

Conflict and Diplomacy in the Middle East

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YANNIS STIVACHTIS, OCT 4 2018

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The Middle East occupies a unique geographical and strategic position. Hence, it is not a coincidence that every great power in history has sought to advance its interests in the region. In addition to its geographical and strategic uniqueness, the Middle East is the birthplace and spiritual center of the three most important monotheistic religions, namely Christianity, Judaism and Islam, as well as the greatest single reserve of oil. Last, but not least, due to its geopolitical importance, any inter- and intra-state conflict in the Middle East has the potential not only of destabilizing the region as a whole or upsetting the regional balance of power but also affecting global stability. For these reasons, the Middle East has been a major center of world affairs; an economically, politically, and culturally sensitive area. The purpose of this volume is to provide an account of international relations in the contemporary Middle East. To address the question of regional order, attention will focus on the policies of external actors – such as the United States (US), Russia, China, the European Union, and the United Nations – as well as on regional hegemonic aspirations and resulting rivalries.

Defining and Delimiting the Middle East as a Region

No unanimity exists on a definition of the Middle East – even the name of the region has not been universally accepted. For the purpose of this volume, the definition of the Middle East region will be based on Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) that was introduced in the first edition of *People, States and Fear* (1983, 105–15). RSCT provides a theoretical justification for constructing world regions based on the degree of enmity and amity existing among states. Updates to the theory were presented in Buzan (1991, chapter 5 and 2016, chapter 5), while a revised version of RSCT was presented by Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde in 1998 and by Buzan and Wæver in 2003.

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT)

A more traditional way to define a region is with reference to the balance of power theory. However, to define a region, the principal element that Buzan has added to power relations among states is the pattern of amity and enmity existing among them (Buzan 1991, 189). 'Amity' refers to inter-state relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectation of protection or support. 'Enmity', on the other hand, refers to inter-state relationships conditioned by suspicion and fear.

The balance of power theory would consider the patterns of amity and enmity as a product of the balance of power, with states shifting their alignments in accordance with the dictates of movements in the distribution of power. However, Buzan has correctly pointed out that the historical dynamic of amity and enmity is only partly related to the balance of power, and that where it is related, it is much more durable than the relatively fluid movement of the distribution of power (Buzan 1991, 190). Moreover, patterns of amity and enmity arise from a variety of issues ranging from border disputes and ideological alignments to longstanding historical links – whether positive or negative – and which could not be predicted from a simple consideration of the distribution of power (Buzan 1991, 190). Enmity can be particularly durable when it acquires a historical character between peoples, as it has between

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the Arabs and the Israelis or the Iranians and the Iraqis. Consequently, the two patterns, namely power relations and enmity/amity, should be considered as distinct factors.

Patterns of amity and enmity among states can, therefore, be used to define a region by focusing on their security relations. The term 'security complex' is used by Buzan to label the resulting formations. A security complex is defined as "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another" (Buzan 1991, 190). Thus, the term 'security complex' indicates both the character of the attribute that defines the set (security), and the notion of intense interdependence that distinguishes any particular set from its neighbors. Security complexes emphasize the interdependence of rivalry, as well as that of shared interests.

Working from the perspective of securitization, Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde have sought to revise Buzan's original definition of security complexes. In doing so, they have still maintained that security interdependence is markedly more intense among the units inside such complexes than with units outside them and that security complexes are about the relative intensities of security relations that lead to distinctive regional patterns shaped both by distribution of power and relations of amity and enmity. The difference is that they have now defined a security complex as a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot be reasonably analyzed or resolved apart from one another (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 201).

Merging and applying the above two definitions, the Middle East security complex can be defined as a group of states whose primary security concerns, resulting from their processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot realistically be considered, analyzed or resolved apart from one another.

The idea of security complexes is an empirical phenomenon with historical and geopolitical roots. Security complexes are also generated by the interaction of anarchy and geography. The political structure of anarchy confronts all states with the power-security dilemma, but security interdependence is powerfully mediated by the effects of geography. Because threats operate more potently over short distances, security interactions with states in close proximity tend to have first priority. However, geographical proximity or even sharing of borders do not necessarily imply the presence of strong security interdependence among states. For example, security interdependence between Iran and Israel is much stronger than Iran's security interdependence with Pakistan, which indicates that Iran and Pakistan belong to different security complexes.

The task of identifying a security complex requires making judgements about the relative strength of patterns of amity and enmity and consequently of security interdependence among different countries. In some places, patterns of amity and enmity are very strong while in others they are relatively weak. In some places the interdependence can be positive, as between Jordan and Egypt – while in others negative, as between Israel and Iran. Usually, security complexes will arise from local relationships, but when outside actors are involved a set of states can be bound together in response to this intrusion. For example, US support for Israel has often brought Arab states together in opposition.

A security complex exists where a set of security relationships stands out by virtue of its relative strong, inward-looking character, and the relative weakness of its outward security interactions with its neighbors (Buzan 1991, 193). In other words, security interdependence will be more strongly focused among the members of the set than they are between the members and outside states. For example, the strong security links between Israel and Syria put these two countries clearly within the same security complex, while the relatively weak links between Iran and Pakistan suggest that these two states belong to two different security complexes.

The principal factor defining a complex is usually a high level of threat and fear, which is felt mutually among two or more states. The Arab-Israeli and the Iranian-Israeli cases clearly show the extent to which neighboring local dynamics are conditioned by the security rhetoric of the states towards each other, by their military deployments, and by the record of their conflicts. On the other hand, the relationship between Egypt and Jordan indicates that a high

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level of trust and friendship can also serve as a binding force. This is because security interdependence can be positive as well as negative.

Power relations and patterns of amity and enmity among states constitute the basis for assessing whether a regional security complex exists. But are there any additional factors that could serve to define regional security complexes?

Additional Factors Determining the Composition of Regional Security Complexes

Cultural, religious, racial and ethnic ties may also constitute a factor in identifying security complexes since shared cultural characteristics among a group of states would cause them both to pay more attention to each other in general, and to legitimize mutual interventions in each other's security affairs in particular. For example, it is not difficult to see how ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam) have facilitated and legitimized security interdependence among a large group of states in the Middle East.

Ethno-cultural thinking underlies much traditional historical analysis. This factor is particularly clear in the Middle East where the idea of an Arab nation, and the trans-national political force of Islam combine to create a potent regional political realm. Arab nationalism and Islam weaken the identity of the local states, legitimize an unusually high degree of security inter-penetration and stimulate a marked propensity to establish regional organizations (the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Cooperation Council, and the Maghreb Group). They also play a major part in defining the main nodes of conflict in the region centered on two non-Arab states embedded within it (Israel and Iran) one of which is not Islamic and the other is the representative of Islam's principal schism. Although cultural, religious, racial and ethnic ties may be important contributing factors in defining the shape and structure of regional security complexes, they nevertheless come second to the patterns of amity and enmity which is the principal defining factor.

Another way in which security complexes can be identified is with reference to the role of economic factors. Usually, in looking for the set of states that constitute security complexes, one is primarily concerned with the military, political and societal dimensions of security. The reason for which these sectors are the most relevant to the patterns of threat and amity/enmity that define the set is because economic relations are not nearly so much conditioned by geographical proximity, as are the military, political and societal ones. Consequently, the problem of economic security is likely to have a quite different relational dynamic from that of military, societal and political security. In most world regions, where local political and military interdependence is strong, economic relations follow a much more wide-ranging pattern that has little to do with the region. Under such conditions, the economic security of regional states does not depend primarily on their relationship with the other states within the same complex.

Economic factors, however, do play a role determining both the power of states within their local security complexes and their domestic stability and cohesion as actors. They may also play an important role in motivating the patterns of external interest in the local complex as in the case of the US and the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf. Yet, they can affect the prospects for regional integration, which can influence and determine how a given security complex evolves. Therefore, economic factors need to be taken into account in defining or analyzing a security complex. However, as in the case of the cultural, religious, racial and ethnic ties, economic factors come second to the patterns of amity and enmity which is the principal defining factor.

The Composition and Boundaries of Regional Security Complexes

Buzan (1991, 195) draws a distinction between a 'lower' and a 'higher-level' security complex. A lower level complex is composed of local states whose power does not extend much beyond the range of their immediate neighbors or states with which are in a relatively close proximity. A higher-level security complex, by contrast, includes great powers whose capabilities extend far beyond their immediate environment and whose power is sufficient to impinge on several regions. Consequently, the active involvement of Russia and the US in the Middle East reflects the existence of a high-level security complex.

Security complexes will often include a number of small states. For example, despite their size the small Gulf States are members of the Middle East security complex. Due to their relative low power in comparison with their neighbors,

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these states may have little impact on the structure of the complex. Moreover, the security of small states is intimately bound up in the pattern of relations among larger states, but they can only become a source of threat to a larger state by virtue of the impact of their alignments on relations among the larger powers. The position of Lebanon in the Middle East security complex is illustrative as the influence of Iran over that country constitutes a central feature of the Iranian–Israeli security relationship.

Another question that has been raised by Buzan is whether regional security complexes are exclusive or overlapping. Although David Lake and Patrick Morgan (1997) have argued that security complexes can have overlapping membership, Buzan and Wæver (2003, 48) have taken the position that regional security complexes are mutually exclusive. Therefore, no single Middle East state can be part of two different security complexes. Instead, Buzan and Wæver have promoted the idea that some states occupy insulating positions between neighboring security complexes. These insulators may exist in relative isolation from the security dynamics on either side, or they may face both ways on the edges of neighboring complexes with or without linking them. Turkey constitutes a clear example as the country separates the Middle East security complex from the European security complex. Likewise, Afghanistan insulates the Middle East Security complex from the South Asia security complex.

Buzan (1991, 198–9) identifies three conditions that explain why it can be difficult to locate the boundaries of security complexes whose existence is not in doubt – such as the Middle East security complex. The first is simply that the boundary between two security complexes is dissolving in a major change in the pattern of regional security dynamics. The second involves the existence of the lopsided security interdependence that occurs when higher and lower level complexes are physically adjacent. However, none of these two conditions is currently present to prevent the identification of the boundaries of the Middle East security complex. Instead, the most relevant condition pertains to a situation in which two or more nodes of security interdependence exist within a group of states, which there are also grounds for thinking of this group as a single security complex.

Specifically, the Middle East contains 25 or so states divided into a number of sub-complexes that have distinct dynamics within the overall Middle East security complex. Buzan and Wæver (2003, 188–193) identify three main sub-complexes which are centered on the Persian Gulf (Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia as the principals), the Levant (Israel, Syria and Egypt as the principals), and the Maghreb (with Algeria, Morocco and Libya as the principals). All these nodes have their own distinctive dynamics, but there is enough crossing of boundaries within the Middle Eastern security complex to justify identifying the larger formation as the main regional unit. For example, Syria plays an important role in the Gulf sub-complex by allying with Iran, and Iran plays a crucial role in the Levant supporting Syria and Lebanon against Israel. Nearly all of the Arab states take some part in the opposition to Israel, which seeks to stir up inter-Arab and inter-Islamic rivalries whenever it can. Yet, the Arab League provides a legitimizing forum in which the affairs of the different sub-complexes are linked together, and which helps to differentiate Middle Eastern security affairs from those of Asia, Europe and Africa.

The Structure of Regional Security Complexes

Regional security complexes are international subsystems and therefore viewing them as having their own structures and patterns of interaction provides a useful benchmark against which to identify and assess changes in the patterns of regional security.

The structure of a regional security complex, such as the Middle East one includes four key components: first, the boundary of the complex that differentiates it from its neighbors; second, the arrangement of its units (an anarchical security complex requires the existence of two or more states); third, the patterns of enmity and amity among its units; and fourth, the distribution of power among its principal units (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 53). Since security complexes constitute products of an anarchic international system, and they represent durable rather than permanent patterns within such a system, (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 15) the composition and structure of a security complex may change over time if one or more of the four key components change. Hence, major shifts in any of these components would normally require a redefinition of the Middle East security complex.

Four structural options are available for assessing the impact of change on a security complex: maintenance of the

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status quo, internal transformation, external transformation and overlay (Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde 1998, 18). Maintenance of the status quo means the essential structure of the regional security complex remains fundamentally intact. This does not mean that no change has taken place but rather that the changes that have occurred have tended either to support or not undermine the structure. Internal transformation of a regional security complex occurs when its structure changes as a result of regional political integration, decisive shifts in the distribution of power, or major shifts in the pattern of amity and enmity. External transformation occurs when the structure of a regional security complex is altered by either the expansion or contraction of its existing outer boundary. Minor adjustments to the boundary may not significantly affect the essential structure. The addition or deletion of major states, however, is certain to have a substantial impact on both the distribution of power and the pattern of amity and enmity. Finally, overlay means one or more external powers moves directly into the regional complex with the effect of suppressing the indigenous security dynamic.

Buzan and Wæver (2003, 55) have drawn a distinction between 'standard' and 'centered' regional security complexes. Centered regional security complexes come in three different forms: first, those centered on a superpower (e.g. the US dominates the North and Central America), those centered on a great power (e.g. Russia and the CIS) and those centered on a regional organization that reflects a high degree of regional integration (e.g. the European Union and Europe). A standard regional security complex is composed of two or more states that share a predominantly military and political security agenda. All standard complexes are anarchical in nature. In this sense, the Middle East security complex constitutes a standard security complex.

The Middle East Security Complex

RSCT helps us identify a standard and high-level Middle East security complex which Turkey and Afghanistan help to insulate from the European and South Asia security complexes respectively. Although power relations and patterns of amity and enmity are the main defining factors of the Middle East security complex, cultural, religious and ethnic ties among states also come into play.

Within the Middle East security complex, one can currently identify three sub-complexes. However, the sub-complexes that are suggested here do not correspond to those identified by Buzan and Wæver. Since the structure of regional security complexes is not permanent and since the patterns of relations among states are dynamic rather than static, it can be argued that the regional relations of the early 2000s (when Buzan and Wæver advanced their argument) have changed. This change has impacted the structure of the Middle East sub-complexes, as well as the Middle East security complex as a whole. Specifically, Buzan and Wæver have correctly suggested that the first and defining core sub-complex in the Middle East is the one centered in the Levant – between Israel and its Arab neighbors – which has given rise to many regional wars. This sub-complex is the result and the reflection of the local struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, which set up and sustained a much wider hostility between Israel, on the one hand, and its immediate neighbors, as well as the wider Arab world, on the other. To a lesser extent, this struggle has been shadowed by a conflict between Israel and the wider Islamic world.

However, a case can be made that the Levant sub-complex also includes the Maghreb states, which Buzan and Wæver have identified as constituting a separate albeit a very weak sub-complex centered on the shifting and uneasy set of relations among Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003, 193), the main regional security problem in the Maghreb has been the Moroccan annexation of Western Sahara in 1975 – which led to tensions with Libya and Algeria. The argument that the Maghreb countries are currently part of the Levant sub-complex is advanced for two reasons: first, today the Western Sahara issue is not strong enough to provide the basis of a wide Maghreb sub-complex which cannot account for the place of Tunisia; and second, the Maghreb countries together with those of the Levant sub-complex have many things in common. For example, the Maghreb states have had a considerable involvement in the Arab–Israeli conflict, they are members of the Arab League, partners in the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). In other words, the Maghreb sub-complex has experienced internal transformation – while the Levant complex has undergone external transformation by incorporating the Maghreb countries.

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As Buzan and Wæver suggest, a strong case can be made that the second sub-complex in the Middle East is the one centered on the triangular rivalry among Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Arab states led by Saudi Arabia. To this core rivalry, one may add the peripheral rivalry between Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Scholars have suggested (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 155; Clapham 1996, 128; Tibi 1993, 52) that the Horn of Africa sub-complex should be located within the African security complex. However, due to increasing patterns of security interdependence, a strong case can be made that today this sub-complex constitutes a third Middle East sub-complex with Sudan and Somalia as its principals and where Saudi-Arabia, Egypt and the Gulf States have taken a significant interest. Hence the Middle East security complex has undergone external transformation by incorporating the Horn of Africa sub-complex. Since maintenance of the status quo would imply that the essential structure of the Middle East security complex would remain fundamentally intact, we argue that this regional security complex has not been static (since it has undergone both a domestic and external transformation) and therefore its structure has been changed.

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The modern Middle East began after the First World War, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated by the British Empire and their allies and partitioned into a number of separate entities, initially under British and French Mandates. The most important regional transformations following the end of the Second World War included the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, the departure of the colonial powers (Britain and France) from the region by the end of the 1960s, and the rising influence and regional involvement of the US from the 1970s onwards.

During the Cold War, the Middle East was a theater of ideological struggle between the US and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. Among many important areas of contention between the superpowers was their desire to gain strategic advantage in the region and secure access to oil reserves at a time when oil was becoming increasingly vital to the economy of the industrialized countries of the West. Consequently, the US sought to prevent the Arab world from being exposed to Soviet influence.

The collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s had several consequences for the Middle East. First of all, it allowed large numbers of Jewish people to immigrate from Russia and Ukraine to Israel, further strengthening the Jewish state. Second, it cut off the easiest source of credit, armaments, and diplomatic support to the anti-Western Arab regimes, weakening their position. Third, it opened up the prospect of cheap oil from Russia, driving down oil prices and reducing the dependence of the Western world on oil from the Arab states. Fourth, it discredited the model of development through authoritarian state socialism that Egypt (under Nasser), Algeria, Syria, and Iraq had followed since the 1960s – leaving these regimes politically and economically stranded. As a result, regional rulers, such as Iraq's Saddam Hussein increasingly relied on Arab nationalism as a substitute for socialism.

In a bid for regional hegemony, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. In response, the US formed an international coalition that included Middle East states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria and evicted Iraq from Kuwait. However, the Gulf War later led to a permanent US military presence in the Persian Gulf, particularly in Saudi Arabia (the land where the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are located), which offended many Muslims, and was a reason often cited by Osama bin Laden as justification for the 9/11 attacks.

The change of governance from autocracy to democracy that occurred in many places around the world following the end of the Cold War did not take place in the Middle East. At the same time, in most Middle East countries the growth of market economies was limited by political restrictions, corruption, cronyism, overspending on arms and prestige projects, and over-dependence on oil revenues. The successful economies were those countries that had oil wealth and low populations, such as the Gulf States where the ruling elites allowed some political and social liberalization – but without giving up any of their own power. Lebanon also rebuilt a fairly successful economy after a prolonged civil war in the 1980s. During the 2000s, all these factors intensified conflict in the Middle East, which affected the entire world. The failure of the Clinton Administration to broker a peace deal between Israel and Palestine at the Camp David Summit in 2000 led eventually to the new Intifada that marked the first major outbreak of violence since the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. At the same time, the failures of most of the Arab regimes and the bankruptcy of secular

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Arab radicalism led a section of educated Arabs (and other Muslims) to embrace Islamism, promoted (to differing degrees) both by Iran's Shia clerics as well as by Saudi Arabia's powerful Wahhabist movement. Many of the militant Islamists gained their military training while fighting Soviet forces in Afghanistan.

In response to the 9/11 attack, US President George W. Bush decided to invade Afghanistan in 2001 to overthrow the Taliban regime – which had been harboring Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. However, Bush's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 went against the advice of Sunni Middle Eastern states and most notably Saudi Arabia. It led to a prolonged occupation of a Middle Eastern capital by a Western army and marked a turning point in the history of the region. Despite elections held in January 2005, much of Iraq had all but disintegrated due to a post-war insurgency. Many dissatisfied Sunnis who once served in the Iraqi Army under Saddam Hussein were successful in organizing a new organization, namely ISIS. While ISIS has been significantly weakened in the Levant, branches of the organization have spread to other countries outside the Middle East and most notably Africa.

By 2005, the situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians had also deteriorated while in 2006 a new conflict had erupted between Israel and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon – further setting back any prospects for peace in the region. Meanwhile, in 2004, a Shia insurgency had also begun in Yemen. This eventually led to a war, that is still raging at the time of writing, and to the deterioration of Iran–Saudi Arabia relations as both became embroiled in a proxy war in Yemen. Finally, starting in late 2010, the Arab Spring brought major protests, uprisings, and even revolutions to several Middle Eastern countries. This challenged the existing social and political order of the region and eventually led to a prolonged Syrian civil war that has seen the military intervention of Western powers, Russia and many regional states to either support the Syrian opposition groups or the ruling Ba'ath party. All these developments have added to regional complexity, which the contributors to this volume have attempted to unpack.

Book Structure

The volume is divided into 9 chapters. In Chapter 1, Ayşegül Sever examines how the processes of globalization and regionalization condition state attitudes and policies as well as international relations in the Middle East. She argues that given the variety of regionalisms, Middle Eastern regionalism has some commonalities as well as differences compared to similar processes in other regions. She suggests that regionally initiated problem-solving mechanisms have been both weak and dysfunctional in the Middle East mainly as a result of the persistent outside intervention, which, nevertheless, is crucial for the ultimate resolution of critical regional conflicts. Sever points out that the spill over of Middle Eastern problems pose serious global challenges to the extent that what is regional and what is global has become obscure.

In Chapter 2, Onur Erpul investigates whether or not Middle Eastern states are able to obtain a tenable regional order. Approaching the question of regional order from an English School perspective, he explores the conditions that inhibit the moderation of conflict in the region at different levels of analysis. In doing so, he argues that there are numerous, cross-cutting, sources of conflict and disunity in the region including the overbearing presence of extra-regional powers, the lack of a common vision acceptable to all Middle Eastern states, the internal locus of security threats for many states, and the use of non-state violence. He concludes that although there are mitigating circumstances, the Middle East international society is at best in a transitional and conflictive phase.

In Chapter 3, Jonathan Cristol examines key events in US foreign policy in the Middle East after the Cold War including the Persian Gulf War; the Israeli–Palestinian peace process; Osama bin Laden & al-Qaeda; the Arab Spring; the Iranian nuclear program; the Syrian Civil War; and the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis – among others. He argues that although the US did not cause all of the problems currently facing the Middle East, the US has a mixed track record in its response to regional events. He concludes that although President George H.W. Bush's successful use of diplomacy and military power during the 1991 Gulf War presented new and unprecedented opportunities for the region, in the present day the region has fallen into disarray with American leadership more distant than ever.

In Chapter 4, Spyridon N. Litsas scrutinizes Russia's involvement in the Middle East under Putin. He argues that for the first time in Russia's long history Moscow sees the region not as a suitable arena to destabilize Western interests but as a suitable venue to implement its geostrategic plans. He points out that Russia follows a more aggressive and

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interventionist approach than during the past and yet it maintains the old style of deceit. He concludes that Moscow implements an advanced strategy in the Middle East and whoever is ready to disregard this will be negatively surprised in the years to come.

In Chapter 5, Xi Chen explores the most recent dynamics of China–Middle East relations from an historical context. Chen argues that China has sought to establish and maintain a prominent presence in the region in recent years. However, she maintains Beijing's new grand Arab Policy is yet to come as China's engagement with the region remains primarily driven by its economic interests – while its diplomatic, cultural, and military involvement in the Middle East is still largely symbolic.

In Chapter 6, Stefanie Georgakis Abbott examines the European Union's approach to the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region by analyzing the institutional framework provided by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). In doing so, she points out that the EU seeks to encourage and facilitate political, social, humanitarian, and economic reform in its MENA neighbors; deepen relationships – both bilaterally and regionally – between the EU and its MENA partners as well as between MENA states themselves; and address Israeli–Palestinian relations. She concludes that unlike the EMP, the UfM provides a more pragmatic and inclusive approach to the problems and challenges facing the MENA region.

In Chapter 7, Yannis A. Stivachtis investigates the European Union's approach to the MENA region by focusing on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). He argues that despite its rhetoric and revisions, the ENP has failed to produce the expected results mainly because it has discounted the feedback of the MENA countries. Following a 2015 Review, it remains to be seen whether the EU would be open to questions, criticism and suggestions from its MENA partners. It also remains to be seen whether MENA countries would play any role in setting the benchmarks of deep reform, have a say in how relevant EU policies develop, or would be involved in the performance assessment. Stivachtis concludes by noting that a more effective engagement with the MENA region would require the EU to abolish neocolonial attitudes reflecting a 'civilizer–civilizee' relationship and instead be more open to the perceptions and viewpoints of its MENA neighbors – thereby cultivating a relationship of mutual respect and equal partnership with them.

In Chapter 8, Allison Miller investigates the contributions of the United Nations (UN) to Middle East peace and security. She argues that the traditional UN approach to regional security through the use of peacekeeping forces has been recently supplemented by a new approach that emphasizes human security. As a result, the UN has sought to address regional security needs through developmental aid, humanitarian aid, and assistance to vulnerable groups. Miller points out that the Middle East is engulfed in conflict, ranging from civil wars, terrorism, and refugee crises that require and necessitate UN involvement. She concludes that in order to address regional security challenges the UN should continuously work towards building partnerships with leading regional organizations, primarily the Arab League – and that future regional stability depends on the ability of the UN and its partner organizations to protect vulnerable groups and continuously work towards humanitarian and developmental goals.

Finally, in Chapter 9, Ali G. Dizboni and Sofwat Omar investigate Iran's hegemonic aspirations. They argue that a complicated and savage chess game is currently taking place in the Middle East as different countries – including Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and Israel – are attempting to become the regional hegemon. They suggest that a "Shia Crescent" has been created where Shia forces in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen are supported by the Iranian regime and that with Russian assistance and the removal of international sanctions following the nuclear deal, Iran has positioned itself as the dominant power of the Middle East. They conclude that if the reformist camp is successful, the economy continues to improve, inflation is reduced, and progress continues to be made, then there is a high probability that Iran's aspirations to be a regional hegemon will be successful.

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