Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East

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Regionalism and globalism are two of the leading phenomena in world politics. In the age of globalism, regionalism can be treated as a complementary and interacting phenomenon – or as a competing and conflicting one. Globalization creates powerful demands for regionalism that are not particular to one specific region, but to all regions. Considering the global-regional nexus as an unavoidably synchronized and complimentary set of processes concerning the Middle East, the chapter primarily draws attention to the state of regionalism in the Arab Middle East and its spillovers. With nationalist and protectionist trends on the rise with the election of Donald Trump in the US and the UK's *Brexit* decision, it is perhaps not a popular time for commenting on the state of regionalism in the Middle East. A scarcity of regional cooperation in the area has also led interested commentators and scholars to label the Middle East as "the region without regionalism" (Aarts 1999, 91) or a space of weak regionalism.

The Middle East is often viewed as exceptional, resisting global trends of economic and political liberalism as well as regionalism in the age of globalization (Hazbun 2012, 207–208). Having said that, regionalism in the Middle East continues to be a part of wider scholarly debate on regionalism with different perspectives and approaches. When treating regionalism as a positive phenomenon – leading to economic, political and security cooperation in a geographically defined area – it is expected to conform to the needs of global governance. How much this could be the case for the Middle East in the current stage of regionalism in the area will be one of the major themes explored in this chapter. In the presence of various regionalisms, Middle East regionalism has some commonalities and differences compared to Asia, Africa or Latin America. As with other regions, the Middle East is a constructed region whose boundaries and the level of its *region-ness* are open to discussion, especially in the absence of significant degrees of institutionalization or a definition of common norms and identities. In this chapter, the most common form of geographical definition of the Middle East which is bounded with all the Arab states and three non-Arab states – namely, Israel, Iran and Turkey – is accepted, but the Arab Middle East will be the center of attention.

There are a large number of studies indicating how weak regionalism has always been in the Middle East due to issues such as a lack of democracy, the absence of regional hegemony, and the non-existence of economic interdependence. A general consensus prevails that the Middle East has not been a successful example of regional cooperation or regional integration over the years. Almost all forms of regional initiatives aiming at conflict resolution, democracy promotion or creating a common market have mainly failed. Recent Middle Eastern problems are posing more global challenges than perhaps the sum of other regional challenges – demonstrating the centrality of the region to the wider world. In other words, what is regional and what is global have become obscure given that the Syrian civil war, in particular, opened Pandora's box with the worldwide challenges of trans-border armed groups, migration, human rights abuses, and failed states.

In the early days of the Arab Spring post-2010, the diffusion effects of what happened, in Tunisia particularly, raised some expectations about whether the Middle East would see the beginning of a new era of regional cooperation. Instead, it seems that the further weakening of the Arab state system has given rise to new transnational identities such as tribalism, sectarianism and ethnicism – rather than regional unity. Instead of seeing the growing

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

interconnectedness as a result of flows of capital, labor, and common democratic values, there have been challenging spillovers of conflicts and civil wars. Having said that, despite these established pessimistic views, in recent years some studies have begun to address Middle East regionalism rather differently by focusing on non-state actors and emphasizing the significance of ongoing networks and interactions in assessing the new possibilities of bottom-up regionalization. In other words, assessing Middle East regionalism on its own terms rather than comparing it with other regionalisms. After outlining the conceptual framework that will be applied to regionalism in the Arab Middle East, the chapter briefly revisits the most common arguments about what went wrong with Middle East regionalism. It then looks at regionalism in the Arab Middle East in the light of existing institutional forms of regionalism – while taking new multidimensional perspectives of regionalism into account.

Framing Regionalism in the Middle East

The definition of "region" is essential for any regional analysis including that of the Middle East. There has been a tendency to deemphasize the geographic elements of regions while focusing on political and ideational characters. Thus, according to Katzenstein, regions are "socially constructed and politically contested" (1997, 7). In defining regions, scholars underscore various characteristics for being or becoming a region. For instance, Russett emphasized factors such as geographical proximity, social and cultural homogeneity, political institutions, and economic interdependence (1967, 11). On the other hand, Cantori and Spiegel (1970, 6–7) regard geographical contiguity, common historical, cultural, and linguistic bonds as well as international interactions as a necessity for the definition of a region. Based on these definitions, where the Middle East stands is not clear.

Considering cultural and religious commonalities, the Middle East has the potential for being regarded as a region. For example, in the Arab Human Development Report 2002, it is suggested that "perhaps no other group of states in the world has been endorsed with the same potential for cooperation, even integration, as have the Arab countries" (UNDP 2002, 121) given that the area has a common historical experience and Arab-Muslim identity represents a relatively high degree of cultural, religious, and linguistic homogeneity. The region has also been identified by a significant degree of interaction witnessed in extensive family ties across borders, and the presence of transnational actors including Islamists, migrants, and business communities (Legrenzi and Harders 2008, 2). Moreover, the emergence of a well-integrated Arab media market has also created an Arab public space. On the other hand, when examining economic interdependence or creating common norm and values, it is hard to resolve the capacity of the Middle East for region-ness. As in most regions of the world, the Middle East was first framed by strategic considerations and military concerns. The Middle East also had its roots in "the security conceptions and practices which were imposed or invented by Western powers" (Bilgin 2004, 26). Considering Europe's colonial and imperial past, the imposition of the Cold War and the War on Terror, it is hard to separate the idea of the Middle East "from the power and the knowledge created and imposed by the West on the rest of the world" (Gasper 2012, 240). Given this, Gasper argues that the Middle East exists "because the West has possessed sufficient power to give the idea substance" (2012, 240).

The Middle East is, then, an externally invented region. It was first mentioned in name in an article entitled "The Persian Gulf and International Relations," by American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan in 1902 who signified the strategic value of the region for British imperial needs (Adelson 2012, 37). The term Middle East was used in the Second World War by the British, for the first time, when they called their contingent in Egypt the Middle East Command. At the time, Britain had troops as far as China and also as close as Western Europe. In view of this, British forces in Egypt remained somewhere in the middle in terms of closeness to Britain. So, the term Middle East was a descriptive one for the British and eventually became ubiquitous. Since then, the response to how the region has been constructed in the interplay between various types of state, market and civil society actors remains ambiguous. Reconstructing or deconstructing of the Middle East remains an open question. External initiatives such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or the Greater Middle East have taken their turn, but with no success. On the other hand, the uprisings of the Arab Spring signaled that possible regionalized interactions through networking or other means call for new interpretations of regionalism in the Middle East.

In view of the above, looking at the state of regionalism in the Middle East from the New Regionalism Approach (NRA) perspective could be more promising to comprehend current and future forms of regionalism – or at least to

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East

Written by Ayşegül Sever

review some of the common pessimistic accounts. The new regionalism approach is generally defined as a comprehensive, multidimensional, and political phenomenon – including all different varieties of issues including economy, security, culture, and environment (Hettne 1999, 19). The NRA's definition of the region as a space open to reconstruction and its acceptance of multiplicity of the actors and different forms of regionalism give a better perspective to look at the Arab Middle East. Consequently, looking at various forms of regionalism in addition to state-led regionalism could be better matched to inquiry about regionalism in the Middle East. Even though there are ample works examining the problems of top-down weak regionalism in the Middle East, there are also recent studies emphasizing the significance of networks, interactions and transnational movements in assessing regionalism, and new possibilities of regionalization in the area (Ferabolli 2015; Valbjorn 2016). Some of these movements are led by classical interstate organizations such as the Arab League, while others are more ad hoc trans-regional processes. Concurrently, some distinctions made in the literature about regional cooperation – such as regionalism and regionalization – could be of use in the context of the Arab Middle East.

There is a broad consensus in the literature that regionalism in the Middle East in the meaning of social, political cohesiveness or economic interdependence – or the existence of region-wide institutions – is not a strong phenomenon. The absence of viable states, the authoritarian nature of Arab states, ongoing issues like the Arab–Israeli conflict, and external intervention are generally accepted as the causes which make the process of region building in the Middle East difficult to achieve. Taking all these into account, regionalism in the area would be better treated very widely since it may incorporate regional groups and networks as well as interstate arrangements and organizations. A regionalism/regionalization division could be beneficial to better comprehend the Middle East in regionalism studies. In discussing the multifaceted experience of regionalism in various regions, regionalism and regionalization are the two concepts which are often used to signify different forms and stages of regional cooperation and interactions. These two concepts are interwoven and hard to differentiate, but regionalization and regionalism are perceived differently in terms of involving actors, their occurrence with top-down or bottom-up initiatives, and their attention to the outcome or procedure. Regionalism is generally understood as a state-led or states-led project designed to reorganize particular regional space along defined economic, institutional, and political lines. Regionalization, on the other hand, defines more spontaneous and endogenous processes which involve "undirected economic and social interactions between non-state actors whether individuals, firms, companies, NGOs, etc." (Legrenzi 2013: 1). Having said that, there is no such a thing as state led regionalism versus non-state led regionalism.

The distinctive aspect of the NRA is its effort to bring non-state actors and informal processes into the purview of regionalism studies. Some define regionalization as a looser form of regionalism or soft regionalism (Behr and Jokela 2011, 5). All these indicate that regionalism is an increasingly complex and diverse phenomenon that is used to describe various levels of interaction among a broad set of regional actors. Regional orders encompass both regionalization and regional institution building. The question is therefore not so much whether regionalism will endure, but what kind of shape it will take in the emerging global order. Many regional groupings consciously started avoiding the institutional and bureaucratic structure of traditional organizations, but old forms of regionalism such as interstate organization did not disappear either. New functions and roles were incorporated into their former standing and status (Hettne and Söderbaum 2008, 66). Moreover, civil society and state apparatus need to come together in a variety of networks and regional schemes and they also do this to some extent in the context of the Arab Middle East. Any well functioning regionalist project needs to have a linkage between state and non-state actors (Fawcett 2004, 433). As a result, the NRA takes into account both state and non-state actors with a focus on both formal and informal processes of regionalization.

Varying Forms of Regionalism in the Arab Middle East

Formal institutional forms of regionalism in the Arab Middle East are embodied in several organizations among which the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will be taken into account. Both are forms of state-driven regional cooperation, but do not represent a profound kind of economic and political integration. Other than their rare contribution to regional cooperation, these organizations generally remain incompetent in resolving regional crises or enabling reliable regional cooperation. Regional organizations are supposed to contribute to conflict resolution, the formation of a common market, and the consolidation of democracy and human rights. But, these have hardly been

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

achieved in the Middle East. However, it would be too far reaching to exclude them altogether as players of regionalism in the Arab Middle East. Ferabolli suggests that they still at least could provide relevant platforms for the growing exchanges in Arab society and therefore also indirectly contribute to the regionalization of the Arab Middle East (Ferrabolli 2016, 189). As regards security and conflict-resolution, there are some cases where the Arab League has played a role, but no final solution has been accomplished. The League, for instance, played a mediating role in the Kuwait–Iraq crisis in 1961, Algeria's invasion of Morocco in 1963, and provided regional support to the intervention in Libya during the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, instead of providing a regional solution, the Arab League has often remained ineffective due to internal rivalries during regional crises such as the 1990–1991 Gulf crisis, the 2003 Iraq War and the 2009 Gaza conflict (Valbjorn 2016). Other than the Israel issue, the League members are rarely united on critical issues. The Arab Middle East is therefore widely accepted as one of the least regionally integrated or institutionalized areas of the world.

The first formal regional organization in the Middle East – the Arab League – came into being in 1945 and became the first regional organization in the Third World. The Arab League was initially founded by Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen. It currently has 22 member states and is based on a shared culture and language with the aim to serve the common good of all Arab countries. However, as Barnett points out, shared identities do not necessarily promote regional cooperation as long as inward-looking state survival takes priority (Barnett and Solingen 2007, 213). For example, having the feeling of *Arabness* did not lead to a common understanding about common norms that each Arab state should adopt. Even a strong appeal of Arab nationalism (Pan-Arabism) during Nasser's reign did not bring about cross national unity since the state-centered approach in the Arab world remained persistent. Most of the regional organizations, including the Arab League, were awarded with only limited autonomy by the member states who preferred to retain power at the nation-state level. Consequently, the existing cooperation among the authoritarian states of the Arab League is defined as "regime boosting regionalism" where the status, the legitimacy, and the general interests of authoritarian regimes are strengthened through the League at the expense of genuine regional cooperation (Börzel and Risse 2016). Between 1945 and 1970 Pan-Arabism became the basis for regional organizations and cooperative projects in the region. However, this Arab discourse was not transformed into practical outcomes (Schulz and Schulz 2005, 191). Rather than progress along the lines of Pan-Arabism, nationalism and the promotion of state interests gained the upper hand over regionalism based on common culture.

The Arab league has traditionally been a club of authoritarian Arab states (Valbjorn 2016). This situation is evident in the Freedom House reports which consistently rate the Middle East as the most authoritarian in the world (Brynen and Moore 2013, 4). With regard to this situation, Tripp states that leaders who are unwilling to make compromises with domestic constituencies appear similarly unwilling to make compromises with neighboring states (Tripp 1981, 302). In the context of Arab unity, the Arab world therefore aimed at creating an organization would preserve state sovereignty. Therefore, the prominence of the principle of non-interference and unanimity in the charter of the Arab League is not a coincidence (Beck 2015, 195–96). These principles prevented the organization from taking an effective action in the case of major regional conflicts. How reversible these principles have become came under scrutiny when the unanimity and interference principles were overlooked by Saudi Arabia during its intervention in Yemen since 2015. Despite its serious weaknesses in capacity and fulfillment, the League occasionally took significant steps in some issues such as promotion of education. Other steps such as the establishment of a Human Rights Committee were also taken following the Arab Charter on Human Rights in 2008, However, such efforts remained superficial and the League did not sincerely engage in a debate about political liberalization and democratization even after the Arab Spring (Valbjorn, 2016). Thus, the Charter on Human Rights was generally regarded as a tentative move to preclude outside intervention in domestic and regional affairs.

During some critical periods, regional and global developments required some changes and adjustments for the state of regionalism in the Middle East. The period following the 1967 war or the period after the Arab Spring are examples of this. The 1967 Arab–Israeli war ended the revolutionary state-led Pan-Arabism under Nasser but also marked the beginning of a new kind of Arab regionalism. The oil boom in the early 1970s brought about new forms of social and economic interconnectedness in the Arab world with flows of workers from poorer Arab countries into the oil-rich ones (Legrenzi and Herders 2013, 2). On the other hand, capital via remittances, investments, and aid started to go in the opposite direction. This circulation resulted in new economic exchanges as well as the share of ideas and

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

values, which created a new sense of belonging in a larger Arab community. By the end of the 1970s, millions of Arab migrants moved to the current Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Ferabolli 2016, 41). This was not a sign of growing regional economic integration as economic relations generally remained in the form of labor movement and remittances at the sub-regional or bilateral level.

As has been the case with political issues, regional leaders have been often hesitant to surrender power to a regional economic community. The Arab Middle East is, therefore, still generally regarded one of the least economically integrated regions in the world. Low integration with the global economy and the domination of state entrepreneurship have hindered the rise of a private entrepreneurial class across the region (Barnett and Solingen 2007, 184). Intraregional trade in the Arab Middle East is also low and the region's global share of non-oil exports is marginal (Schulz and Schulz 2005, 189). The trade pattern largely consists of agriculture and raw materials, displaying a lack of complementarity. The large differences in GDP per capita among the Gulf states and the rest of the Arab countries is also regarded as one of the reasons for failing economic unity (Seeberg 2016). Attempts to institutionalize regional trade and economic relationships with the initiatives such as the Agadir Agreement, the GCC Customs Union, the North African Union, and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) have all failed to create an integrated regional economy. The Arab League's foremost project, the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA), launched in 1997 also fell short of providing integrated trade relations in the region (Vignal 2017).

The rise of sub-regionalisms in the Gulf or North Africa in the 1980s also brought about a new dimension to reassess state-led regionalism at a different level in the Middle East. The most famous example of sub-regionalism in the region is the GCC which includes Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman and was established in 1981 in the wake of the Iranian revolution of 1979. Despite all its shortcomings, the GCC is regarded as the most successful example of regionalism in the Middle East especially in the context of other examples of sub-regionalism in the region. Compared to the other sub-regionalisms, the GCC is moving towards the consolidation of a common market and a monetary union. The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) was also set up in 1989 with the involvement of Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia to provide economic and social progress with the free circulation of goods and people in North Africa. Among other sub-regionalist projects, the AMU emerged as a response to the growing integration in Europe by aiming at creating a customs union along the same lines as the European Community. However, it was destined to fail in view of consistent political quarrels among member states and the members giving priority to its bilateral relations with the European Union over intra-AMU economic integration.

Other than the abovementioned organizational regionalisms, the presence of civil society and growing transnational exchanges in the region leads many to consider the extent of regionalism in the Arab Middle East in the context of regionalization. In the 1980s and 1990s, civil society and networks of civil society activism in the Middle East came to the forefront. The liberal waves of the 1990s – the globalization of the ideas of human rights, political participation, and market economy – opened up new spaces for social mobilization in the Middle East. All sorts of NGOs mushroomed in the region. They became critically important in expressing the common people's needs and also formed "the social safety net that every country requires" (Gubser 2002, 140). UNDP Arab Human Development Reports consider the emergence of civil society as a significant factor of human development progress (Isfahani 2010). The regional conjecture also affected the rise of some other important issues. For example, in the 1990s when the signing of the Oslo Accords between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership created an atmosphere of hope, a civil society initiative – the Alliance for Middle East Peace (ALLMEP) – assembled 44 NGOs promoting coexistence between Arabs and Jews in the Middle East (Krokowska 2010, 41). Another large gathering also took place in Cairo in 1997 when 700 NGO representatives from all parts of the Arab world came together to exchange their views and projects on population and development (Bayat 2002, 15). Over a range of transnational and global issues, Arab networks are working together. For example, there are numerous Arab Networks for environment, human rights, and development issues that share knowledge, expertise, and projected solutions.

Civil society activism has been comparatively stronger in some Arab countries – such as Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine – than in others. The donors of NGOs in these countries have generally been rich Arab countries (Gubser 2002, 146). They also receive financial and technical assistance from international NGOs (INGOs). The emergence of a dynamic civil society in the Middle East was initially, especially in the early 1990s, regarded as a good sign of democratization – especially when the transition to democracy was taking place in various parts of the world after the

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. It was expected that an 'awakening of civil society' would lead the Arab world to democratization as it had done so for Eastern Europe (Kubba 2000, 84–90). Therefore, civil society assistance "has constituted the linchpin of international MENA democracy promotion efforts" in the 1990s (Yom 2005, 17). Even though the confluence of domestic and global trends brought about significant civil society activism, all were ineffective challenges to state authoritarianism. As a result, state intervention and manipulation of civil society continue to be a serious problem across the Middle East. Arab civil society may be stronger compared to earlier periods, but "the state remains far more powerful" in most cases (Carapico 2000, 14). As national civil society organizations, transnational forums have also remained either under the direct control of "respective governments as government organized NGOs or operate within tight governmental supervision" (Pinfari 2014, 166). Consequently, regional civil society actors still seem to play a regional role to the extent that state-based regionalism allows them to. Therefore, in the Arab Middle East the top down and bottom up regional discursive practices are intertwined.

Despite all the problems and complexities involved, bottom-up regionalization is very much at work. "Open and horizontal" features of social media also provide previously marginalized groups such as youth, women and ethnic minorities in the MENA region with a new "Arab public sphere" (Gheytanchi and Moghadam 2014, 6). All sorts of people and social actors are on the move in the region – on a voluntary basis as well as due to necessity. There is a growing interaction among Arab societies on voluntary basis to work, travel, and get better education or health services. For example, labor mobility within the Arab world is still one of the significant drivers of regional economic and social integration. For example, the presence of Palestinians in the Gulf helped the "transmission of ideas and building of activist organizations" (Ferabolli 2016, 136).

Turning to tourism, the role of the Arab Tourist Organization, an NGO in Saudi Arabia, has been pivotal in the rise of intra-Arab tourism (Ferabolli 2016, 145–46). Intra-regional student mobility is also growing because of equal enrolment policies for every Arab student as well as a common language of instruction (Ferabolli 2016, 148). At this juncture, one could mention some NGO networks such as the Association of Arab Universities as a relevant contributor to regional cooperation in education. The diffusion of ideas and culture through satellite and Pan-Arab broadcasting has also been crucial in the region (Vignal 2017). While considering the importance of Arab media in the creation of regional belonging, it is hard to distinguish the roles of formal and informal forms of regionalism. It is almost impossible to talk about the new media in the Arab world without reference to the role of the Arab League in the formation of Arabsat and the role of the GCC states in financing it (Ferabolli 2016, 156). Another example is seen in the Arab film industry. To get funding for a film to partake in Arab film festivals requires being a citizen of an Arab League member state (Ferabolli 2016, 173). The regionalization of the cultural productions in the Arab world such as Arab literature and cinema are continuing to make Arab peoples more and more aware of the Arab regional space. Arab states, institutions, and citizens are intersecting in the making of Arab regional politics.

Conflict has also become an important cause of increasing mobility of people from all social classes and professions. For example, a series of regional crises have enforced a new form of regionalization via growing number of refugees. In times of necessity, Iraqis, Syrians and Palestinians flee to the borders of their Arab neighbors which incites the dynamics of regional belonging. The neighboring countries of the conflict regions in the Middle East face large numbers of forced migrants. Moreover, regionalization in the form of expanding cross border radicalization is on the rise. Both cooperative and conflictive regional dynamics are simultaneously in play. Regionalization driven by civil wars, refugees, and transnational identities based on sectarianism poses a novel set of regionalism debates as to the Middle East – with global consequences.

In recent times, the Arab Spring led to a revisiting of all forms of regionalism in the area. Looking at how unexpectedly the people took to the streets during the Arab Spring protests in one country after another, the picture initially displayed hope about the future of Middle East regionalism. The region-wide protests, the searching for democracy and a better life against repression resulted in synchronized protest in quite a number of Arab states. The street protests displayed how regionalization of the Arab Middle East is on the rise when unprecedented region-wide protests with the involvement of various transnational networks and region-wide interactions appear. The uprisings did not cause a transformation to democracy or regional solidarity for the overall change of the status quo. Instead, the authoritarian state mechanism survived and even worsened in some cases. On the other hand, the unprecedented feeling of togetherness among the masses gave hope about the possibility of forming a basis of a

Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

long-term cooperation with the participation of multiple actors through interaction. Traditional, long standing, civil society groups were not as active as expected in anti-regime demonstrations during the Arab Spring. Other than the classical organized form of civil society such as NGOs, new forms of civil society activism were observed with the new name 'activated citizenship' throughout the protests (Cavatorta 2012, 78). It became evident that there were numerous modes of engagement ranging from blog writing, artistic expression or mass participation to non-political events (Cavatorta 2012, 81). The Arab world never seemed more unified than during the protests of the Arab Spring with the wave of transnational diffusion in the Arab world.

Following the Arab uprisings in March 2011, the Arab League and the GCC have also reassessed their standings and tried to improve their image – or adjusted themselves to the changing political dynamics of the region. Some even argue that the Arab uprisings triggered a revitalization of regional organizations, particularly the Arab League and the GCC (Beck 2015, 190). Firstly, Libya's League membership, and then Syria's, were suspended. With Libya's suspension, the League took a radical decision to get involved in the internal affairs of a member state by taking the matter to the UN Security Council. This resulted in UN Resolutions 1970 and 1973 which authorized intervention against the Qaddafi regime through military means. Despite this unusual over-involvement, the League was gradually sidelined by superior US and European involvements including massive NATO bombardment of Libya. In the case of Syria, the Arab league was again quite active with the decision to suspend Syrian membership after Assad's policy towards Syrian civilians and also dispatched joint observer missions with the UN in 2012 and 2013 (Mohamedou 2016, 1225). While it did fall short in forwarding an Arab solution to either the Syrian or ISIS crises, the security concerns of Arab states seemed to be taking a new turn. Consequently, the Arab League announced the creation of a joint military force comprising some 40,000 troops in 2015 (Mohamedou 2016, 1229). In the meantime, the GCC launched campaigns such as an intervention in Bahrain showcasing hard means of security rather than societal instruments of security.

These examples show that conventional nation-state centered understandings of politics in the Middle East fail to capture the realities on the ground. In reality, political and military developments in almost all critical regional issues are heavily influenced by the acts of several non-state actors including Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, PKK and PYD. The proliferation of non-state actors, transnational armed groups, the rise of multilayered tribal, and sectarian identity beyond the state request new forms of organizations and cooperation for democracy, development, and security in the region.

Conclusion

While the Middle East might not be a region without regionalism, it seems that any expectations that high levels of regionalization would translate into an advanced regionalism have not been matched by the realities on the ground, yet. In many cases, regionalism in the Arab Middle East remains closely tied to the intensification of insecurity or the consolidation of authoritarian regimes rather than to a cooperation for prosperity, conflict resolution, or democracy. Meanwhile, the Arab League and the GCC frequently underperform and often remain ineffectual. The Middle East is therefore still not a region easily associated with cooperation or integration and is undoubtedly one of the most volatile zones in the world, dominated by crises, conflicts, and wars. Having said that, the potential for cooperation and integration should not be overlooked, and the low level of regionalism should not be taken as a static phenomenon – especially since the protests of the Arab Spring suggested otherwise with the display of unprecedented degrees of regionalization. For the foreseeable future, multifaceted novel forms of regionalism seem to make their appearance with multilayered levels of regional cooperation, transnational diffusion or unwanted forms of regionalization in the region. Considering all the uncertainties and challenges ahead for the region, we would do well to revisit Fawcett's reminder that "there is no ideal region, nor any single agenda to which all regions aspire. Regions, like states, are of varying compositions, capabilities and aspirations" (2004, 434).

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Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

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Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East
Written by Ayşegül Sever

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Globalism, Regionalism and the Middle East

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