (London: Routledge, 2016).



Thus, the term “World Cities” coined by urban planning theorists John Friedmann and Goetz Wolff applies specifically to cities of the Gulf.<sup>16</sup> These “World cities” also embrace the influx of foreign labour and expertise, which renders them world cities in their demographic structure as well. Hence, this concept note argues that the study of Gulf cities can help to develop theoretical discussions on the experience of urban diversity and the various ways of managing it.

Following the emergence of the Gulf’s oil industry and the financial and economic boom which ensued, Gulf cities became an incubator for a broad migration movement which continued to the point where citizens became the demographic minority of the population in most Gulf countries. These dynamics led to the development of multicultural societies which have impacted the structure of Gulf cities just as, prior to this, the traditional social structure had impacted the makeup and distribution of neighbourhoods and the like.

The Eleventh Gulf Studies Forum seeks to highlight the importance of Gulf cities for global research, and to open up a wider space for Gulf cities in the Gulf Studies research agenda. In other words, this track of the Gulf Studies Forum is not limited to the importance of Gulf cities for the field of urban studies worldwide; nor does it simply situate the urban landscape of Gulf cities within the political, cultural, social, and economic contexts which have shaped urbanization in the region, but it also looks at the importance of the city for the field of Gulf Studies generally, and what it means in this area.

This paper proposes discussing the research problems associated with the Gulf city in relation to the following themes:

- Traditional Gulf cities in the age of modernization.
- The Gulf city as a framework of affiliation.
- The Gulf city and national construction.
- The Gulf city as an incubator of aspirations for modernization.
- The Gulf city and the rentier state.
- The Gulf city between Eastern and European models.
- The Gulf city and globalization.
- The original and the imported in the makeup of the Gulf city and reconciling the two.
- The Gulf city, immigrant and labour communities, and multiculturalism.
- The city as a framework for the national brand in Gulf countries.
- Gulf cities as a transnational phenomenon.
- Urban planning for Gulf cities: a critical review.

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<sup>16</sup> John Friedmann & Goetz Wolff, “World City Formation: An Agenda for Research and Action,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1982), pp. 309 - 344.

- Urbanization between inland and coastal cities.
- The Gulf city and rapid architectural and urban transformations.
- Land at the expense of the sea: filling in the sea and urban expansion.
- Gulf city architecture: a critical review.
- The Gulf city as a global phenomenon.
- Smart cities and specialized cities in Gulf countries.
- Organizing major cultural and sports events and its impacts on the Gulf city.
- Similarities and differences among cities in the Gulf region and the Arabian Peninsula.
- The distinctiveness of Gulf cities in the Arab world.

## Participation Guidelines

- The Gulf Studies Forum invites academics and researchers to participate in the Forum by submitting a research paper on one of the two aforementioned topics.
- The Academic Committee will receive abstracts of the proposed research papers (approximately 350 words). Each abstract should explain the paper's basic plan, including the problem the research intends to address, a quick inventory of the available literature of relevance, the research hypothesis and its basic thesis, its methodology, and references. Moreover, each abstract must be received by no later than Sunday, 21 April 2024. Each abstract should be sent with a current CV which includes the titles of papers completed by the researcher in fields of relevance to the topic of the forum (if any). Abstracts, CVs, and any other correspondence should be addressed to: [gulf.forum@dohainstitute.org](mailto:gulf.forum@dohainstitute.org)
- The Academic Committee will inform researchers of the acceptance or rejection of their proposals by no later than Monday, 20 May 2024.
- The Academic Committee must receive completed research papers (approximately 5,000-7,000 words, including footnotes and references) whose abstracts it has approved, subject to peer review, no later than Monday, 2 September 2024. Papers must adhere in both form and substance to the Center's approved research specifications.
- The Academic Committee's approval of a proposal does not mean automatic approval of the completed research paper's presentation at the Forum. The Forum Academic Committee will inform each researcher of its decision, and may ask the researcher to act on suggestions for improving the quality of the research, or to make amendments to it.
- The Forum will cover the costs of transportation and accommodation. However, it will not grant compensation for any research paper presented, and all research shall be deemed the intellectual property of the Forum.

- Researchers may write their papers in Arabic or English.

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### Arabic

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