Domestic Politics as an Explanation for Voluntary Union:
The Missing Case of the United Arab Republic

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Abstract

What are the causes of voluntary union in world politics? In other words, why would two states decide to freely surrender their individual autonomy and merge into one state? In a sweeping new study that emanates from the realist tradition, Joseph Parent claims to have examined all the relevant historical cases and found that the unmistakable cause of voluntary union between two states is "optimally intense, indefinite, and symmetrically shared" external security threats. However, this paper will demonstrate that Parent has mistakenly omitted valid historical cases of voluntary unions from his sample and, in the process, biased his findings. By examining one of these wrongly excluded cases in-depth, that of the United Arab Republic between Egypt and Syria, this paper will demonstrate that internal security threats and personal political incentives can also be causes of voluntary union.

Keywords

Arab Nationalism; Nasser; Political Integration; Realism; United Arab Republic; Voluntary Union

Introduction

In his book, *Uniting States*, Joseph Parent attempts to explain what causes *voluntary* political union in world politics. In other words, why would two states decide to freely surrender their individual autonomy and merge into one? His central argument, emanating from the realist tradition, is that two states unify if they face "optimally intense, indefinite, and symmetrically shared" *external* security threats from third-party states (Parent, 2011: 8). While Parent's argument may fully explain why some voluntary unions occur, this paper will challenge it in two principal ways by examining a single case in-depth – that of the United Arab Republic, a short-lived union between Egypt and Syria that lasted from 1958 to 1961.

Though the results from a single case study are not as generalizable as those from a large-N analysis and cannot disprove a probabilistic argument, one case can disprove a deterministic argument simply by showing a single situation where the argument does not hold (Rogowski, 2010: 89-97). Parent makes two deterministic arguments that I will argue the case of the UAR disproves. The first one is definitional. In defining voluntary union, he asserts that "the first [factor that makes a union less voluntary] is the power disparity between unifying states. When a large state annexes a small state, the outcome *cannot* be called voluntary" because coercion undoubtedly must have been at play (Parent, 2011: 5; emphasis added). As a result of this assumption, Parent dismisses several potential cases from his analysis, which he claims include the entire "universe of cases".[13] However, whether coercion is at play in a union is an empirical question that cannot be determined *a priori* (Coggins, 2013: 352). Though Parent dismisses the UAR as a union "between unequals" (Parent, 2011: 5), it was actually the weaker state, Syria, that aggressively sought union with the stronger state, Egypt. Therefore, even though it is only one case, an analysis of the UAR will demonstrate that Parent's restrictive definition of voluntary union is incorrect.

The second deterministic argument that Parent makes is that "…*only* security deficiencies causes states to unify. Unification is extreme balancing behavior *against other states*" (Parent, 2011: 23; emphasis added). Nevertheless, the case of the UAR will demonstrate that, in addition to external security threats, *internal* security threats to Syria, along with the personal political incentives of certain Egyptian and Syrian elites, were also critical to the formation of the UAR. Accordingly, Parent's argument that only external security threats can spur voluntary political union is also incorrect.

To support these claims, the paper will be organized as follows. First, it will consider Parent's arguments in more detail and foreshadow how the case of the UAR supports and contradicts his framework. Second, it will examine in-depth the conditions leading to the formation of the UAR. Third, it will conclude by explaining the implications of the UAR for Parent's arguments.

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[13] Parent examines the unions of the United States, Switzerland, Sweden and Norway, and Gran Colombia in his book.

Parent's Argument

Summary

Parent argues that there are at least three necessary conditions that must be present for two states to unify: (i) they must face optimally intense *external* security threats that are indefinite and symmetrically shared; (ii) there must be some crisis that highlights the need for union in order to address security concerns; and (iii) elites must use the tools at their disposal to persuade the necessary audiences that union is necessary.

Optimally intense external security threats are those that are severe enough to warrant the extreme step of union, but not so overwhelming that union fails to alleviate the security threat in any meaningful sense (Parent, 2011: 9-10). Egypt and Syria did face significant external security threats in the form of Israel, Iraq, the US, the USSR, the UK, France, etc., and forming the UAR did help deter these threats to some extent. Parent also argues that threats must be of long duration to spur union, as only threats that extend indefinitely will be powerful enough to motivate states to forsake their autonomy (Parent, 2011: 10-11). Since the US, USSR, UK, and France were not going anywhere, the threats that Egypt and Syria faced did seem to be long-term. Finally, Parent contends that states will not merge unless they are symmetrically (i.e., about equally) vulnerable to these security threats, as asymmetric vulnerability might make the less vulnerable state unenthusiastic about union (Parent, 2011: 11). However, this argument does not hold for the UAR. Even though Syria had its own unique internal threats and was more vulnerable to external threats than Egypt, union still occurred. Parent's mistake is a function of how he defines voluntary union, as by excluding any cases "between unequals," he biases his sample towards finding unions between states that are equally vulnerable to external threats. Nevertheless, the fact that Egypt was less vulnerable than Syria did make Egypt more tepid towards union and allowed Egypt to drive a harder bargain when it came to the terms of forming the UAR.

Parent's second necessary condition for union is that there must be some sort of crisis that highlights the need for union to address security deficiencies (Parent, 2011: 8, 12). Without this, citizens will not be convinced that a measure as extreme as union is necessary. This argument fits the case of the UAR since the Syrian Crisis of 1957 was the spark that precipitated its creation.

Parent's last condition for union is that elites must use the tools at their disposal to persuade critical audiences that union is necessary (Parent, 2011: 13-14). One important tool is the media, and it is true that the Egyptians used propaganda to convince the masses that union was necessary and desirable. A second tool is the military, and specific Syrian elites effectively utilized the military to pressure Egypt into accepting union. Finally, political procedures can be an important factor, and

certain Syrian elites undoubtedly manipulated who sat at the bargaining table in order to make union more likely. Therefore, this aspect of Parent's argument fits well with the case of the UAR.

Finally, Parent argues that realism explains voluntary union better than other major international relations paradigms. While Parent's realist theory argues that it is security threats that drive union, liberals have argued in favor of economics (Haas, 1964; 1968; Rodrik, 2000), and constructivists in favor of ideas (Adler and Barnett, 1998). Although this paper disagrees with Parent about what kinds of security threats can lead to union, it agrees with him that realism, broadly defined, does a better job than the alternative theories of explaining the formation of the UAR. Liberalism does not explain the formation of the UAR, as economics played little to no role in the merging of Egypt and Syria. On the other hand, constructivism does help explain the creation of the UAR, as ideas about Arab unity and nationalism certainly played a role in motivating political leaders to seek union and the public to accept it. Nevertheless, what drove the creation of the UAR was security threats and the personal political incentives of Egyptian and Syrian politicians. Though ideas about Arab unity were enough to convince Egypt and Syria to consider union on several occasions, union was explicitly rejected until security threats became particularly salient (Palmer, 1966: 50). Thus, it was realist-related variables like material threats and power that were the most important factors precipitating union.

Theoretical Criticisms

This paper makes two central criticisms of Parent's argument. The first is that Parent defines voluntary union too narrowly. Just because there is a power disparity between states does not automatically make a union involuntary. The union between Egypt and Syria was voluntary given that it was the weaker state (Syria) that pushed for union and the publics of both states overwhelmingly approved of it. The second main criticism this paper makes of Parent's argument is that he inconsistently applies (Coggins, 2013: 352) the fundamental neorealist assumption that states are unitary actors, which essentially means that domestic politics is unimportant (Waltz, 1979). For example, Parent allows for domestic politics as an explanation for when unions form (after a crisis), how they form (by elite persuasion), and why they collapse (if internal threats eclipse external threats) (Parent, 2011: 10-12, 15, 27). However, when theorizing about why states unify, he appears to assume that states are unitary actors that only face external security threats. Therefore, while Parent allows for domestic politics to creep into his analysis, he does not consider it as an explanation for his central question of why states would agree to voluntarily unify. This paper argues that Parent did not go far enough in relaxing neorealist assumptions and considering the importance of factors at the state level of analysis. Domestic politics was critically important in motivating union between Egypt and Syria, as two of the major reasons for the formation of the UAR were (1) to protect Syria from

internal security threats, namely communism; and (2) to further the political power of key Syrian and Egyptian elites. Consequently, this paper will demonstrate the limitations of strictly adhering to neorealist assumptions.

The UAR: A Story of External Threats, Internal Threats, & Elite Incentives

Methodology

It is precisely because Parent makes such unconditional arguments that a single case study can disprove his claims and significantly contribute to our understanding of voluntary union. Parent argues that unions between unequal states "cannot be considered voluntary" and that "only" external threats cause states to unify (Parent, 2011: 5, 23). Neither argument holds in the case of the UAR, which establishes that unions between unequal states can indeed be considered voluntary, and that there are other causes of voluntary union besides external security threats.

Background on Egypt: The Rise of Nasser

Before discussing the years immediately preceding the formation of the UAR, it is important to note some background information that will help structure the following sections. Egypt became a British Protectorate in 1882 and only received formal independence in 1922. The UK nevertheless continued to maintain significant influence over Egypt afterwards. It is in this context that Gamal Abdel Nasser came to power in 1954, after helping overthrow the British-backed Egyptian King Farouk (Yapp, 1991: 211-212). Nasser was first and foremost an Egyptian nationalist that aspired to free Egypt from British oppression and establish Egypt as a hegemon in the Arab world (Podeh, 1999: 28). Later, Nasser also became an aggressive supporter of Arab nationalism: the idea that Arabs in different states are linked and should unite based on their common language, culture, and (in most cases) religion in order to fend off foreign threats, especially Western imperialism and Israel (Hopwood, 1988: 79). Nasser, of course, favored Arab unity under his leadership. To this end, his two major doctrines were: (i) non-alignment with the superpowers is the best guarantee of independence; and (ii) Arab states should rely on other Arab states for their defense (Seale, 1965: 199). Given that Egypt was the strongest Middle Eastern Arab state, these doctrines were somewhat self-serving and led to conflict with other Arab states that did not want to depend on Egypt (Hopwood, 1988: 49). Foremost among them was Iraq.

Background on Syria: Domestic Instability & The Ba'ath Party

Two key points are important regarding Syria. First, besides external threats, Syria also faced significant internal threats in the form of domestic instability: the country had three military coups in 1949 and one in 1954 (Yapp, 1991: 99-101).

Second, a critically important political group within Syria for the formation of the UAR was the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, formally founded in 1946 and a minority member of the governing coalition in 1956 (Hopwood, 1988: 38). The goals of the Ba'ath Party were to achieve socialism, a unified Arab state, and independence from imperial influence, (Seale, 1965: 153). Therefore, both the Ba'ath and Nasser shared a passion for Arab nationalism, which demonstrates the importance of ideas in fostering union.

The Baghdad Pact: A Battle Between Egypt & Iraq with Syria in the Middle

On February 24, 1955, Iraq joined the Baghdad Pact or Central Treaty Organization, a military alliance between Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the UK. This signaled Iraq's alignment with the West and pledged the UK to defend Iraq if it were attacked and to provide them with military aid (Khadduri, 1960: 348-349). Iraq's signing of the Pact illustrates the contrasting visions for the Middle East held by Nasser and Iraq's Prime Minister, Nuri al-Sa'id. Sa'id was more supportive of relations with the West because he believed that the Soviet expansionist threat was substantial and that Arab armies were too weak to deter it (Seale, 1965: 199). Furthermore, Sa'id believed that forsaking Western aid would empower Egypt as the hegemon of the Middle East, thereby disadvantaging Iraq (Seale, 1965: 200). Alternatively, Nasser bitterly opposed the Baghdad Pact because he was against significant Western influence in the Middle East on principle and believed the Pact threatened Egypt's regional position by isolating it and enabling Iraq (Jankowski, 2002: 59).

The result of Egypt and Iraq's specific feud over the Baghdad Pact and general struggle for influence in the Middle East was attempts by both sides to destabilize and depose the other. Egypt waged a scathing propaganda campaign on their Voice of the Arabs radio station that criticized Sa'id for his "betrayal of Arabism" (Hopwood, 1991: 43) and his acceptance of "…an alliance that will destroy Iraq's aspirations of freedom, Palestine's hope of independence, and the Arabs' hopes of unity" (Jankowski, 2002: 72). Iraq also utilized its own propaganda radio station, the Voice of Free Iraq, to call for rebellion in Egypt (Jankowski, 2002: 73). Moreover, both parties provided financial support to opposition groups with the hope of overthrowing the other (Jankowski, 2002: 73). Consequently, Iraq was a serious external threat to Egypt.

The fight over the Baghdad Pact between Egypt and Iraq also extended to Syria, as Iraq wanted them to join as well, while Egypt strongly opposed such a move (Izzeddin, 1981: 303). Iraq had previously aspired to annex Syria in the so-called "Fertile Crescent Plan," which would have

strengthened Iraq's regional position at the expense of Egypt's (Pearson, 2007: 46). To this end, Iraq had a hand in the Syrian coups of 1949 and 1954, as well as plans for additional coups that never materialized and military invasion plans that were never approved (Seale, 1965: 266-280). None of these schemes ever led to union, and Syria ultimately decided not to join the Baghdad Pact because it was very unpopular with the Arab masses (Jaber, 1966: 37-39). Nonetheless, given Iraqi designs on Syria, which were also shared by Jordan, Syria faced significant external security threats during this time (Anderson: 1995: 23-24).

The Suez Crisis & Nasser's Skyrocketing Popularity

Standing up to perceived Western imperialism with the Baghdad Pact improved Nasser's standing in the Arab world, and two additional events in 1955 furthered this trend. The first was the Bandung Conference in Indonesia in April, which was attended by 29 Asian and African states, many of which were newly independent. At the conference, Nasser advocated for the end of colonialism, including the right of Algeria to gain its independence from France, championed the Palestinian cause, and became a leader in the non-aligned movement (Izzeddin, 1981: 200-202). Although Nasser's support for the non-aligned movement angered the West, and his support for Algerian independence infuriated the French, it increased his prestige among Arabs (Hopwood, 1991: 46). A second event occurred in September, when Nasser bought arms from the USSR through Czechoslovakia, bypassing the West.

Western anger towards Nasser only increased in early 1956. In March, Jordan, which had a treaty linking it to the UK, ordered General John Glubb and other British officers to leave the country (Jaber, 1966: 42). Since the UK mistakenly thought that the Egyptians had a direct hand in removing Glubb, their frustration with Nasser expanded even further (Lucas, 1991: 94-95). In May, Egypt formally recognized communist China, which was yet another black mark on Nasser's record (Izzeddin, 1981: 156). Britain and France only needed one more antagonistic act by Nasser to push them over the edge.

The Suez Canal, occupied by the UK since 1882, was a clear symbol of external political domination and economic exploitation. Principally for this reason, Nasser announced on July 26, 1956, that Egypt would be nationalizing the Canal. This was immensely popular with the Arab masses in general, and after this announcement there was a rally in Syria with over 100,000 people celebrating Nasser's decision (Podeh, 1999: 33). Even Iraq had to *publicly* support and congratulate Nasser because his actions were so popular that opposing them risked revolution (Jankowski, 2002: 83). In private, however, Iraqi leaders condemned Nasser's actions and urged the UK to overthrow him (Jankowski, 2002: 84). For example, Sa'id told UK Prime Minister Anthony Eden that "you have only one course of action open and that is to hit, hit now, and hit hard" (Lucas, 1991: 41).

Eden thus decided that Nasser needed to go (Jankowski, 2002: 84). France also saw this as an opportunity to remove Nasser as punishment for his support of Algerian nationalists, as did Israel, who was concerned about Egypt's arms buildup with the Czechoslovakia deal (Hopwood, 1991: 46, 52). Consequently, the UK, France, and Israel colluded to invade Egypt, overthrow Nasser, and re-occupy the Suez Canal. This plan was known as the Protocol of Sèvres.

On October 29, Israel invaded Egypt and the UK and France followed on November 5 (Hopwood, 1991: 53). Egypt was outmatched militarily and only saved when the US, USSR, and United Nations demanded that the three aggressors end their invasion and subjected them to intense pressure (Hopwood, 1991: 55). Nasser consequently suffered a relatively small military defeat, but a massive political victory, as he had stood up to Western imperial aggression and survived an attack on three fronts (Mansfield, 2010: 290). Thus, by the end of the Suez Crisis, Nasser was by far the most revered Arab leader (Hopwood, 1988: 39). Nasser's popularity will thus be critically important to the formation of the UAR, and the Suez Crisis clearly illustrates some of the significant external threats faced by Egypt.

The Syrian Crisis of 1957: Satisfying Parent's Crisis Condition

The Syrian Crisis of 1957 was a result of perceptions that Syria was falling to communism and on the verge of becoming a Soviet satellite state. This notion began when King Hussein of Jordan, a UK ally, blamed Syrian Arab nationalists for directing a pro-communist subversion in Jordan, which almost led to the fall of the monarchy in April 1957 (Anderson, 1995: 24). Then, in late July, Syrian Defense Minister Khalid al-Azm, a known Soviet sympathizer who was allied with the one member of the Syrian Communist Party in Parliament, signed a significant economic agreement with the USSR (Podeh, 1999: 37). The drama accelerated in August, when 3 US "diplomats" were expelled from Syria for allegedly being involved in a plot to overthrow the Syrian regime (Anderson, 1995: 25). In reality, this was a CIA plot (one of many) to overthrow the Syrian government, codenamed "Operation Wappen" (Little, 1990: 55-58). Four days after the expulsion, Afif al-Bizri, another communist sympathizer, was appointed the Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army (Little, 1990: 55-58).

Even though there was just one member of the Communist Party in the Syrian Parliament, by this time the US, UK, Israel, Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey were convinced that Syria was on the verge of becoming a client state of the Soviet Union (Anderson, 1995: 25-28). Many states were eager to intervene in Syria before this occurred, especially the US, Israel, Iraq, and Turkey (Anderson, 1995: 25-28). However, the US could not intervene alone because unilateral Western intervention in the Arab world would have been immensely unpopular among the Arab masses; the Israelis were held back by the Americans because the optics of an Israeli intervention would have been even worse

than a Western-led one; and Sa'id was restrained by his government (Anderson, 1995: 29). Nevertheless, the Turks were intent on taking military action, and at the height of the crisis, in September 1957, they massed 50,000 troops on the Syrian border with the acquiescence of the US (Pearson, 2007: 49). In a show of strength, the US also moved its powerful 6th Fleet to the Syrian coast and sent aircraft from Western Europe to their base at Adana in Turkey, which is close to the Syrian border (Pearson: 2007: 49).

Ultimately, however, the crisis abated without any violence, as the US did not want Turkey to intervene unilaterally and be isolated in the Arab world (Anderson, 1995: 37). When it had become clear that no military action was forthcoming, Nasser sent 2,000 troops into Syria as a sign of solidarity, boosting his support among the Syrian public and some circles of the Syrian government (Jankowski, 2002: 96). Still, this crisis highlights that Syria faced significant external security threats, and it was the trigger that would spur the creation of the UAR.

The Birth of the UAR: Confirming the Importance of Elite Maneuvering

By the end of the 1957 Crisis, the Syrian Ba'ath were worried about the growing communist influence, especially since their prestige within Syria had increased after the economic deal with the USSR and the fact that the Soviets supported Syria during the Crisis (Jankowski, 2002: 96). As a result, the Ba'ath and some other Syrian political parties boycotted municipal elections in November 1957 for fear of significant communist gains or even a victory, and the Syrian Prime Minister eventually postponed them indefinitely (Jaber, 1966: 44-45). The refusal to participate in elections demonstrates the electoral weakness of the Ba'ath and the urgency of their concern regarding the ascendency of the communists (Podeh, 1999: 37). The Ba'ath were also anxious that an attempt by the communists to take power would be used by the Syrian right-wing to justify forceful counter-measures that would move Syria closer to the West and pro-Western Iraq and Jordan (Seale, 1965: 316-317). Given that the Ba'ath were at the height of their political power yet controlled just 20 of the 142 seats in the Syrian Parliament, they concluded that they had to take a new approach in order to rise to power (Seale, 1965: 310).

Over the past few years, the Syrian Parliament had passed resolutions calling for union with Egypt and created committees to negotiate a federal union between the two countries (Palmer, 1966: 50). However, Nasser's position had consistently been that conditions were not favorable for union and likely would not be for many years (Podeh, 1999: 102). Furthermore, Nasser had never even visited Syria before (Podeh, 1999: 49)! This demonstrates that while ideas about Arab nationalism caused Egypt and Syria to consider union, they were not sufficient to convince them to unify. However, the Ba'ath calculated that aggressively pushing for union with Egypt now was their best move for four reasons: (i) it would help them achieve their goal of Arab unity; (ii) it could help

stabilize Syria and mitigate the *internal* threats that the Ba'ath believed Syria faced, namely communists and right-wingers; (iii) it would allow them to more effectively deter external threats given that Egypt was more powerful than Syria; and (iv) they hoped it would increase their domestic power, given that union with Egypt was popular with the Syrian public and Nasser and the Ba'ath would be natural allies if Syria and Egypt merged (Hopwood, 1988: 39). Hence, internal threats and personal political incentives are a critical part of the Ba'ath's motivation for union.

To try and make this a reality, the Ba'ath turned to the Syrian military, whose most powerful faction consisted of pro-Ba'ath officers who believed that Nasser could strengthen Syria's weak institutions and prevent it from falling into civil war (Hopwood, 1988: 39). This shows that critical members of the Syrian military were also motivated to seek union with Egypt due to internal threats. In any case, the Ba'ath believed that if the military demanded that Nasser agree to union in order to save Syria, he would have to accept given his public image as a strong advocate of Arab nationalism (Jankowski, 2002: 105). In addition, Nasser had signaled in the past that he would not accept union unless it had the support of the Syrian military, as he did not want the military to overturn it and embarrass Egypt (Seale, 1965: 319-320). This fits with Parent's argument that elites often must utilize the military to make union a reality. To this end, Ba'ath Foreign Minister Salah al-Din al-Bitar suggested to the Syrian Military Command Council that they open direct negotiations with Nasser (Jankowski, 2002: 105). While Chief of Staff Bizri (a communist sympathizer) at first tried to resist Bitar's proposal, he eventually had to accept it for fear of popular backlash if it ever became public that he opposed union with Egypt (Jankowski, 2002: 105). It was only after the military decided to leave for Egypt and press for union that they informed the rest of their political superiors. Although Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli considered this essentially another military coup, he was powerless to stop it for the same reasons as Bizri (Jankowski, 2002: 106).

In their initial meeting, Nasser worried that he did not know much about Syria, that he would be taking responsibility for a fragile state that could collapse, and that the Military Command Council did not represent the legitimately elected government of Syria (Monte, 1966: 52). To address the last point, Bitar flew to Egypt to negotiate some sort of federal union between the two states (Jankowski, 2002: 107). Ultimately, Nasser decided that he would accept union with Syria.

One of the main reasons for this is that the Ba'ath had ensnared Nasser in a trap. If he rejected the offer, then his image as a courageous champion of Arab nationalism would be tarnished, diminishing his personal power (Podeh, 1999: 46). The second reason involved the external security threats faced by both Egypt and Syria. By agreeing to union, Nasser gained an advantage in the fight for regional influence with Iraq (e.g., by gaining control of Syria's military, economic resources, and strategic location), as well as in the continued conflict with Israel (Podeh, 1999: 47). Additionally,

Nasser would be able to better secure his ally, Syria, from foreign threats. This was important to Nasser because Syria provided a geographic buffer from his Middle East enemies, and if Syria fell, Egypt would have a new enemy near its border (Podeh, 1999: 28). A third major reason Nasser decided to accept union was to combat Syria's *internal* threats. He legitimately feared a communist takeover of Syria (Jaber, 1966: 48) and worried that Syria's collapse could destabilize the Middle East and ultimately threaten Egypt's security (Jankowski, 2002: 98). So, like his Syrian counterparts, Nasser was motivated to accept union largely due to internal threats to Syria and personal political incentives.

At this point, the terms of the union were still up for negotiation. In this debate, however, it was Nasser that had caught the Syrians in a "trap of their own making" (Jankowski, 2002: 112). Nasser demanded that the union be total, that all parties be eliminated except his National Union Party, and that the Syrian army cease political participation (Hopwood, 1988: 40). Even though many Syrian politicians and parties (e.g., the Ba'ath) had no desire to "commit party political suicide" (Seale, 1965: 322) and tried to renegotiate Nasser's demands, he refused to yield and the Syrian military supported him because they believed that only he could solve Syria's problems (Palmer, 1966: 52). The Ba'ath and other Syrian politicians were trapped in a Catch-22: if they capitulated to Nasser's demands, they would lose power, but if they refused his conditions and rejected union, they would enrage the Syrian public and risk being overthrown (Palmer, 1966: 53). In Bizri's words,

> "Since they're all saying unity, unity, unity, nobody would dare say no, we don't want it. The masses would rise against them. I mean we followed the masses. The crowds were drunk…Who at that hour could say that we don't want unity? The people would tear their heads off" (Jankowski, 2002: 106).

Therefore, Syria agreed to Nasser's demands, and on February 21, 1958, a referendum was held in Egypt and Syria, which approved the union and Nasser's election as its president by a resounding majority of 99.9% (Hopwood, 1988: 40). The UAR was officially established.

Putting it All Together: Evaluating Parent's Argument

What Did Parent Get Right?

Parent's framework fits many aspects of the UAR. First, he was correct that external threats played an important role in explaining why Egypt and Syria were motivated to merge. Both countries faced significant external security threats, and they had reasons to believe that union would help alleviate these threats. Second, Parent was correct that a "security crisis" usually precedes union and helps explain the timing of when unions occur, as the Syrian Crisis of 1957 shows (Parent, 2011: 12, 27). Third, Parent was right that elite persuasion/maneuvering was a critically important factor in explaining union. Nasser utilized the media with his Voice of the Arabs radio station to increase public support for union by aggressively promoting Arab nationalism. Additionally, the Syrians

employed their military to put pressure on Nasser, and they manipulated political procedures so that it was pro-union Syrians (i.e., the Military Command Council and Bitar) that sat at the bargaining table. The latter point is critical, as once union had been agreed to, pro-union Syrians knew that public pressure would make it difficult for anti-union Syrian politicians to reject it. Lastly, Parent was right that realist-related variables do a better job of explaining union than constructivist-related variables. Though ideas about Arab unity certainly played an important role in the formation of the UAR, what explains why union was agreed to in February 1958, as opposed to earlier, was a change in the threat environment faced by Egypt, Syria, and their political elites. As Parent argued, "states unify…not because their identities change but because their environment does" (Parent, 2011: 19).

What Did Parent Get Wrong?

The case of the UAR suggests two of Parent's central arguments are incorrect. First, his definitional argument that voluntary unions cannot take place between two states with a significant power disparity is contradicted by the formation of the UAR. In that case, it was the weaker state, Syria, that aggressively sought union with the stronger state, Egypt. In fact, before the Syrian Military Command Council flew to Egypt, Nasser had suggested that union would not happen for many years. Furthermore, the union was put to a referendum and was overwhelmingly endorsed by the people from both countries.[14]

Now, Parent might respond by arguing that significant coercion was involved, given the pressure the Military Command Council put on Nasser to accept union and the pressure Nasser put on Syria to accept union on his terms. However, neither side was prepared to use their military and economic resources to force union. Therefore, either side could have walked away freely, though they may have faced significant political costs. In addition, Parent allows for a certain amount of coercion with his arguments about elite persuasion/maneuvering. Finally, it is possible Parent would argue that the UAR was not a voluntary union because its terms essentially meant Egypt was annexing Syria. However, if the smaller state voluntarily agrees to be annexed, which was the case with Syria, then there appears no logical reason why Parent's claim must hold.

The second argument that Parent gets wrong is his assertion that voluntary unions *only* form in response to external security threats from third-party states. However, the case of the UAR demonstrates there are at least two additional explanations that Parent does not consider. The first is that voluntary unions may form at least partially in response to internal/domestic rather than external/foreign threats. One of the principal motivations in forming the UAR for all actors was to

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[14] I have not found any references to significant voter fraud or intimidation in the cited literature, but it stands to reason that the 99.9% majority is at least a bit inflated.

combat the internal threats facing Syria. A reasonable response by Parent would be to point out that Syria's internal threats were an external threat to Egypt. Nevertheless, this would not explain why Syria sought union to address their internal difficulties, and it contradicts Parent's claim that voluntary union is a response to threats from third parties. It is because Parent fails to consider internal threats as a motivation for union and assumes that unions between unequals are inherently involuntary that he mistakenly claims that voluntary unions cannot occur unless states are symmetrically vulnerable to security threats. Given that Egypt did not face the serious internal threats that Syria did and was stronger militarily, they were asymmetrically vulnerable. The fact that Syria was more vulnerable did not mean that voluntary union could not occur, as Parent asserts, but that the union that did form was more unequal since Egypt did not need union as badly as Syria and consequently had more bargaining power.

The second motivation for voluntary union that Parent misses is personal political incentives, which played a strong role in convincing the Ba'ath to push for union, Nasser to accept it, and Syrian politicians to bow to Nasser's terms. If domestic politics played no role in motivating union, per neorealist assumptions, then it is possible that the UAR would have never been formed. For example, the Ba'ath may never have pushed for union for fear that Syria's relative vulnerability would lead to strong demands by Egypt; Nasser may never have accepted union to avoid assuming the responsibility of fixing Syria and risking the Arab unity failing in practice; and Syria's politicians may never have acquiesced to Nasser's terms and surrendered a large portion of Syria's autonomy. Therefore, by strictly adhering to neorealist assumptions and neglecting domestic politics, Parent may underestimate the chances of voluntary union in some cases (e.g., the UAR) and overestimate it in others (e.g., where elites have political incentives to reject union).

Conclusion: The Limitations of this Study

There are at least three big questions that this paper leaves unanswered. The first is: what is the most important factor motivating states to form voluntary unions? Since external threats, internal threats, and personal political incentives are all present in the case of the UAR, it is difficult to know which factor played the largest role. Parent may yet be right that external threats are the most powerful; we will need to examine more cases to be sure. A second outstanding question is: what conditions are sufficient to cause voluntary union? Because this paper only examined a case where voluntary union occurred, we cannot definitively know what causes voluntary unions since external threats, internal threats, political incentives for union, etc. are also present in many cases where union does not materialize. We must avoid selecting on the dependent variable and analyze cases where union does not occur. Finally, the third question this paper leaves open is: why do some voluntary unions break down? Considering that this was not Parent's main research question, this paper did

not analyze the collapse of the UAR. Doing so could be an avenue for future research on voluntary unions.

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