

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: *PHENO-MENA*

January 26, 2024 Friday
6th Conference Series

PARTNERED BY:

Hasan Kalyoncu University (TURKIYE)

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The Gulf International Forum (USA)

Edited by

Murat Aslan

Pelin Aliyev

Aya Swehli

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA PHENO-MENA

11.10	PANEL I	THE SOURCES OF INSTABILITY IN THE MENA REGION
14.00	PANEL II	ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES IN THE MENA REGION
16.00	PANEL III	CONTRADICTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL THINKING IN HANDLING THE MIDDLE EAST
17.00	PANEL IV	GENERAL ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

26 January 2024 | Friday
11.00

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“THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: PHENO-MENA”

26 January 2024, Hasan Kalyoncu Univesity, GAZİANTEP, Türkiye

Proceeding Book

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<p>Hasan Kalyoncu University, 2024</p> <p>Address Havalimanı Yolu Üzeri 27410 Şahinbey/GAZİANTEP Phone : +90 (342) 211 80 80 Fax : +90 (342) 211 80 81 www.hku.edu.tr - yayin@hku.edu.tr</p> <p>President Prof. Türkay DERELİ</p> <p>Edited by Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev Aya Swehli</p> <p>Organised by Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev</p> <p>Conference Secretariat Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev Aya Swehli</p> <p>Published by KALMEC</p> <p>Design Murat Aslan</p> <p>Hasan Kalyoncu University Mütercim Asım Library has catalogued this publication.</p>	<p>Scientific Board Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev</p> <p>THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: PHENO-MENA (6th Conference) 26 January 2024, Hasan Kalyoncu University, GAZİANTEP,</p> <p>Proceeding Book</p> <p>Hasan Kalyoncu University, Gaziantep- TURKEY, 2024.</p> <p>66 sayfa: tablo, grafik; 21x29,7 cm</p> <p>E-ISBN : 978-605-74046-1-9</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. International Relations2. Middle East and North Africa (MENA)3. Regional Security
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THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA: PHENO-MENA

1. CONCEPT OF THE CONFERENCE

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have been the geography of a complicated cobweb of relations for millenniums. A classic on the history of the MENA region starts with religious narratives, depicting extreme tempers of holiness, dynamic shifts of civilizations, struggles for dominating the region and designing an order. In this sense, the MENA region is usually referred to as the area of escalations, wars, and, in other words, high politics. Nevertheless, the MENA has experienced a bottom-to-up reflection of societal grievances committed to access basic services, and democratic rights. It has been an ‘Arab Winter’ rather than ‘Spring’ though; the fragility in the MENA has become the expected political and societal pattern. Other than the ‘Winter – Spring’ phenomena, structural and persistent issues in question – like the Palestinian-Israel question, competition of the Gulf Countries, or ambiguity in Libya, have downgraded the scholarly capacity of ‘explaining and understanding’ the region.

The fact that it is not a unique region and is composed of varying regional systems, MENA requires a compartmentalized effort of academic scrutiny based on three dynamics. The first dynamic is that the regional systems in the MENA attract the global powers. The competition of the dominating states facilitates the external hands to drive the regional disputes either directly or through the pros. The second dynamic is the regional states that are well-connected to each other whilst pursuing contradicting agendas based on a ‘self-help’ system. Finally, transnational dynamics challenge the states of the region for the sake of prosperity and democratic rights. Under the shade of these three dynamics, the MENA remains an ambiguity that makes it a vulnerability for a stable international system. Given the intertwined structure of the mentioned dynamics, the MENA has a weight in determining the course of overall international politics.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT OF THE CONFERENCE

‘International Conference on The Middle East and North Africa: Pheno-MENA’ will address the question ‘Does MENA proceed to a state of stability in the long term?’. In this regard, ‘what concrete steps may be on the agenda?’. For this purpose, the conference will focus on the

challenges that are sources of instability, how to address them for smooth regional well-being, and contradictions regionally or globally in handling the issues in question in the Middle East.

3. MODUS OPERANDI

There will be three panels at the conference, which will be held hybrid – a mixture of in-person and virtual attendance. The first panel will delve into the sources of instability in the MENA region covering both high and low political concerns. The second panel will be more focused on addressing the challenges in the MENA region. The third session is to discuss the contradictions on the Middle East regarding political, economic, security, societal, and else aspects. The fourth panel will be the ground for academic proceedings on relevant and varying aspects of the region, prepared by the scholars and students.

The moderators will introduce the panels and speakers with introductory remarks. Each speaker will present their perspectives for ten minutes. Per the questions received, there will be a 20-minute discussion period before finalizing the panels.

4. THE PANELS OF THE CONFERENCE

Keynote Speech

11.00 Prof. Burhanettin Duran, GC of SETA

Panel I. The Sources of Instability in the MENA Region

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Ahmet Keser

TIME	SPEAKER	INSTITUTION
11.10	Moderator's Introduction	
11.20	Prof. Hind Kabawat	George Mason University (USA)
11.30	Prof. Magdalena Kumelska-Koniecko	University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn (Poland)
11.40	Ms. Amina Khan	CAMEA / ISIS (Pakistan)
11.50	Prof. Konstantinos Filis	Institute of Global Affairs, Athens (Greece)
12.00	Ammar El Qadi	Deutche Orient Institute

12.20	Discussion and Q&A	
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Panel II. Addressing the Challenges in the MENA Region

Moderator: Prof. Yücel Acer

TIME	SPEAKER	INSTITUTION
14.00	Moderator's Introduction	
14.10	Prof. Patrice Brodeur	University of Montreal (Canada)
14.20	Prof. Murat Yeşiltaş	Ankara Social Sciences University (Türkiye), SETA
14.30	Amb. Prof. Heinrich Kreft	Center for Diplomacy and Security Policy / Andrassy University (Hungary)
14.40	Assoc. Prof. Ahmet Keser PhD Cand. Müjgan Güneş	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
14.50	Dr. Samir M. Seifan	Harmoon Center for Contemporary Studies
15.00	Discussion and Q&A	

Panel III. Contradictions of Contemporary Political Thinking in Handling the Middle East

Moderator: Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan

TIME	SPEAKER	INSTITUTION
16.00	Moderator's Introduction	
16.10	Prof. Murat Yeşiltaş	Ankara Social Sciences University, SETA (Türkiye),
16.20	Amb. Doru Costea	New Strategy Center (Romania)
16.30	Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan	Hasan Kalyoncu University, SETA (Türkiye)
16.40	Discussion and Q&A	

Panel IV. General Issues in the MENA Region

Moderator: Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev

TIME	SPEAKER	INSTITUTION
17.00	Jawan Aldaoud	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
17.10	Ahmad Alkhalil	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
17.20	Mostafa Kamal Ibrahim	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
17.30	M. Suphi Algin	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
17.40	Yousef Alfares	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
17.50	Omar Garebo	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.00	Amina Muhannaia	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.10	Mohammad Nassani	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.20	Feras Kalash	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.30	Omar Sammak	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.40	Zayit Alhamid Alali	Hasan Kalyoncu University (Türkiye)
18.50	Mesut Şöhret	Gaziantep Üniversitesi (Türkiye)

5. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES:

The transcripts of the speeches and presented perceptions will be published in an edited abstract e-book. In this context, the panelists are highly expected to provide the proceedings per the calendar of this academic conference. Virtual attendance needs special care for the functionality of the internet connection, software, and sound checks. The participants are kindly requested to display themselves on the screen.

The Turkish time zone applies to all timings.

6. IMPORTANT DATES

Concept Submission	23 November 2023
Proceeding Submission (for the Fourth Panel)	11 January 2024
Peer Review	15 January 2024
Submission of presentation scripts for the Abstracts Book	20 January 2024
The Conference	26 January 2024

7. The Conference Board

Amb. Andreas Reinicke

Amb. Prof. Heinrich Kreft

Prof. Ebtesam El Ketbi

Prof. Hind Kabawat

Prof. Magdalena Kumelska-Koniecko

Prof. Konstantinos Filis

Ms. Amina Khan

Assoc. Prof. Ahmet Keser

Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan

Assoc. Prof. Mesut Şöhret

Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev

8. CONFERENCE COORDINATORS

Assoc. Prof. Murat Aslan

Assist. Prof. Pelin Aliyev

Contact Info

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Conference Website

<https://icmena.hku.edu.tr>

Conference Link (For Online Participation)

The link will be sent to the designated email of the participants. It is highly requested not to share the link with third parties to prevent unauthorized access. The Conference will be broadcasted through the social media accounts of partnering organizations.

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Prof. Burhanettin DURAN

General Coordinator of SETA

Dear speakers and distinguished guests, we are here to perform the International Conference on Security with the participation of our partners. The emphasis of this year is the Middle East and North Africa. I believe this conference is a success story because this is the sixth one of its kind. And we have a scale attendance of distinguished scholars and think tank from the world in this conference. And then we can conclude that this conference has become a tradition. I hope the conference board will continue to perform this activity in the future as well and maybe this conference may be in face activity most probably starting next year. We should do our best to realize this goal.

The conference has coincided with another wave of conflict in the region after the October 7th. The Gaza conflict showed us that what could happen if procreated and unresolved conflicts could not be resolved in the region. I visited Israel just before this October events. There was no sign of any problem at the time. People were talking about normalization, normalization between Türkiye and Israel, normalization between Israel and Arab countries. But now we are just trying to anticipate what could happen after the Gaza incident ended. And as we all know, there will be a new Middle East. But what kind of Middle East?

We are very tired of talking about the new Middle East. So, this case shows us that the root causes of many disputes are not only about the escalations observed but also about the social, cultural, and historical dimensions that are very related to the region and the related countries. In this sense, the Middle East as the hub of the globe is a complex region with paradoxical cooperation and confrontation patterns. Let me put forward some recent cases as proof of such these complex situations.

The Middle East is again on the top of the world agenda. Israel's massacres in Gaza and low-intensity conflict with Hezbollah at the Lebanese borders remain underway. Meanwhile, in the Red Sea, the United States and Britain bombed Yemeni Houthis to ensure marine navigation. Washington also relisted the Houthis as a global terrorist group. During that time, again, Iran

attacked Syria, Iraq, and Pakistan with ballistic missiles, provided that the country had used proxy forces in previous attacks. But this time there is a direct involvement of the Revolutionary Guards, and this is not worthy. Observers argue that Tehran deemed reaction by proxy insufficient, a sign, they say, that the country's infamous strategic patience is running out. The Iranian government and its supporters in turn claimed that their target in Israel was linked to Mossad and their assault on Pakistan was intended to crack down on the Israeli-funded terrorist entity. Iran also said that it targeted an armed affiliate of Daesh in Syria.

Nevertheless, Pakistan retaliated against the Iranian attack by carrying out a series of surgical strikes against separatist terrorists in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province. At that time, Jordan was bombing the Syrian province of Sweden for the Syrian regime's production of illicit drugs because it's a source of concern for Amman. During again that time, Assad's regime's continuous attack to Idlib pointed out the fragility in Syria, whilst Israel bombed the outskirts of Damascus. Taking into consideration Türkiye's week-long attacks against PKK-YPG operatives in Iraq and Syria, one cannot help but wonder where the region is heading. So, all of us should focus on the Middle East, where the MENA is heading. Personally, what can I conclude from the events of only one week is very clear. The great powers are short of completely removing risks due to asymmetric challenges, while the high-tech response of non-state actors shakes the security needs of the public, states, or economic activities. In this scope, the naval traffic route is shifting from the Suez Canal to the Cape of Good Hope.

For sure, this escalation will mobilize the competing powers in a way to coordinate their efforts. After the Gaza and Houthi challenge, there is a lesson learned. The Middle East geographically, economically, socially, and militarily, this will continue to be the area of interest for all of us. The recurring trends of irregular immigration, democracy deficits, run to your state types or depriving societies are still persistent religion. Nevertheless, the change continues well. Maybe some of us may think that the Arab Spring is over, but still, we can argue that the Arab Spring, which reflects a route of transformation, is still ongoing with probable upheavals in the coming decade. As far as the people of the region are not satisfied. So, the future of the Middle East is not clear yet. We should put our energy in anticipating this region. Also, this shows that the Middle East is not a region that global powers can withdraw easily. There will be many more issues to be dealt with within their foreign policies.

The other region that's the theme of this conference is North Africa. Africa is actually a rising continent, more dynamic if compared to the Middle East. But again, there are some conflictual issues, and I'm not sure whether we have enough information about the African social

structures, political disputes, or other issues. The Sahel region has witnessed the Cold War sort of coup d'état last year. This is an example that there is such a dynamic and uncertain continent. The very north of Africa is a mixture of cultures with African, Arab, and Amazigh backgrounds. Hence, we have to understand the problems and the potential of North Africa. As a result, this conference is promising to put forward a comprehensive frame of the MENA region.

I'm thanking all partnering organizations and the organizing committee. In this sense, I appreciate the efforts of SETA foreign policy department, mainly Associate Professor Murat Aslan and faculty member of Hasan Kalyoncu University. And also, I thank Assistant Professor Pelin Aliyev for her commitment and thank Hasan Kalyoncu University for leading this event. And of course, the last thing is that our participant speakers and our dear guests.

Thank you.

PANEL I:
THE SOURCES OF INSTABILITY IN THE MENA
REGION

KEY FACTORS BEHIND INSTABILITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Prof. Hind KABAWAT¹

Abstract

The instability in the Middle East is a very complex issue influenced by various factors. Some of the most significant factors contributing to instability in the region, including the conflict between Israel and Palestine, has been ongoing for a long time and has caused lasting regional tension that continued to create instability. The Middle East holds a vital strategic location, making it a hotspot for various global powers. Iran, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the United States, and Türkiye have competing interests in the region, leading to numerous geopolitical competitions.

This often results in a proxy conflict, which further worsens regional tensions. The authoritarian regimes in many countries suppress political opposition contributing to social unrest and instability like it's happening in so many Arab countries. So, the Middle East is renowned for being the resident of some of the planet's wealthiest countries, but it's also grappling with significant poverty and unemployment levels. These economic imbalances and the high unemployment rates are vital in causing social discontent and could lead to instability, like what we saw at the Arab Springs and other places in Iran and others. So, the Middle East is home to some of the world's most valuable resources, particularly oil, and gas, but its control over these resources has led to regional competition and conflict over resources.

Historically, we can think also that contemporary foreign intervention has significantly impacted the dynamics of the Middle East. Military intervention and geopolitical meddling by external powers have often fueled regional instability likewise in Syria with the intervention of the Russians, Israel and others. Thus, the conflict in the Middle East has resulted in a massive refugee crisis, which has forced millions of people to flee their homes. And we have now the Syrian refugees and the Yemeni refugees, and other places are now the most very sensitive files in the Middle East.

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The challenges of the Middle East and, the presence and activities of extremist groups, such as ISIS and others, contribute to insecurity in the region. Terrorism has both regional and global implications affecting stability within and beyond the Middle East. Now, the Middle East also has a rich diversity of ethnicities and religious sects. However, this diversity has led to conflict instead of being a source of strength. The existence of ethnic and religious tensions refer to conflicts, disputes, and disagreements between different ethnic and religious groups within a society. This tension may arise due to differences in culture, values, beliefs, customs, and practices, and may be fueled by discrimination, prejudice, and stereotyping. Ethnic and religious tension can have negative consequences on social cohesion and may lead to violence, aggression, and even civil unrest in extreme cases. Many examples of recent conflict, especially now with the war in Gaza, the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi in Yemen, and the ongoing war in Syria. Moreover, we have to think about this tension, and we can see that this tension is creating instability, especially in Iraq, Yemen, and Syria, and there are numerous deaths and forced displacement of millions of people related to this conflict. Thus, it is observed that the domino effect will lead to this destabilization in neighboring countries since one country can lead to the other. It's like what happened in so many in the region. Contributing to the rise of extremist groups like ISIS and other terrorist groups, this also will be very challenging for the stability there. The question we can ask ourselves is, how are we challenging and navigating this conflict?

First, we must start and recap the deep-rooted, divided conflict. And what is the root, the deep-root cause for all this? Why do we research it all? Why the conflict between Sunni, Shiite, Christians, and Jews in the Middle East? We need to acknowledge the challenges in navigating the region's complex dynamics, and to call for increased understanding and respect among different groups in the Middle East to promote peace and stability to navigate.

So, when dealing with complex problems, it's essential to consider all relevant factors and stakeholders. A comprehensive approach can significantly lead to the best possible outcome when a narrow or simplistic approach will not cut it. This means that it's necessary to include essential details and address the underlying.

Different aspects of the issues identify possible solutions and evaluate their feasibility, as well as potential impact such as we need all to have to promote the role of human rights and the crucial role of economic growth as a preventative measure against radicalism. We can think of poverty as the catalyst for radicalization. And here I want to also emphasize how the role of education is important to respect culture and religious diversity. And how we have to start with

this is with early teaching of empathy, tolerance, and respect. For example, the impacts of Saudi Arabia's strategy for 2030 on school curriculum. Now all the books in Saudi Arabia, are changed to be more tolerant and to teach the students at an early age about tolerance and respect.

Here I need to touch the important word of secularism because there is a common misconception in Arabic where the word secularism is often mistaken for atheism, like they don't believe in God, leading to tension. So, the importance of promoting secularism as a way to acknowledge and respect individual beliefs and differences. To illustrate this, we can use Türkiye as an example because it is a secular country that values its constitution and women's rights while allowing people to express their faith freely. And there is a famous Turkish TV series called The Cranberry Sherbet. It's top-rated in Arabic countries. This show addresses the challenge of having secular and conservative families in Turkish society. But the message of the series is clear. It's a secular society. Everyone is free to choose their belief, but they must also respect the laws and regulations put in place by the government, and putting the love of your country and the Republic first is essential, more important than your religion.

So, encouraging peaceful dialogue and negotiation to resolve conflict, and additionally teaching non-violent acts to stop aggression and violence against other groups should be incorporated into schools from an early age. Let's not forget that social media is very difficult with hate speech. We must campaign against it and promote building bridges. We need to involve more regional leaders, religious people, international organizations, civil society groups, women groups, and youth, to create more awareness and promote interface and acknowledgment among the public. They should build bridges between nations instead of using religions for their own gain. We must commit to dialogue, conflict resolution mechanisms, and promoting stability for long-term solutions. However, this approach will only work if we involve civil society, women, and youth. I recall the words of Pope Francis in his famous speech, let us build a bridge network. Walls can divide us; bridges can put us together. And the only way we can have stability is if we can have more dialogue among nations, among people to people, and we need to focus on public diplomacy, which is very important in the Middle East. Public diplomacy is a university to talk together, an academic think tank, and civil society so yes, it is complicated in our region but giving civil society academics more space is a key to a brighter future.

Keywords: The Middle East, instability, conflict, radicalization, secularism, foreign intervention, economic problems, regional tension.

AMERICAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE MIDDLE EAST

Prof. Magdalena KUMELSKA-KONIECKO²

Abstract

Strategic special relations have been developing since the late 40 last century and they last till the present day. According to American strategists, ensuring Israel's securities guarantees the security of the Middle East region and also protects American interests, including ensuring the interrupted flow of energy resources and fighting with asymmetric threats such as international terrorism, the spread of weapons of massive destruction, and fighting against the regime of rough states. The attack of Hamas on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent massive IDF military campaign in the Gaza Strip as well as the accompanying regional repercussions call into question the effectiveness of the US Middle East strategy.

It can be, therefore, said that the US and Israel Special Alliance do not contribute to the stabilization of the regional security, and it also poses a threat to Middle East American interests. Israel's recognition of the collective responsibility of the Palestinians for the act of terror committed by Hamas is a violation of international humanitarian law. Since the beginning of the war in the Gaza Strip, over 24,000 people have died, including 9,000 children. 70,000 buildings were destroyed, including internationally protected schools, hospitals, mosques, and churches. 1.9 million people have been forced to leave their homes and 2.2 million people are at risk of hunger. The scale of Israel's military operation in the Gaza Strip and the intensification of Israeli settlers' violence against Palestinians in the West Bank contributes to the escalation of tensions between Israel and its antagonists. It also radicalizes the activity of non-state actors. Moreover, Arab countries such as Egypt and Jordan that have normalized relations with Israel are beginning to lose their patience with its actions towards the Palestinians. Jordan King and President al-Sisi expressed their opposition to Israel's actions, demanded an immediate ceasefire, and developed peace terms. They do understand that the prolonged war directly threatened their national security. Particularly dangerous for maintaining peaceful relations with those two countries are the announcements of members of the Israeli government including Mr. Gvir and Mr. Smotrich about the relocation of Palestinians

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to the neighboring countries. Israel as a part of their right to self-defense also bombs Hezbollah positions located in Lebanon. They also carried out operations against the commanders of the Qassam Brigade, called as target killing. Israel is also taking similar actions towards Syria, bombing its territory and conducting operations against IRGC commanders. Lebanon and Syria are still unstable countries, driven by domestic problems and home to militant groups and proxies outside government control, which makes them particularly dangerous. Escalating tensions in these directions may at some point include Iran in the threat, a theatre of military operation. Although Iran has been showing so-called strategic patience since October 7, this patience may run out at some point as evidenced by the bombing in northern Iraq, where according to Iran, Mossad agents, Daesh's position in Syria and Pakistan, West Pakistan.

It cannot be forgotten that since Donald J. Trump terminated the nuclear agreement, Iran has also increased its capacity to produce highly enriched uranium, which is also a danger for the whole region, as well as Israel and the US. The complicated situation in the region is further destabilized by the activity of the Houthi movement, which as a part of the solidarity with the Palestinians are blocking traffic on the Red Sea by attacking ships heading to Israeli ports and the flags of countries who support Israel. In attempts to restore freedom of international navigation, the US established the so-called Prosperity Guardian Coalition, which in recent weeks has bombed Yemen several times. The actions of Americans, supported by the UK, have not brought any results so far, but only mobilized Houthi fighters to continue their strategies. We need to remember that Yemen and the Houthi position have been bombed by Saudi for at least eight years so far, and it does not bring any changes to that organization. The US has been providing Israel with unconditional and uncritical support since the outbreak of the war. They increased supplies of military weapons, more than 14 billion dollars in American aid, and military American aid. And they also gave Israel political support, especially among UN organizations. Supporting Israel in actions aimed primarily at civilians ruins the international image of the US, which will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild, and it threatens the safety of US military personnel in the region. American military bases, especially those located in Iraq, have been attacked more than 115 times by Shia militias since November 2023. The US must reorient its approach to Israel. They should also rebuild their overall Middle East strategy. First of all, they must lead to a permanent ceasefire and find a political solution for the Palestinian people. The prolonged war in Gaza is a threat to the interests of all parties involved. But above all, it is a moral bankruptcy of the international community.

Keywords: The US, Israel, Middle East.

THE KEY ISSUES IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Ms. Amina KHAN³

Abstract

Dynamics have changed and we have more players and new actors taking center stage. This could be a double-edged sword because we have seen a union, a unipolar approach, but now we see the Chinese entering the realm of affairs in the Middle East, which initially we thought would not be political. But after we saw the whole Iran-Saudi Arabia approach, we have seen that now it has become political as well as economic.

Now, this is a double-edged sword because it leads to diversification. It has challenged the monopoly that the Americans have been having in the larger Middle East. But this shows that there is a greater willingness within the Middle East to move towards diversification, particularly when it comes to their foreign policies. I am stressing the fact that it's a double-edged sword because diversification usually is a positive change. But, of course, it could lead to even more great power competition with both sides pressing on certain key issues. So these are major factors that one has to keep in mind.

Also, we have seen, leading to this, regional alliances. The bilateral approach within the region has seen somewhat of compartmentalization where you have seen the bilateral approach taking precedence over, say, a collective approach within the Middle East. If you see now countries have taken certain directions, and they will continue to take those directions. And again, this leads to greater power competition, and a tilt in Iran's approach more towards, say, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where its focus has slightly tilted. Again, this leads to even more competition, because when you have diversification, you would expect these processes to complement each other. But unfortunately, considering the dynamics of the region, I feel that this is going to just lead to even more competition in these alliances.

Another factor that is important is that with all these changes in dynamics and regional alliances taking place, you are inevitably giving space to transnational terrorist groups to take advantage of the situation and fill the vacuum. Now, we have seen this throughout the Middle East, but

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I'm going to even extend it, you know, when we're talking about West Asia, to say our part of the world. Trust in Gaza, these do have ramifications on the overall region, particularly in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. And this is a very important factor to keep in mind because transnational terrorist groups always take advantage of these situations. We have seen cases in my part of the world where groups are coming up and questioning not only the Muslim stance on such cases but also the Arab stance, and then obviously questioning the international community stands on fundamental and human rights because we have always seen the West being the torchbearers of such concepts. So, these concepts, in short, give space to certain transnational terrorist groups and certain actors to take advantage of the situation. And if we continue to see events unfolding in Gaza the way we are, we are inevitably giving more and more space to such groups.

Of what is happening in Gaza, the widening of the conflict. Questions of human rights and fundamental human rights have been challenged, and I think the international community and most of the Americans and Europeans have put themselves in the corner when it comes to questions of human rights and international law. Now they have given the floor to several regional actors to take unilateral actions whenever they want without facing any ramifications. Because in what authority will the international community be able to be the torchbearers of concepts like international order, international law, human rights? These are so important to keep in mind.

Moreover, when we are seeing the widening of the conflict, I have to say that Iran has, without a doubt, shown restraint. And as I said, what Madalena alluded to as strategic patience, but for how long? And, it depends on how you see the strategic patience and restraint. The widening of the conflict we also saw between Iran and Pakistan, which of course has been sorted out now. But again, you see events like this then give presidents and to other countries to take unilateral actions without facing any ramifications. And God forbid if a conflict does erupt, say in different parts of the world, what authority or role does the international community have to question one country's actions against the other?

This has added complexity to the region. Moreover, it is going to provide more fodder to groups that have always been against the West or have had complex views against the West, in terms of questioning US hegemony throughout the world. Also, I think it has raised a very important question that I think we have been questioning since the days of Iraq and Afghanistan: What is the role of the UN and how effective is it? And when we see events happening in Gaza, which I have no qualms in saying equate to genocide, it is time for the international community to

step up, not just the international community; but moreover, the Arab world. Unfortunately, all we have been hearing is calls for a ceasefire, but decisive action to prevent these events is not taking place. These are very important questions that will largely affect the future of the region.

We are seeing the Middle East divided, where again, the bilateral approach is taking precedence over a collective approach and focuses more on economics, on regional visions like the Saudi vision, the Qatari vision, where it's all economics at the end of the day. But a very important factor was the normalization of ties with Israel. I think that is another thing completely stunted. It is still very much there and it will continue. And normalization should take place, but not at the cost of the two-state solution. And again here, it is unfortunate, but this division, this one-sided approach where normalization can take place in the absence of a peace deal in Palestine, it will never work. There will be no peace unless and until this issue is resolved, even if they're focusing on economics.

By and large, I don't see, not just for the Middle East, but the greater Middle East. And this extends to my part of the world. We will continue to see even stern policies coming out. And we will continue to see more competition, more competing alliances. It's going to be difficult. I will end here, just for the sake of not repeating the points that have been made before.

Keywords: The US, Middle East, Israel, Iran, Gaza.

GREECE'S POSITION IN THE GAZA CONFLICT

Prof. Konstantinos FILIS⁴

Abstract

Based on the Abraham Accords, some Arab countries started recognizing Israel without the two-state solution and the recognition of the Palestinian state as a precondition. The Israelis felt they didn't have to do much to satisfy this part of the Arab world. They also felt the Palestinian issue could be put on pause or solved in a way. The current leadership of Israel decided to support extremists on the Palestinian side rather than the more moderate figures, probably to demonstrate that there is no Palestinian authority with which to negotiate. The Palestinian Authority based in the West Bank is weak and cannot enforce any solution to its people. Netanyahu decided to follow this path to escape the need to provide a viable solution to the Palestinian cause. Second, Israel had a feeling of complacency for reasons.

The National Security Advisor of the US, Jacob Sullivan, stated a few days before the 7th of October that the situation in the Middle East was calmer than it was during the last two decades. That was not verified only a few days after, but it proves that the Americans who have withdrawn to an extent from the region probably lack the information and access they used to have or felt, especially following the Abraham Accords, that regional actors would solve some of their issues and challenges on their own without external support. But without a solution to the Palestinian issue, this was impossible.

Arab states started recognizing the State of Israel, and there was no reason because of that for the Palestinians, for the Israelis to push further for any kind of solution. And there is not any serious initiative after the Oslo Accords. And that has been a thorn both for the international community in terms of morality, but also for the region overall and the leadership of the region. What's more, the Israelis were caught by surprise because of the political instability and polarization inside the country. They had consecutive rounds of elections. Within three years they had four elections and every other government was more extremist than the previous one. And let us not forget that there is an issue with the illegal settlements that have further sparked controversy and reaction by the Palestinians. That is not to in any way justify the heinous

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terrorist attack by Hamas on the 7th of October. And, of course, any attempt to use what Israel is doing today in Gaza as a pretext or as an alibi to express anti-Semitic feelings. But still, we have a reality now in the region I don't think that the US or US's policy, which is much more balanced today than it used to be during the last decades or at least years, has contained Iran. Iran decided that it was not going to be beneficial in any way, on the contrary, for it or for Hezbollah to be directly involved in this conflict. However, Iran's proxies do play a role, like the Houthis in Yemen, but others in Syria and in Lebanon, with these sporadic attacks against Israel.

70,000 Israelis who lived in villages close to Lebanon or others who live in villages close to the Gaza Strip, are not in their homes anymore, they have moved in other places in Israel, is the highlight of what is the internal situation in Israel when it comes to security. The current leadership of Israel plays and uses this card, this feeling of insecurity, by claiming that the ultimate goal in Gaza is to eradicate Hamas. Hamas cannot be eradicated operationally. And time works against Israel. And of course, Hamas's ideology that are deeply rooted in some Palestinians cannot be destroyed and eradicated, especially given what is happening in Gaza for 115 days already. Greece traditionally had very strong ties with the Palestinians and with the Arab world. Since the 1980s, under Andreas Papandreou's leadership, who were very close to the Arabs and very close to the Palestinians. He was a warm friend of Yasser Arafat and PLO. The State of Israel was founded in 1947, and Greece was the last Western country to recognize the State of Israel in 1990. Our relations with the Arabs and the Palestinians played a role in that respect. We were supportive of Gaddafi when Libya, was considered as terrorist or at least as sponsor of terrorism. In 1983, Andreas Papandreou convened a meeting between François Mitterrand, then President of France, and Muammar Gaddafi in Crete, to find a solution between the two for the issues that were back then problematic in the relations between France and Libya. So, we had taken some initiatives, especially in the 1980s, in bringing the Arab slash Palestinians closer to the West, or at least in being perceived as a bridge between them and the West and we have succeeded in doing so to an extent. In 2010 we started warming our ties with Israel and today we have a strategic relationship with Israel as we have with Egypt which is of course the most populous Arab country in the world but we still use our access to Israel to ask our Israeli friends to think or maybe try to follow another kind of policy to rethink about their current policy. Given that even the Americans that can pull the strings to a big extent regarding Israel are not effective in doing so. I'm not very hopeful.

Because of the upcoming presidential elections in the US, on the one hand, Joe Biden is becoming a lame duck that is a president who cannot really push for decisions and initiatives on behalf of the US. He has to take into consideration and the coming days, the coming weeks are really important for fundraising, not only for the president but also for the upcoming elections in Congress, the House of Representatives, as well. So, I feel that Netanyahu believes that this is a window of opportunity for him to take some steps, and create some precedents now that he feels that the US leadership is weak. But the same perception is probably affecting other regional players as well. They also feel that the current US leadership is weak, and they might take some initiatives to impose their interests or their will on the ground.

Keywords: Greece, the US, Israel, the Gaza Conflict.

THE EFFECTS OF THE GAZA CONFLICT ON THE SYRIAN REGIME

Dr. Amar ALKADI⁵

Abstract

This research aims to analyze how the recent conflict in Gaza affected the Syrian regime and Hezbollah regarding rebuilding their legitimacy. I will start by talking about the Arab public opinion about the Israeli war in Gaza, which explains legitimacy, this conflict can give the Syrian regime and Hezbollah. Then I will talk about the Syrian regime and how it lost its legitimacy or part of it during the civil war in Syria. Later I will talk about the Syrian regime and its attempt to rebuild its moral legitimacy during this conflict in Gaza. I will also talk about Hezbollah and its involvement in the war in Syria and how Hezbollah tries once again to be a resistant movement during this conflict in Gaza. At the end, I will have a short conclusion.

Starting with talking about Arab public opinion, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Study conducted a survey covering 16 Arab countries from December 12, 2023, to January 5, 2024, aiming to analyze Arab public opinion trends regarding the Israeli conflict over Gaza. The survey results showed that about 80% of the respondents continuously follow the news related to the Israeli war on Gaza and its development. 67% of respondents supported the military operation carried out by Hamas, considering them legitimate resistance. The survey also revealed widespread solidarity among the citizens of the Arab region with the Palestinian people in Gaza, with 92% expressing their solidarity. The results showed that 69% of the respondents stand not only in solidarity with the Palestinian people in Gaza but also with Hamas. A very important point is that the data indicates the public opinion considers the Palestinian issue an exclusively Arab issue, not limited to the Palestinian people alone, with 92% of respondents agreeing on this view. Now moving to the Syrian regime and losing its legitimacy during the civil war in Syria, over the past decades, the Syrian regime has faced significant challenges that have affected its legitimacy on domestic, regional, and international levels due to the repression and armed conflicts that erupted in the country.

Under these circumstances, it seems that the regime is seeking to exploit the ongoing event in Gaza to rebuild the moral legitimacy that was greatly damaged during the years of war. Since

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the conflict in Syria began in 2011, the Arab League suspended Syria membership in the same year, and the diplomatic relations between Damascus and several Arab countries were severed. The relationship between Hamas and the Syrian regime has also been negatively affected since the Syrian demonstration. The leadership of Hamas left Damascus in February 2012. However, in recent years, there has been a change in the Arab stand towards the Syrian regime, with some countries moving to normalize relations with it. For example, in December 2018, the United Arab Emirates reopened its embassy in Damascus, and the Kingdom of Bahrain announced in the same year the continuation of its embassy operations there. Talks have taken place between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Tunisia on one side and the Syrian regime on the other, regarding the resumption of diplomatic relations. In September 2022, Hamas also announced an official statement, the resumption of its relationship with the Syrian regime. Since the beginning of the protests in Syria, the Syrian regime has tried to portray the demands for its overthrow as a part of a Western conspiracy, aimed to weaken its role in supporting the resistant axis. The Syrian government is considered one of the main supporters of the Palestinian faction opposing Israel, providing comprehensive support to this function. Due to its geographical location adjacent to Israel, Syria has played a pivotal role in enhancing the resistance capabilities in both Lebanon and Gaza. Considering that the resistance axis extended from Iran to Lebanon, Syria forms an essential link to this security belt.

Due to this, according to the Syrian regime, the war in Syria aimed to weaken the resistance axis. During the years of war in Syria, the transfer of advanced weapons continued through what is known as the land corridor from Iran through Iraq and Syria to Lebanon, demonstrating Iran's determination to arm Hezbollah and the vital role Syria plays in this task. This role especially has contributed to renewing the legitimacy that the regime enjoyed among the Arab people, helping the Arab country, which wished to normalize relations with the Syrian regime, to continue their efforts without fear of popular rejection, giving the Arab people acceptance of the Syrian regime as a supporter of the Palestinian cause and the resistance in Lebanon.

The ongoing event in Gaza confirmed the Syrian regime's status within a resistance axis. The great popular support and the sympathy with the people of Gaza enhanced the support of many for the Syrian regime, considering it part of the resistance. This legitimacy that the regime seeks to regain is necessary for its return to the Arab fold thanks to the clear Arab popular support. Now moving to Hezbollah, Hezbollah has a very similar situation like the Syrian regime regarding the conflict in Gaza. In May 2013, Hezbollah announced its military participation in the Syrian conflict alongside President Bashar al-Assad. Since then, the party has suffered

human losses exceeding 1,000 individuals. And more important, its status as a resistant movement has declined on both the national and Arab levels, as it gradually becomes involved in a sectarian conflict with the majority in the region. Hezbollah was previously regarded as a resistant movement by a wide segment of Arab, due to its participation in several wars against Israel and its emphasis on resisting the occupier as priority. However, it's believed that its intervention in the Syrian war was to enhance the interest of the Iranian axis. The biggest loss faced by Hezbollah is the loss of popular legitimacy as a resistant movement in the Arab and the Islamic world. Amid the recent conflict between Israel and Gaza, Hezbollah sought to exploit the opportunity to regain its political legitimacy by supporting Gaza and Hamas.

Through this stance, the party aimed to regain popular sympathy in Lebanon and Syria, in addition to restoring support from a large segment of the Arab population that it lost due to its support for the Syrian regime. The party considered itself a popular resistant movement and seek to expand its mass base. Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah delivered several speeches, not only to support Gaza and its people but also to endorse the military operation on October 7 and support Hamas during the conflict. All this contributed to the party's return to its previous status before the Arab Spring as a popular resistance movement, regaining popular support in Lebanon and Syria, which gives it greater legitimacy to influence regional policies. At the end, a short conclusion. The recent conflict in Gaza has contributed to reshaping the political dynamics and power distribution in the region, leading to the formation of a new legitimacy. The widespread Arab support for Gaza and the resistance, which is considered almost complete, has paved the way for several parties to regain their political legitimacy. This renewed legitimacy could at least bring the Syrian regime and Hezbollah out of their regional isolation, enabling them to implement their policy with increasing popular support. This new legitimacy is a result for a shift in Arab public opinion, where the ongoing events in Gaza have a direct impact on the general view towards the different parties in the conflict.

Keywords: Syria, the Gaza Conflict, Israel, Hamas.

PANEL II:
ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES IN THE MENA
REGION

THE ROLE OF NGOS IN THE PATHWAYS TO LONG-TERM STABILITY IN MENA

Prof. Patrice Brodeur⁶

Abstract

This research is about a state of stability in the long term in the MENA region. There are multiple kinds of steps that need to be taken on everyone's agenda, to address how these challenges can smooth the regional well-being overall. And so let me give you some examples, first by saying that there are a variety of dynamics that I will call glocal in the sense that many of the local actors that are promoting sort of peaceful, dialogical, respectful sort of dialogue over very deep at times differences, trying to sort of sift what similarities exist among different identities, whether ethnic, religious, national, or ideological. When this occurs, there is an urgency to humanize relationships today, given the context of war impacting various regions directly, particularly Gaza and others in the area to varying degrees. What I want to convey is the complementarity between local, national, and regional initiatives and the involvement, funding, and assistance from the international community for initiatives in the MENA region. Understanding this as complementary, rather than an intrusion from the international community into the region, is crucial. Much of the funding for these activities comes from those who share an identity with the region's identities, whether on a national or international level religious or ideological. Therefore, many of the participants and helpers internationally to the MENA region are doing so because they are also binational, sharing a sort of Western often, as well as maybe other regions of the world and one country or another in the Middle East. Therefore, there's complementarity in how civil society is organized through NGOs officially and through FBOs, faith-based organizations that are connecting religious organizations to prevent further dehumanization of discourses regarding differences both intra-religiously and inter-religiously. It's important to recognize the leadership of many of the religious leaders taking place in the region towards that end, despite the tense situation now, to say the least.

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Some organizations are working internationally in the region. KIC, the International Dialogue Centre, is now based in Lisbon and has a particular Arab region program wing. They have been involved in addressing issues of hate speech online, training social influencers, especially younger people, and providing in-person training on dialogical skills for the MENA region. These elements are inclusive of all religious diversity in Arab countries. Initiatives across the Mediterranean, involving Israelis at times, include a fellowship program with an international wing that includes people from the region. Many examples of people trained in these programs, with over 100 of these young people trained in dialogical skills, can be found on the website. In best practices, as well as in the fellowship of the CAICID website, these are often local initiatives that are trying their best to keep to the importance of maintaining dialogue between people of different religious, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds in the local context. These include people from almost all of the MENA regions at the moment. The second example I want to give is more from a Lebanese perspective. Initially, it's ADIAN, and they work primarily in Lebanon, but also in the region as well as a little bit in Europe. ADIAN has female leadership now and they're involving many women on an equal basis in their participation in promoting respectful dialogue that emphasizes the importance of providing better education that teaches people about citizenship and common citizenship as an alternative to considering some religious communities or ethnic groups as minorities within national frameworks. Rather than focusing on minority-majority dynamics, they emphasize sharing a common citizenship that requires all people living in a country to better understand and work together. This enhances the quality and respect in interactions from the local to the national to the regional level. Another example is seen in Syria and the Syrian diaspora, with activities taking place in Gaziantep, Türkiye. This includes Tastaqil, an Arabic-speaking, woman-led civil society organization addressing racism, inter-religious dialogue, and inter-ethnic dialogue to promote peace by embracing the diversity of Syrian identities tangibly.

One more example is the development of several Gulf countries. Soft power that promotes regionally and internationally peaceful dialogue, including the production of important international declarations that center on the notion of respect for human dignity and human rights, as well as security for all people from all sides, regardless of the countries in which people live or the religious identities they may have. For example, the older country to have developed this approach is Georgia with two different centers. Alel Beit Foundation is one of the oldest. Because of the challenges of waves of refugees that they've been dealing with for decades now, including several Palestinian waves, they have been at the forefront of promoting

a respectful and constructive approach to peaceful and constructive dialogues to integrate their own Christian-Muslim population, but also to basically respond to the challenge of living in peace with Israel through eventually an accord, which we all know about several years ago, and now being challenged by the current situation anew. The United Arab Emirates, with the Muslim Council of Elders at the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque, led to the common fraternity document, the Human Fraternity document of Pope Francis, and the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. These are international but originate from soft power in the MENA region. Additionally, efforts are coming out of Oman, a primarily Ibadite state - therefore neither Sunni nor Shiite - that also fosters Christian-Muslim relations, including Jewish communities recently. The Abrahamic Accord is primarily based on an economic perspective without involving Palestinians, requiring more Palestinian involvement and addressing civil society, and policy development, to enhance dialogical training in the educational system and policy-making on all levels of nation-state societies.

Keywords: MENA, Civil Society Organization, Regional Stability, International Community.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE MENA REGION

Amb. Prof. Heinrich KREFT⁷

Abstract

The MENA region is very diverse and can be segmented in various ways, with defining characteristics being fossil fuel availability and native population size. This segments the region into three groups: resource-rich and labor-abundant countries like Algeria, Iraq, and Syria; resource-rich but labor-importing countries like the GCC countries and Libya; and resource-poor countries, some with large populations like Egypt and others like Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, and Palestine. The MENA region is facing major economic, social, political, and environmental challenges today and definitely over the next decade to come. These challenges include financial pressures from long-term downward trends in global energy prices, competitive pressures from advances in digitalization, increased water supply scarcity, rural-urban migration, resulting also from climate change, and the greater labor supply measures due to demographic trends. And job creation remains a top priority mainly in all countries of the region. We have a very young population, mainly in all countries. We have huge underemployment, in some cases up to 50% of those between 15 and 24 years of age, are unemployed or at least underemployed, as in the case of Palestine, where the regional average is 25%. There are also a couple of governance deficits. We have weak public institutions. We have a fraught state-citizen relationship. We have exclusionary economic systems, and of course, we have fragile interstate relations. So, what the region needs is a new developmental paradigm, including emphasizing incremental improvements over major reforms, enhancing transparency and accountability, and creating space for meaningful citizen participation. Fighting corruption is another issue, strengthening the rule of law is essential for economic growth and development. In many countries, we still have a bloated public sector which has distorted the labor markets and crowded out private entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship in general is relatively low in most MENA countries compared with other countries and regions across the globe. Migration issues persist, both within and into the region, particularly into the GCC countries, mainly from Asia, including Indonesia, the Philippines, and India. However,

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migration out of the region, such as from Syria into Türkiye and Europe, has also been observed in recent years. Food and fuel price volatility have always been issues, especially in countries lacking fossil fuels and those struggling to feed their populations, like Egypt and Lebanon, which have been particularly affected by grain shortages from Ukraine and Russia. Trade diversification and intra-regional trade remain low, and energy transition is a significant issue for the region. However, there are also the opportunities. Taking the demographic situation in the region into account, a young population offers great potential as a market and a labor force. The average median age is 25 years (in Europe, above 40 years). Renewable energies also have potential in the region to become a very important economic activity. Of course, in those fossil fuel-rich countries who have the capital to invest in the production of hydrogen. But it's also an option for sun-rich countries, all of which are sun-rich, so there is huge potential for photovoltaic. The entire North African region, for example, from Egypt through Morocco, has high potential here, also because of its neighborhood to Europe, which will need imports of energy either in the form of electricity or in the form of hydrogen in the years to come because of the energy transition going on in Europe. There is also significant potential in manufacturing and services, including tourism, not only in countries that have always been tourism targets like Egypt but also in Morocco and the GCC countries that have attracted tourism in the past. Another opportunity comes from the diversification of trade and political partners. We have seen, over the last couple of years, the emergence of two major economic and political powers in the region: China and India. China has brought Iran and Saudi together and the US will probably continue to stay in the region. Some believed the US, becoming self-sufficient in energy and even exporting energy, might lose interest in the region, but I think this is not the case. The growing role of China in the region is a significant reason, but the US also brought Israel and some Arab countries together. The Abrams Accords were struck by the attack of Hamas on Israel and Israel's response by invading Gaza, which not only halted progress but also strained the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi. The attacks of the Houthis in international waters, attacking ships in the Red Sea, have posed a particular challenge to many countries in the region and particularly to Egypt, which is heavily dependent on the Suez Canal and the revenue it generates. So far, we have not seen a further escalation. This has been avoided, but urgently we need a ceasefire. And a two-state solution is the only way to resolve the conflict in the long term, which of course has to guarantee the security of both, the security of Israel and the security of Palestinians.

Keywords: Challenges, Opportunities, MENA, Israel, Palestinians.

ISRAEL PUBLIC DIPLOMACY, NEW STRATEGIES AND PROPAGANDA TECHNIQUES

Assoc. Prof. Ahmet KESER⁸ & PhD Student Mjgan GNEŖ⁹

Abstract

This text examines Israel's approach to public diplomacy, focusing on prioritizing strategic communication and diplomacy since the inception of statehood in the Middle East. To establish a comprehensive framework for Israel's public diplomacy, the study initially provides a historical overview of Israel's past in strategic communication and diplomacy. Drawing from existing literature, the study investigates the correlation between strategic communication and public diplomacy, Israel's presumed influential political history in public diplomacy, the key actors, and practices influencing Israel's public diplomacy. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the functioning of Israeli diplomacy during the conflict between Israel and Palestine that commenced on October 7, 2023. The study concludes that Israel's public diplomacy has exhibited notable success in economic, cultural, technological, scientific research, and lobbying engagements with various stakeholders. However, the research exposes a shift in Israel's public diplomacy during the conflict period from October 7. It moved away from the characteristics of reciprocity, bidirectionality, and the utilization of soft power in strategic communication and public diplomacy. Instead, this phase witnessed a unilateral approach employing aggressive propaganda, diverging from a security-centric approach.

Keywords: Israel, Public Diplomacy, Strategic Communication, Propaganda.

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SYRIA AS A NEGLECTED AND FORGOTTEN PROBLEM AFTER 13 YEARS OF CIVIL WAR

Dr. Samir M. SEIFAN¹⁰

Abstract

Syria is one of the most complicated problems in the Middle East and possibly in the world after 13 years of civil wars. Naturally, what happens in the Middle East impacts Europe, as waves of immigration drive the rise of right-wing movements, so it is crucial to find a solution to the conflict in the Middle East to also help Europe. Syria, after 13 years, is neglected and forgotten as a problem. This is typical of long-term conflicts, as the world is rife with conflicts. Therefore, we aim to shift the conversation away from past events to focus on the future, looking ahead to the next decade regarding Syria. We initiated this project with the Center for Conflict Resolution and Humanitarian Work in Doha. We both belong to the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha, led by Dr. Bishara. Firstly, we compiled a report on the situation in Syria itself. As, Syria is divided into four controlled areas: one by the regime, one by the PYD, affiliated with the PKK, one by what is known as the opposition or the national army, supported by Türkiye, and the Hayyut Tahrir al-Sham in Idlib. Currently, in Syria, there are five million internally displaced persons, six million refugees in neighboring countries, and around one and a half to two million immigrants abroad, in Europe, Australia, the United States, etc. The situation is worsening, especially in the areas controlled by the regime, with people leaving daily. This has resulted in severe damage to the Syrian population, not only through bombings, killings, arrests, and disappearances but also due to many Syrians permanently fleeing the country. Those who have left Syria for Europe, the United States, etc., are unlikely to return. Currently, there are around 13 million Syrians, both in and outside Syria, who need assistance. Moreover, 80% of the population within Syria lives below the poverty line. They are poor people, armed. So, it is very complicated. There are four armies in the Syrian territories: Türkiye, Russia, Iran, United States. And there are hundreds of military points, so this is a full report. We're prepared to understand the situation in Syria. And we prepared paper policies about the key players of the Syrian conflict. This means the key players are Türkiye,

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Iran, Russia, the United States, Israel, GCC, and Europe. So, because they are impacting the future of Syria and the Syrians themselves as a people, we lost every power, every impact because there isn't any organization that can play a role, can say any word in the name of the Syrian people. We did two seminars about scenarios. And we agreed on four scenarios. We're expecting four scenarios in the coming 10 years in Syria, either or. The first scenario is the so-called do-nothing scenario. This means the situation is frozen, staying as it is now for several years, five years, or more, or 10 years we don't know, so this means there isn't an assumption for this scenario, there isn't any real change in the relation between the powers controlling Syria or involving in Syria, and there isn't any change on the ground, just the situation is deteriorating. In this case, the refugees will stay outside Syria. People will continue leaving Syria forever. The situation on the economic and social side is always deteriorating, etc. ISIS is still in Syria and there is a possibility to grow or not till now, especially if the Americans withdraw from Syria. This is the first scenario. We analyzed this scenario in detail the impact of this scenario from different aspects and what's the standpoint of all key players from this scenario. The second scenario is the withdrawal of the Americans from Syria. So, in 2019, Trump issued an order to withdraw from Syria. And after that, this order is frozen because the CIA and Pentagon stand against this decision. In the last few days, we heard there is a discussion in Washington about this issue. They discuss this issue every year. But today, there is news that there is an agreement between Iraq and the United States to put a plan to withdraw from Iraq, perhaps within some years. If the United States withdraws from Iraq, the United States withdraws from Syria. Now, this is another scenario, if the United States withdraws from Syria, the PYD will go directly to the regime to protect themselves from Türkiye because Türkiye is considering this area as a threat to national security. So, to protect themselves, because now they're the Americans, if the Americans withdraw, they will go to the regime. The regime will control this area, which is around 25% of the Syrian territory. This area is an area of oil production, wheat, and agriculture. It is a rich area; The Russian troops will go there. That's why there are Russian troops now. This is one scenario. Türkiye, on one side, has an interest in this scenario because the possibility for PYD to build a kind of sovereignty area or a semi-independent area in Syria will disappear. However, on the other side, this scenario will create pressure on Türkiye, where Türkiye is controlling three areas, so-called Dar al-Qurat, Nab al-Salam, and another area. It will create pressure on Türkiye. In this case, Türkiye could jump to negotiate with the regime to find a kind of normalization of the relationship between the two countries. Türkiye is keen to make some special arrangements for these three areas, which are controlled by Türkiye these days. There are a lot of details in this scenario. We can discuss them in the future in detail. This

can provide part of the solution, but it is not the right solution. A large part of the Syrian population is not happy with this solution because it keeps al-Assad in power, although al-Assad committed humanitarian crimes. The third scenario could be a scenario together between Türkiye and GCC. GCC started their project so-called step-by-step, but it was not a successful project because the regime was not ready to move any step toward what it wanted, so it froze. But there is an idea. If Türkiye jumps with GCC and develops a full solution like Geneva and pastes it to resolution 2254, this means finding a kind of sharing in power between the regime position and the society but keeping the most powerful part in this new agreement for the regime. And there is no veto against Al-Assad. Al-Assad will continue. This is one of the scenarios. In this scenario, Türkiye finds some interest. In all cases, naturally, this scenario, if developed as a full scenario, must convince the United States, they must convince Russia, they have to convince Iran, and then put pressure on the regime to put it in the ground. This scenario, in this case, if based on 2254, means all international troops, other troops, and foreign troops, will withdraw from Syria. It provides part of the solution, but it is not, as I said, the same solution. So, this is another scenario. This scenario could happen between two to four years, perhaps not now. The withdrawal of Iran as a scenario could be next year, we don't know. This depends on. So, what if Trump, for example, wins this election in the United States and decides to withdraw from Iraq? And the last scenario is what's so-called the Syrian hope. And the Syrian hope, will not come before five to seven years. The assumptions need a lot of assumptions, a new atmosphere in the relationship between Russia and the United States. We support the end of the war in Ukraine. The war against Gaza will create something new for the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian state. And there is some development that the world needs to make stability in the area, etc. So, if these conditions, which are very difficult now, happen, we will find a kind of political transfer from this regime now to a new regime, to a regime without al-Assad. This is the first scenario we are discussing. We have prepared a report about this scenario, about this project, and we are still discussing this report and scenarios. And we are going to have seminars in several capitals like Ankara, Berlin, Paris, London, etc., to discuss this scenario again. The aim is to push the discussion about Syria to discuss the future instead of just discussing the past, to present the Syrian issue to the minds of the international community instead of forgetting it as it is now.

Keywords: Syria, Civil War, Humanitarian Crisis, Key Players.

PANEL III:

**CONTRADICTIONS OF CONTEMPORARY
POLITICAL THINKING IN HANDLING THE MIDDLE
EAST**

FROM CONFLICT MANAGEMENT TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Amb. Doru COSTEA¹¹

Abstract

At the end of the day, whoever looks at the history of the Middle East, and particularly the history of the Middle East conflicts, would note that there are hardly any new things happening right now. They somehow repeat themselves. This view is found in many analyses and articles coming from the region. Therefore, I suggest to you, and I'm ready to offer for your attention and very harsh criticism, a slightly different approach. I'd like to draw a parallel between two wars that are happening in our respective areas. I will start by emphasizing that the awareness of the Middle East's strategic significance has been a reality since the beginning of the world's history, even when the world was much smaller. Forever, the roots of this significance have been a blend of economic components and trade within and outside the area. The region has been a source and a target of military campaigns and, finally, a source of products of the human mind, mostly under the guise of religion. Moving on to more recent times, each war of the 20th century changed the landscape of the region, and its surrounding areas as well, in dramatic and most consequential ways. And many of those events are still with us nowadays. The transformation caused by the end of the Cold War in the MENA region is hard to underestimate because of the earth-breaking consequences of this rupture in the continuum of the region's history. One of the two ideological giants that had been vying for the allegiance of different states in the area vanished. And a new era of cooperation seemed to rise both within the region and between the region and the rest of the world. What did not change, however, was the overall significance of the Middle East. Quite the contrary, this significance has markedly increased. And so did the diversification of the local actors in terms of their quest for consolidating their national identities and asserting their aspirations for unhindered development and emancipation. Lately, a relative newcomer arrived who belongs to the so-called class of global player, and that is China. Now, moreover, non-state actors have entered the mix.

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A collision course with said national identities, the increasing relevance of the local realities impacted developments in the international landscape of security. The outcome of this process is visible in this century. So, the balance between the external factors and the local factors tilted somehow in favor of the local factors. The geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Eastern and Southeastern Europe and the Middle East hardly need any further development. The well-known arc of crisis has been mentioned repeatedly and included either one area or the other or both. Now, there is a connection between these two arcs and the lynchpin is the Black Sea. The region that Romania belongs to has also changed dramatically. And it is worth noting that the changes in Romania and the Middle East were not very far away, just a decade or so. And consequently, we may speak about or look at the results of these changes. There are similarities between them, and one of them, which is somehow neglected, is that the processes I was talking about changed the governance systems in those countries, in all of them, to a lesser or greater extent, to success.

But the system of governance was never the same as it used to be before this process started. So, there is a new reality here. But this reality is already changing. Two years of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and almost five months of unprecedented violence and destruction, including civilian deaths on both sides, of the Hamas-Riga-De Khaza war seem to have pushed these two arcs of crisis on a course leading to the emerging into a plausible single and much wider crisis. Of course, there are differences between the two worlds. However, some very interesting similarities range from causes of the ongoing military and non-military operations to immediate and long-term effects and uncertain prospects for resolutions and configurations of how the day after may look like a very quick list of these changes I will just enumerate one causes are of these conflicts are unsolved or half-settled crisis that had been inherited in time. And their background is poly-crisis. Two, immediate effects exceed the conventional borders of the areas that are subject to war operations. Three, the input of non-state actors is increasing. Fourth, the fighting itself is a full costume rehearsal of the war of the future thinking about hybrid operations, cyber war, and the outsize role of the information war. Five, the parties that started the wars aim at causing wide-reaching changes to the opposition including the very statehood of the respective parties. Six, other states are heavily involved that are not facing each other on the battlefield.

Warring parties have become dependent on third parties in military and non-military terms. An outside factor includes visible reliance on political developments elsewhere, both present and soon, that are supposed, probably, to facilitate the war coming to an end. The most visible

example, of course, is the American presidential elections. UN efforts to stop the wars have been largely irrelevant. Equally irrelevant have been the efforts of plurilateral and multilateral formats that were supposed to deal with the original crisis. Solutions to both wars seem to be unobtainable because they are flatly rejected by the parties involved without any other possibility. So, compromise is the only way out, but then again in this sense, a ceasefire takes the front face first because of the humanitarian crisis. Compromises mean temporary solutions at best, and the no-war situation has proved to lead to no peace at all. These wars are meant or bound to bring about a new reality. There are more uncertainties of how this new reality will look like than certainties. Like late Rumsfeld used to say, the unknown unknowns and the known unknowns. The unknowns that we know are on a much longer list. Perhaps new thinking is needed to deal with this crisis and start building this new reality. For instance, one obvious thing is that this new reality would bring about new regional security arrangements because the reality wouldn't have been changed by then. So, there is a paradox here. We have old problems that need to be solved or settled by new solutions. And then who would come with these new solutions? Perhaps a new generation of leaders. There are examples already here and there, and during our tour, and our conference, we heard one of the participants mention even a name for such a new leader. So, this brings me to the end. The Middle East proper and the MENA region itself cannot be left aside from the quest to find the right answer to the challenge of the new reality. No longer is here the time. When others came and said, "All right, this is it, you do it, and we will have peace."

It didn't work in the past very well. It won't work tomorrow. Therefore, ownership may be regional, local ownership may be the key to this. Mind you, this truth, if it is true, cannot be separated from the global environment. Hence, the necessity to achieve this solution, this local ownership, is because of cooperation among players from various parts of the world. This means that habitual language and concepts that we are accustomed to, that focus on mutual recrimination and finger-pointing, are hardly of any use. We need to think forward to take steps forward. Conflict management, which used to be the keyword here, is no longer valid. It must be replaced by conflict resolution. And not any resolution, but a durable one. A wise leader in the area used to say that peace is made among the courageous. I think that valor must be highly prized, particularly outside the battlefield.

Keywords: Middle East, Conflict Resolution, Strategic Significance, Conflict Management.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE REGIONAL ORDER IN THE MENA REGION

Prof. Murat YEŞİLTAS¹²

Abstract

I have three questions. First of all, I think we need to understand how we should make sense of the Middle East security complex landscape. I have been thinking about this question since the Arab uprising in 2011 but of course, I have been modifying my thesis, and my explanations about the changing nature of the Middle East security complex because the region, I think, has been significantly changing since the Arab uprising. So we have witnessed a couple of turning points since the Arab uprising. Now, I think we have a different era in terms of understanding, explaining, and anticipating the future of the Middle East, especially in the post-October 7th regional landscape is dramatically different compared to the pre-October 7th. So, therefore, first, we need to understand this question. The second one is basically about what are the new features of the new regional security landscape in the Middle East. Because of this transformation, it's very active, it's very dynamic. So, therefore, it's difficult to understand a very dynamic process to anticipate the future of the Middle East.

The third question that I will try to explain in my speech is basically about the future of the Middle East. What kind of features the Middle East looks like so it's really important because understanding the current dynamics is, I think, helping at the same time understand the future of the Middle East, which is important for the transformation of the international system because it is not possible to separate Middle East region from the transformation in the international system because Transformation in the Middle East is the manifestations of the transformation in the international politics. So, when we look at international politics, there is also a significant transformation there, especially within the context of the return of great power politics and the rise of technology as a very important dynamic in the international system. Other changes in the international system will ultimately shape the very nature of the regional order in the Middle East. So, I have three concepts to understand. And to test what kind of evolution or transformation in the Middle East we have, the first one is basically about change.

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Change is an evolutionary process. We have been witnessing different turning points in terms of understanding the evolutionary nature of the developments of Middle Eastern politics since the end of the Cold War. So, therefore, when we look at the dynamics around change, we have important variables to argue that there is a change in the Middle Eastern security order. The second concept to understand the puzzle of transformation is the transformation itself, the concept of transformation. Transformation is different than of change and it's a very dynamic process and it is, dynamic process in which different webs of interactions in the Middle East context have been transforming so Arab uprisings, for example, made a huge transformative effect or impact on the regional security architecture in the Middle East. Number three as a concept is rupture.

This is important because we are at a very different stage, which is not comparable with the previous waves of transformation in the Middle East. If we see a revolutionary rupture in the Middle East, probably we will have a different regional order in the upcoming years. So what kind of transformation we can understand in the Middle East? Is it a change? Is it an evolutionary process? Is it a transformation? Or is it a rupture that is taking place in the Middle East at this stage, at this moment? So to understand what kind of process we have been experiencing now, we need to look at the units in the Middle East, especially in terms of their different structures terms of differentiation of units, so we have states, non-state actors, terrorist organizations, violent non-state armed actors, and external actors, but there are different types of actors in the region so we need to look at how these actors are transforming or changing through the impact of different developments. So the second, I think, layer is about the number of units. So if we can understand, if we can rightly grasp the number of units, we can make sense of the transformation or change or rupture in the Middle East. Another point I think that we need to take into consideration is the patterns of amity and enmity in the early post-Cold War era in the Middle East. The nature of amity and enmity was different today we have a different conceptualization in analyzing the relationship between amity and enmity. Syria, I think, is the textbook example to see how the interactions between the discourse of enmity and the enmity have been changing. So when you look at Iraq, it gives us also a striking example to see the changing dynamics of enmity-enmity relations. Of course, as a structural dynamic, we need to also look at the distribution of power to understand what kind of polarity we have at the current stage of Middle Eastern politics or in the next stage, what kind of polarity or power structure we will have in the upcoming years. All these variables, I think, are important

to understand today's dynamic and to anticipate the future. So what I can see about all these dynamics to understand the current state of security in the Middle East.

Number one, I think, is about questioning borders. So, this is the manifestation of the Arab uprising from Libya or from Tunisia to Yemen. We have a process of questioning borders, which is happening in at least two different directions. One is about the function of borders, and the features of border function. The borders are losing their function and meaning, such that in many parts of the region, they have been rendered irrelevant due to the movement of refugees, militants, arms, and other supplies across borders beyond the control and regulation of legal authorities. The second point about questioning borders is a challenge that is coming from the bottom up against internationally recognized borders. Syria is a good example, Iraq, and Yemen. There are other examples. Of course, Libya has the same problems about the different dynamics of the demarcations of the border.

The second point about the new feature of the Middle East is about the erosion of sovereignty, authority, and governance. We have been witnessing the decline of state sovereignty in the Middle East, especially the proliferation of non-state armed actors has been very influential in undermining state sovereignty, and authority within borders. And of course, we have also been witnessing the decline of the governance model in terms of the nation-state level. We have the same problem in Syria. We have the same problem of a different nature in Libya. Iraq has the same problem. Yemen has the same problem. There are a lot of countries in the MENA region that have a problem of governance or a lack of global governance. Contrary to the decline of governance or good governance model, we have been witnessing the rise of the non-state governance model in different contexts. When you look at Syria, for example, there are at least four types of governance models. HDS has a different organizational model. Syrian National Army has different terrorist organizations. YPG and PYD have different organization models. And Iran-backed Shia militias have different orders. At the end of the day, the Syrian state, I think, has been losing its governance model, which will ultimately shape the future of Syria as well.

Number three, I think, is basically about the empowerment of sub-national actors and identities. So, the Arab Uprising, I think, is a key development to see how these sub-national actors and identities are influencing the very nature of the interactions of different sub-state groups from Tunisia to Yemen.

We see the increasing role of subnational actors and identities in Northern Iraq, for example. Traditionally, of course, we label Iraq as the crystallization of the Middle East. However, Northern Iraq has emerged again as a network of different subnational groups in which they have conflicting interests and priorities when it comes to Iraqi politics. Therefore, to understand how the regional security architecture has been changing, we need to examine the impact of the rise of sub-national groups. Number four, the final point of the new features of the regional security architecture is the structural instability. We still have problems with stability, but these are all related to structural instability. We do not have a comprehensive state structure in the MENA region, and different countries face different problems. External interventions are still important. The remobilization of non-state armed actors, especially in the post-October 7th era, indicates that structural instability is the main reason for the unstable security order in the region. As a consequence, I believe we have different sectors of security that we need to consider to understand the future. I think the number one issue is state insecurity. There are countries that do not have adequate security, and we also see regime insecurity in different countries in the region. Interstate insecurity is still an important factor for the regional security architecture, and we also have societal concerns.

And human insecurity, especially after the Israeli aggression in Gaza. So, we saw that the increasing importance and the impact of societal and human insecurity, as far as we know, more than 20,000, 4,000, something like that, the humans lost their lives because of the Israeli aggression in Gaza. So, still, human insecurity is the main driving factor to mobilize different non-state armed actors. So, as a consequence, I think we need to understand how these different types of insecurities will shape the nature of the Middle East. When we look at the last two decades, there were attempts to restructure the regional order in the Middle East. All of them, I think, have failed. This is important. I mean, for example, when we look at the MESA, Middle East Strategic Alliance, which was created in 2017, it failed, right? When we look at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in the Persian Gulf, Russia, was announced in 2019, it has also failed. So, when we look at other initiatives, such as Hormuz Peace Endeavor, which was developed and promoted by Iran in 2012, it has also failed because of the weakness of this initiative, the image of Iran, the absence of trust-building mechanism, the lack of roadmap or Iranian proxy strategy, and the final initiative was the Abraham Accords or regional normalization. And it again failed simply because of the gap between realities on the ground and the desired strategic objectives.

So, there were really, important gaps between the questions on the ground, such as the Palestinian problem, the Syrian problem, the Houthi problem, or the Yemen problem, and the problems in Libya. There was a huge gap, and the political leadership in the region ignored the realities on the ground. This is the reason why we experienced a Hamas attack against Gaza. It was believed that Hamas was contained, and the Abraham Accords should not necessarily be based on the Palestinian issue. However, we saw the importance of the Palestinian issue as the main political, security, or military issue in the region. Therefore, now, I think in the post-October 7th era, we have to think about three alternatives for the future of the Middle East from a systemic perspective.

The first alternative is a unipolar Middle East, a distribution of power which one state exercises most of the geostrategic, economic, and military influence. I don't think this is the likely scenario. The second option is a multipolar Middle East, a distribution of power in which more than two states have nearly equal amounts of military, geostrategic, and economic influence. It is a likely scenario because of the regional countries' quest for being influential actors on the regional level. The third alternative is a non-polar Middle East, with dozens of actors possessing and exercising various kinds of power. I'm not sure which one will be the case for the future of the Middle East, but in the post-October 7th era, we are witnessing a remobilization of non-state armed actors.

Before October 7th, there was a process between the Houthis and Yemen, and the Houthis and Saudi Arabia, in an attempt to reach an agreement. There was also a process between Saudi Arabia and Israel, and a process of normalization between Israel and Türkiye. All of them have ended. Now we have to look at how these new processes will impact the future of the Middle East. Will it be a unipolar Middle East? Yes, it is a likely scenario, considering the United States' re-engagement and its changing military priorities in the Middle East, but it will be very difficult for the United States to fully control the Middle East. A multipolar solution may be a desired political solution in the Middle East.

Keywords: Middle East, Israel, Türkiye, the US, Regional Order.

THE MIDDLE EAST BETWEEN WISDOM AND EMOTIONS

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Murat ASLAN¹³

Abstract

What I have observed from the literature and also developments in the region, we have two different poles of ideas. The first is emotion-based arguments, either in a negative or positive way. And another one is wisdom-based. So, what is the difference and how can we benefit from either of them or how can we prevent the escalations by just having these two poles under control, because that's important. International politics is something once a state or non-state actor claims any emotional narrative or starts an act on October 7th is one. At a counterattack, a counter-act, on the other hand, is another either emotional or wisdom-based undertaking, and it goes to somewhere that you can't control, and you can't step back. And today, interestingly, International Court of Justice took a decision, and announced it.

It was purely objective, mechanical, like mathematics. That means on one side emotions, on the other side, well, wisdom and mechanics are in charge of interpreting the events. So, my wisdom is to start a discussion. Maybe to scrutinize a proposal, which is, if there is a strategy making mechanism of state or non-state actors in concluding a decision, and once they are much more inclined to emotions of negative attitudes, well, maybe inspired by the popular narratives. Well, it's something that they can't revert back.

The Middle East is one area, not only the state or non-state actors of the regions, but also global powers are engaging. And once they leave, this emotional state, once they feel that they are stuck to this emotional stance, well, the events are not under control and proceeding by itself with a lot of disasters. So, then my research question in this proceeding should be how we can build up a wisdom to have much more consistent security or political decisions, maybe to address the political situations.

Because the scope of wisdom is really important because it must lean on data. It must lean on a calculated course of actions. It must lean on the capacities you have for assessing the collateral effects that you may cause. In this sense, once you portray the conflicts in the Middle

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East and North Africa, we have many. Starting from the Sahel region up until to Iran's Baluchistan, well, I counted it, it's just like 20s. If you add another one, it's up north in Russia. And we can't assume that Russia provoked the, violence in the Middle East. We don't have any proof on the other these violations are interrelated because once anything happens in the Middle East it's for the benefit of Russians or the other actors.

In this sense, I believe we are mostly dealing with Gaza and Yemen nowadays but it's beyond. Another issue, as both of the speakers rightly mentioned, now we have states and also non-state actors in the region and they are influential in driving the communities. Sometimes they are de facto state entities, even though they are not state, and sometimes.

They strictly limit the access of the other institutions or states into the region. In this sense, emotions and wisdom are not engagements or activities of only state actors, especially in defining or describing what's going on in the Middle East. And that's why fragility is at hand. On the other hand, expansion of the conflicts in the region will always be a probability because emotions weigh more in comparison to wisdom. If we check the literature, well, negative emotions are usually concluded with conflicts of many sorts. Positive emotions are usually for internal publics, maybe reminding Machiavelli. On the other hand, negative emotions are taking the external or internal threats to the epicenter of their narratives. Well, if the internal positive emotion is somehow built upon, then internal solidarity is usually the outcome that is an objective. On the other hand, wisdom is an obstruction of strategy making that requires a clear identification of problem, a vision, an intention, available courses, and in the meantime, an act on the ground. But we must also take something into mind. Usually, the wisdom is in the hands of whom? Elite. Elite of a certain political party, elite of a state, elite of a non-state actor. And they design it with a reference to either, to ideology, religion, idea, like concept, independence... Then wisdom is something very calculated and goal-oriented. Well, emotions, again, within the literature and as a conceptual framework is usually spontaneous. Once you deliver a speech before the public and be really diffused by the chanting of your supporters, you can suffer a word that you can't revert back. And then you tend to ignore the long-term impacts of what you say. Historical bias, popular support of the people and repetition of meta narratives that we are imposed from the very early stages of our life are sources of these emotional narratives that will start and act. Wisdom, on the other hand, needs courage. Why? It must focus on long-term gaining. It must be an optimum calculation and decision-making process of either state or non-state actor must be the targeted phenomena and This act building up wisdom is an integrated coordinated effort.

Why? Wisdom is the output of knowledge from individuals following a process of synthesizing them. This means wisdom requires group study, brainstorming, and open, frank discussions. Wisdom brings marginal and original solutions to problems. So, when you observe the current situation in the Middle East, especially these days, unfortunately, it seems we rely more on emotions rather than wisdom.

What we are witnessing now usually falls within the frame of conflicts or harsh competitions through secondhand or proxy warfares or struggles. To solidify this conceptual background, I want to provide some examples. For instance, the rise of extremism and radicalization, whether in the region or in Europe, it does not matter. It builds itself upon emotional, strong metanarratives with a clear reference to either a certain idea of nationalism or religion. Sometimes, these ideas are not questioned as if they were dogma.

On the other hand, when wisdom is introduced into this discussion, questioning begins. Let's take, for example, the case of Yemen. On October 7th and afterwards, the Israeli response to Hamas and the devastated Gaza people are an emotional reaction to what? It stems from their perception of injustice. Regardless of their actions, it endangers marine traffic and may cause the great powers of the world to focus more on this region, potentially neglecting the Palestinian question.

Consider Iranian wisdom in comparison to this emotional stance. Iranian wisdom here involves using proxies to manipulate the situation and gain an advantage in the competition. Thus, we have an emotional response versus the wisdom of a third party with negative motives.

Reflecting on the Annan Plan of 2004 regarding Cyprus, it was a wisdom-seeking a middle ground between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots. However, emotions prevailed over wisdom, leading to the current prolonged situation there.

To conclude, emotions seem to be dominating the international arena, as voiced by politicians, making wisdom difficult to achieve. International norms and universal values should be the reference point to establish a wisdom-based approach, rather than the popular biased approach of negative emotions. The focus should be on norm and value-based international stance.

As a proposal following this argument, academics should be more involved in seeking wisdom-based solutions, courses, and perhaps rely more on understanding the backgrounds of the problems to effectively address them.

Keywords: Wisdom, Emotion, Middle East.

PANEL IV:
ACADEMIC PROCEEDINGS

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION CONTRIBUTION IN PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS CONCEPT IN NORTHWEST OF SYRIA

MS Student Omar GAREBO¹⁴ & Assoc. Prof. Murat ASLAN¹⁵

Abstract

An In-depth Examination of Local Perceptions and Challenges the primary focus of this dissertation is to critically evaluate the feasibility of fostering social cohesion in northwest Syria. This exploration hinges on the nuanced perspectives of local authorities, residents, and civil society organizations (CSOs) actively operating within the region. To comprehensively understand this dynamic, a structured approach was employed, including conducting 25 Key Informant Interviews (KII), organizing three focus group discussions with a total of 30 participants representing the broader community base, and launching a public survey which garnered insights from 516 respondents across diverse community sectors following up with the Post-data collection, the research utilized advanced Excel methodologies to rigorously analyze the findings, thereby probing the stated hypotheses. The analytical journey unearthed a myriad of challenges and roadblocks impeding the attainment of social cohesion. The survey underscored an imperative: the need for capacity-building across all regional actors. It also highlighted certain critical areas requiring immediate intervention and overhaul, notably the economic and security sectors.

Keywords: Advocacy, Volunteering, Diversity, Fundamental Freedoms, Defenders.

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TURKISH RUSSIAN RELATIONS 1600-2015: UNRAVELLING THE TAPESTRY OF TURKISH-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

MS Student Mohamad NASANI¹⁶

Abstract

This research conducts a comprehensive examination of Turkish-Russian relations within the specified period of 1600-2015, focusing on five key areas. It pursues analyzing the ancient foundation of present-day dynamics with the view of transforming the geopolitical environment. The research aims at demonstrating that the evolution that occurred in the relations between Russia and Türkiye is a serious attempt to reshape the relationship on the basis of understanding through equal strategic dimensions and broad perspectives. This effort aims to enhance trust between the two countries, dispel fears, and transform some points of contention into points of cooperation. It necessitates certain concessions to create a new reality. On the other hand, it underscores Türkiye's importance after entering into relationships that may gradually enhance its status and gradually secure European support. However, the research methodology entails a thorough examination of archival records such as diplomatic and official statements dating back from 1600 to 2015. Moreover, it has been relied on key references for this research and consulted scholarly papers, research studies, reports, journals, newspapers, magazines, and available online sources in both Arabic and English.

The historical approach has been relied upon to highlight the significant stages in this relationship. Additionally, an analytical approach has been employed, addressing five main topics. The historical method was used to emphasize the important stages in this relationship, and the analytical method was applied, addressing these certain five topics. The research identifies key historical stages, influential factors, and conflicts shaping Turkish-Russian relations specifically within the period of 1600-2015. It discusses the significance of Türkiye's border and the legacy of the geopolitical conflict as well as the transformation of the Cold War. Apart from emphasizing successful Türkiye's economic policy and politics in contemporary instances, it also highlights a number of serious mistakes that were made by Türkiye along with the failure to recognize the fall of the Soviet Union. The findings contribute to a deeper

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understanding of Turkish-Russian relations within the defined period, emphasizing potential areas for cooperation and dispelling misconceptions. The studies indicate building trust between these two robust states to lay the foundation for future collaboration and mutual benefit.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Historical Roots, Regional Powers, Cooperation, Conflict, Strategic Planning.

THE ROLE OF NGOS ON SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF SYRIANS LIVING IN GAZIANTEP

MS Student Jawan ALDAOUD¹⁷ & Assoc. Prof. Cenker Korhan DEMİR¹⁸

Abstract

As the Syrian conflict unfolded, Türkiye emerged as a key host for millions of displaced individuals seeking refuge from the protracted humanitarian crisis. Among the myriad challenges faced by both the refugees and the host communities, the concept of social cohesion has gained prominence as a crucial factor influencing the successful integration of displaced populations. This research scrutinizes the landscape of social cohesion programs implemented in Gaziantep, Türkiye, with a particular focus on their role in facilitating the integration of Syrian refugees. For a comprehensive understanding, a structured approach was employed, which included key informant interviews with INGOs/NGOs representatives, a public survey published in the Gaziantep, in-depth interviews with beneficiaries, and a review of some secondary data.

Keywords: Syrian Refugees, Social Cohesion, NGOs, Gaziantep, Integration, Humanitarian Assistance, Refugee Well-being, Forced Displacement.

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EGYPT AND ITS POLITICAL INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ROLE IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A STATE FORMATION PERSPECTIVE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH MILITARISM & DEMOCRACY

MS Student Mostafa Kamal IBRAHIM¹⁹

Abstract

This research explores Egypt and its political international relations role in the Middle East. It employs a qualitative narrative and historical analysis to examine Egypt and its political international relations role in the Middle East from a state formation perspective of Egypt's time line state transformation and its relationship with militarism and a need for more democracy. Focusing on Egypt's state formation journey from the kingdom era to the current coup state. Covering the periods of King Farouk, Mohamed Najib, Nasser, Sadat, Mubarak, Morsi, and Sisi, analyzing the state formation relationship with militarism, and democratic processes during each era and their effects on Egypt and its international relations in the Middle East region. Therefore, the theoretical framework clearly will explore the interplay between state formation, militarism, and democracy, examining Egypt's transformative role during the period from 1936 to 2023. Based on challenges as colonialism, Sykes Picot agreement, resource dependency, military interferences in government reign as well as the strong role of religion, which shaped the development of Egypt's institutionalized state formation. Thus, shedding light on Egypt's evolving role in the geopolitics of the Middle East. To finally make a profound claim that despite facing challenges of dramatic transition in state formation and political decision-making ideologies, Egypt remains politically of great significant value in the Middle East region and international arena till the current coup state under President Sisi reign. Egypt has a widespread of political influence in the Middle East based on its historical events, military strength, and diplomatic expertise in the area in ensuring regional security and stability.

Keywords: Egypt, Middle East, State Formation, Militarism, Democracy, Political International Relations.

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ISLAM AND DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Abstract

Democracy has been discussed in the Middle East throughout the history. Islamic faith and ruling are regarded to have more role in politic conflicts than others. The idea that İslam and democracy are not compatible with other has prevailed and led to neglect of other reasons in debates. When the historical process is observed, the Middle East countries have been in a political impasse since they gained their independence in the first half of the 20th century. Because of continuing wars and internal conflicts in the region, we can observe that all democratic demands of people have been refused by rulers and most of the time suppressed by force. Therefore, the governments in the region have given to prioritize security over basic political, economic, social and human rights rather than democracy. When people living in the region asked for freedom, authoritarian regimes confronted them with severe security conditions and limited their basic rights.

Especially in near history in the Middle East, so many important developments happened. For instance, Iranian Revolution (1979), Iran-Iraq War (1980-88), Gulf War (1991), Invasion of Iraq by Anglo-American forces (2003), Israel-Lebanese War (2006) and Israel-Palestinian conflicts jeopardized the political, economic and social situation in the region. In this context, thinking of a democratic transition was considered a luxury item under these circumstances. Moreover, such factors like American support to Israel, tapping down Saddam Hussein with unproved claims and siding with dictators against opposition groups during Arap Springs weakened the possibility of a democratic transition.

Another example is that the Bush administration invaded to Iraq to overthrow Saddam and allegedly bring democracy to the country in 2003. Even though Saddam was defeated and sentenced to death eventually, Iraq could obtain pre-invasion stability. Actually, the Bush administration declared that their purpose was to bring democracy to Iraq. However, as a result of this process, we can observe that they failed.

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There are some basic problems for establishing democratic governments in the Middle East. First problem is the reluctance of foreign powers to remain neutral. The second problem for under democratic environment is the control of hydrocarbon revenues that strengthened authoritarian regimes and let them maintain undemocratic governance. The third problem is tribalism. Regional countries are ruled by tribes with high populations or junta leaders. The last problem is actually historically absent. The civil society in Middle East was religious foundations. So, Middle East lacks both civil society and civil culture that can be a resource of democratic transition. As a result of these problems, middle east countries are not classified and as developed as democratic countries in spite of high income given that other parameters don't match the standards of a developed and democratic nation.

Some scholars such as Huntington, Fukuyama and Pipes claim that Islam cannot be incompatible with democracy arguing that democracy requires pluralism, openness, tolerance of diversity, individualism, liberalism, popular suffrage, elections and parliamentary assembly whereas Islam encourages absolute acceptance of authority. Islam is seen as the opposite of democracy, alien and hostile while democracy requires the notion of popular sovereignty by these scholars.

We can say that one of the main factors in the failure of democracy in the Middle East was the rise of political Islam in the region because the rise of political Islam in the Middle East can be attributed to various complex factors, including historical, social and political context. As known, that, the political Islam emerged partly as a response to colonialism, authoritarian regimes, social-economic disparities and the search for an identity rooted Islamic value. Nevertheless, it is known that these occasions could not succeed to found a democratic regime in the region because the effectiveness of political Islam as a solution for the oppressed greatly depends on its implementation, adaptability and inclusivity within a modern context that respects human rights and diversity. We can give Hamas as an example of the failure to establish a democratic environment as a result of the practices of political Islam. As known, that, Hamas is Palestinian militant Islamic organizations for known its role in the especially Israel- Palestinian conflict, influencing political Islam through its armed resistance, governance in Gaza as a key player in regional dynamics. Although it holds the majority in the elected Palestinian parliament in the Palestinian national government, we cannot fully talk about democracy because it is a paramilitary organization.

Especially, we can say that the most important development within the scope of democratization efforts is the Arab Spring. As known, that, the wave of protests and upsprings

in several Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in 2011 had a major impact on regional politics in terms of democracy, leading to changes in leadership, civil wars and ongoing unrest. Because the authoritarian regimes in the region took form by the effects of many historical and social dynamics, they couldn't change the regimes with authoritarian characteristics and bring democracy to the region.

As a conclusion, although partial democratization steps have been taken throughout the historical process, we can state that internal complexities, ongoing wars and external powers are the main factors affecting the formation of democracy in the region. In other words, democracy has been mostly unwanted by dictators and authoritarian regimes in the region.

Keywords: Islam, Democracy, Middle East.

UNRAVELLING THE SYRIAN QUAGMIRE: NAVIGATING HISTORICAL FORCES, GEOPOLITICAL INTRICACIES, AND SOCIETAL COMPLEXITIES

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Abstract

This comprehensive study offers a nuanced exploration of the Syrian Civil War through a qualitative narrative approach enriched by conflict theory, geopolitics, and sectarianism studies. Answering a fundamental research question, the research unravels the multifaceted layers of the conflict, dissecting historical legacies, geopolitical strategies, and societal dynamics that shape the Syrian quagmire. The historical forces at play, stemming from post-Ottoman era borders and exacerbated by economic disparities, lay the foundation for societal tensions and the eruption of protests. Geopolitical maneuvering, viewed through the lens of proxy warfare and fluid alliances, emerges as a dominant theme, illustrating the deliberate instrumentalization of sectarian identities within the Syrian theater. Sectarian dynamics, interpreted through the theoretical framework of sectarianism studies, reveal the role of identity politics and the intentional manipulation of sectarian narratives by various actors. The study extends its gaze to the profound humanitarian crisis born out of the conflict, emphasizing the global implications and ripple effects on neighboring countries. In presenting these findings, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the Syrian Civil War, challenging reductionist perspectives and emphasizing contextual sensitivity. Acknowledging the limitations inherent in capturing the entirety of such a complex conflict, the research invites future scholars to delve into unexplored dimensions. It offers policy recommendations informed by the nuanced insights uncovered. This exploration enriches the academic discourse surrounding the Syrian quagmire and beckons policymakers to navigate its complexities with empathy and informed strategies.

Keywords: Syrian Civil War, Conflict Theory, Geopolitics, Historical Forces, Geopolitical Chessboard, Societal Dynamics, Fluid Alliances, Humanitarian Crisis, Local Narratives, Global Implications.

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MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA REGION OF PROTRACTED CONFLICTS

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Abstract

The raising insecurity in the region of the Middle East and North Africa compels further research on this region, its sources of instability and challenges that it faces. MENA region is significant in the international context due to its regional importance, political adversity, economic and social grievances that affect the rest of the world. This research aims to discover the main challenges of the MENA region and how their development could be directed in the best possible way that will bring future stability and prosperity. We used data from the existing literature and methodology followed in this paper is descriptive, and comparative with the focus on case studies. The diversity of the escalating problems in the region obliges us to seek most effective solutions for establishing stability in all state levels, from correcting societal thought and ideology to building a competent leadership and gaining independence. This paper discovers how social division in the Middle East and North Africa, dictatorship that has ruled over the region for decades and lack of vitality among people to defend themselves against any kind of aggression have paved a path for today's escalating tensions and conflicts. A variety of solutions have been discussed to pursue a long-lasting peace among nations in the region considering objectives and interests that support progress in all spheres of social issues.

Keywords: Crisis of Thought, Social Division, Leadership, Independence.

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SHRINKING SPACE, A BARRIER TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCALIZATION? THE STRUGGLE OF THE LOCAL SYRIAN NGOS IN THE SYRIAN RESPONSE

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Abstract

This article explores the Syrian humanitarian crisis, particularly the pivotal role of local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in providing aid and support amidst escalating challenges. It focuses on the concept of "shrinking space" and its impact on the journey towards humanitarian localization. Employing a transnational relations framework and Power Dependence Theory, the study examines the dynamics of power and dependency that shape the strategies of local NGOs. The research highlights the numerous barriers Syrian NGOs face, including funding limitations and regulatory challenges, and discusses their innovative approaches to local empowerment. Additionally, it emphasizes the vital role of external actors such as international organizations, governments, and donors in supporting and reshaping partnerships for effective localization. The article concludes with strategic recommendations aimed at reinforcing the localization agenda, drawing insights from the Syrian context with global relevance for more effective, equitable, and sustainable humanitarian responses in various crisis situations.

Keywords: Localization Strategies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Syrian Conflict, Shrinking Civic Space.

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EXPLORING THE DRIVERS OF RETURN AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES LIVING IN GAZIANTEP TO THEIR HOME IN NORTH SYRIA

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Abstract

The study examines the drivers of Syrian refugees return to their home country residing in Gaziantep, Turkey, and Northwest Syria. Considering historical and political contexts, it investigates refugees' motivations for return and their experiences in Syria, analyzing how political solutions impact return migration. The study assesses living conditions in Gaziantep and factors influencing return decisions, utilizing Return Migration and Network Theory to inform intervention strategies. It focuses on motivations, returnee experiences, push and pull factors, and service-related factors. The research aims to understand factors influencing return decisions, motivations, challenges, and necessary conditions for successful return. Using a mixed-methods approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, the study explores demographic insights and factors such as economic opportunities, political stability, and social ties. Findings reveal economic motivations for return alongside concerns about security, access to services, and economic challenges. Overall, the study aims to contribute nuanced perspectives to the discourse on Syrian refugee return migration, offering insights into decision-making processes and challenges encountered during return.

Keywords: Refugees, Türkiye, Syrians, Return, Push-pull factors.

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UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY'S POLICIES AND I/NGOS IN PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS IN NORTHWEST SYRIA: THE GREATER IDLEB CASE

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Abstract

The interplay between local authorities and NGOs in conflict-affected areas and how they promote sustainable livelihoods is complex and varied. This study aimed to understand how these two actors can work together to achieve sustainable livelihoods while also exploring any other factors that can contribute to the promotion of the livelihoods of the community and ensure its sustainability. The findings of the study show that the local authorities and humanitarian organizations in Greater Idlib face significant challenges in providing sustainable livelihoods, particularly for vulnerable groups and displaced people. These challenges include lack of funding, security instability, and lack of awareness and commitment among individuals. The evaluation shows that there are gaps and inconsistencies in policy frameworks and governance structures, which hinder the effectiveness of interventions. To address these challenges, the study recommends the development of reliable policies and legal frameworks that provide clear guidance for sustainable livelihood initiatives. In conclusion, the analysis highlights the significance of establishing efficient collaborations among NGOs, local authorities, and various stakeholders to achieve sustainable livelihoods and enhance living conditions. At the end, local authorities are not capable of easing the livelihood of the residents without the involvement of INGOs and the community.

Keywords: Sustainable Livelihood, Local Authority, Policy, Coordination, Community Engagement.

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IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON FOOD SECURITY: THE CASE OF YEMEN

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Abstract

The past decade in Yemen has been marked by immense hardship and suffering due to the ongoing civil war, which began in 2014 between the Southies and the government. The conflict has become a regional proxy war, with Iran backing the Houthis and Saudi Arabia supporting the government. The war has devastated Yemen's economy, leading to widespread poverty and unemployment, and it does not show any signs of abating, with ongoing stalemates and occasional flare-ups. Indeed, the dire situation in Yemen has received increasing international attention, with calls for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement, however, no sustainable solution has been agreed on. One of the major outcomes of the conflict, Yemen is facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis, with millions on the brink of famine. the conflict led to widespread food insecurity, despite improvements in 2023 and humanitarian assistance in the past years, millions still face hunger, with 17 million experiencing crisis-level or acute food insecurity. Malnutrition, particularly among children, remains a major concern. In addition, the ongoing conflict and sanctions have crippled the economy, making it difficult for Yemenis to afford necessities such as food security. In this context, the goal of the research is to evaluate the Impact of the Yemeni conflict on the food security in the country.

Keywords: Yemen, Civil War, Food Security.

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EFFECTS OF MONOTHEISTIC RELIGIONS WITHIN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA POLITICS

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Abstract

Throughout human history, religions have had serious effects on social life. Monotheistic religions, especially those with belief in the afterlife, have serious effects on people's lifestyles and political life. This study aims to examine religion and politics in the Middle East and North Africa and to understand their effects in the region. First of all, it deals with the emergence and development of the three Abrahamic (monotheistic) religions, which continue to be influential not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but all over the world, and then examines its relationship with religion in the political processes of the Middle East and North Africa. The article has tried to explain how countries and communities inspired by religious references act and follow political processes and society. In this study, in which the approaches towards the Middle East and North Africa are evaluated, the information necessary for a correct analysis of the religion and politics of the Middle East has been tried to be explained by associating it with the internal dynamics of the countries in the region.

Keywords: Religion, Politics, Monotheistic Religions Middle East and North Africa, Religion and Politics in the Middle East, Religion and Politics in North Africa.

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