Introducing Regional Security in the Middle East

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As a term, *Middle East*, albeit still contested in its meaning, did not gain much currency until after the Second World War. Especially during the Cold War, the terminology was popularised in US contexts (Adelson 2012, 47–50). Here, we use the neologism *Middle East* as referring to the geographical area situated at the junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa and of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean, reflecting contemporary politological conventions without denying the term's contestations. As such, the region occupies a unique strategic position. Hence, we can easily understand why the region has attracted the strategic attention and involvement of great powers and empires throughout history. The Middle East is also the birthplace and spiritual centre of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Specifically, the Middle East contains the holiest places of Islam as well as the highest institutions of Islamic learning, while the Holy Land of Palestine is associated with the aspirations of Jews and Christians. It is also the birthplace of civilisation in the Northern hemisphere (Jamieson 2016). Moreover, with the beginning of the twentieth century and the discovery of oil and natural gas "the fate of the region" changed dramatically (Grigoriadis 2014, 124) because in the Middle East we can find the greatest single reserve of oil that stipulated other powers' desires.

The region's significant stocks of crude oil added to its geographical, strategic and economic importance. Particularly 'Saudi Arabia was no longer the regional backwater that it had been until the 1940s', but became one of the leading regional powers in the region. With the ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, particularly after 1979, 'the Persian Gulf became an epicenter of global instability' (Steinberg 2014, 116; Qadir and Rehman 2016). Mass production of oil began around 1945, with Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) possessing large quantities of oil. Thus, with ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia in mind, it is worth noting that the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia and Iran are some of the highest in the world and the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is dominated by Middle Eastern countries. It is not, therefore, surprising that the importance of the Middle East transcends its geographical limits and that the region has been a major theatre of global politics.

Defining Security

The answer to what makes something a security problem has been a subject of a long academic debate which grew out of dissatisfaction with the narrowing of the field of security studies imposed by the military logic of the Cold War. Thus, it has been argued that concerns about military security traditionally masked underlying issues of political, economic, societal, and environmental threats (Buzan 1991 and 1991a; Buzan, Waever and de Wilde 1998). Although military threats remain important for security thinking and frontier disputes maintain or are still perceived as an ongoing (military) security threat (Joffé 1996), other types of threats have risen in importance. Increasingly, Middle East scholars have argued for a shift in the perception of security away from military aspects to other issues in the region (Chalk 2004). Unsurprisingly, the continuous emphasis on the military aspect of security comes primarily from scholars related to the military sector itself (see Feldman and Toukan 1997; Cordesman 2004; Terrill 2015) and, at least partly, reflects the traditional interests of hegemonic powers in the region (Zulfqar 2018). Thus, reflecting the recent trend in scholarship, this volume does not treat military security as a singular issue, but as a problem that should be discussed in as wider context. For instance, as Blanton (1999) has argued, an increase in military imports

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often goes hand in hand with an increase in human rights violations and, thus, a decrease in personal security. Thus, for the purposes of this volume, Middle East security is defined in the broader sense as the presence of threats that pose an existential threat to states, governments, communities, individual groups, and the region as a whole.

In other words, security operates both at the domestic and regional levels. Because the dynamics of national security are highly relational and interdependent between states (Buzan 1991a, 34), individual national securities can only be fully understood when considered in relation to each other. Yet, power dynamics within individual states are also of relevance here, whether they concern authoritarianism, rentier economics, and protectionism (Dauderstädt 2006) favouring some groups, while causing security concerns to others. Moreover, although migration is mostly discussed in the European context (Held 2016), it is essentially an even greater challenge, security issues included, for the Middle East. Consequently, even though the traditional understanding of security suggests a focus on the military sector, the concept cannot be properly understood without bringing in actors and dynamics from the political, societal, economic, and environmental sectors (Buzan 1991, 363). According to Buzan, the concept of security binds together these levels and sectors so closely that it demands to be treated in an integrative perspective (Buzan 1991, 364).

What is important to note is that the operation of the forces of interdependence causes threats operating in one sector to spill over and affect other sectors. For example, a threat operating in the economic sector may generate threats operating in the military and societal sectors. In this sense, economic decline or the unequal distribution of economic benefits may affect internal stability, state (government)-society relations, as well as reduce a state's capacity to acquire weapons systems for its defence. Similarly, threats stemming from the domestic environment of the state may affect regional security. The Syrian Civil War is a case in point of a crisis that has a long history leading up to the events that sparked the civil war: After 'Hafez al-Assad had abandoned socialism for a limited crony capitalist liberalisation in the 1990s […] his son accelerated the process', limiting economic opportunities to the elites, while stripping off farm subsidies for diesel and fertilisers. Together with the 2006–2010 drought which caused the internal migration of over 300,000 (Sunni) peasants to the urban centres, and the destabilisation of the social strata in these centres (Philipps 2015, 366–7).

In the military sector, the referent object of security (what it is to be secured) is mainly the state and threats usually come from the state's external environment. Military action usually threatens all the components of the state. It can, for instance, repress the idea of the state, damage its physical base, destroy its various institutions, and leave a defeated society at the mercy of the conqueror's power. One example may be seen in Lebanon's dependence on Syria during and after Lebanon's civil war (1975–1990). During the war, Syria's Hafez al-Assad established 'a web of client relationships with multiple political actors and militia' (Philipps 2016, 13) that essentially turned into a de facto hegemony in Lebanon (Scheller 2013, 51). This is one reason for which military threats have traditionally been accorded the highest priority in national security concerns. Due to the existence of several conflicts in the Middle East, military security features prominently among governmental priorities.

In the political sector, a state may be threatened both internally and externally. Internally, threats may result from a political struggle over the state's ideology (e.g. secularism, Islamism, pan-Arabism, democracy, and authoritarianism), which may lead to governmental actions that would threaten individual citizens or groups. All of these elements may be identified in the Arab Spring uprising in Egypt that first ousted Mubarak, brought the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood under Morsi to power through democratic election, and eventual military coup under el-Sisi (Arafa 2014). Resistance to the government, efforts to overthrow it, or movements aimed at autonomy or independence all threaten state stability and enhance state insecurity. The Arab Spring has demonstrated the centrality of political security since social uprising was, among other things, a response to years of state oppression. Externally, political threats are aimed at the organisational stability of the state but may jeopardise the stability of the entire region (Mason 2016, 77). Their purpose may be to pressure the government on a particular issue, or to overthrow the government, or to encourage secessionism, as it is visible in the Kurds' call for an independent state, or to disrupt the political functions of the state in order to weaken it prior to military attack. The idea of the state – particularly its national identity, organising ideology, and institutions – are the usual targets of political threats. Since the state is essentially a political entity, political threats may be as much feared as military ones.

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Political threats stem from the great diversity of ideas and traditions. Because contradictions in ideologies are basic, states of one persuasion may well feel threatened by the ideas represented by others. Threats to national identity, for instance, may involve attempts to heighten the separate ethno-cultural identities of groups within the target-state. Empirically, conflicts classified as 'ethnic' have significantly increased since the end of the Cold War (Landis and Albert 2012, 2). Their purposes could range from increasing the difficulty of a government in a neighbouring state to deal with specific issues that encourage secessionism. Thus, an external threat can be transformed into an internal one. Moreover, political threats may be intentional or may arise structurally from the impact of foreign alternatives on the legitimacy of the state. Such threats may come into existence when the organising principles of two states contradict each other in a context where the states cannot ignore each other's existence as may be visible in the Palestine-Israel conflict or in the anti-Jewish rhetoric by Khomeini and his successors (Koch 2015, 193) or in the ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In other words, where the achievements of one state automatically erodes the political stature of another, this often leads to more intentional forms of political threats. Yet, when political threats destabilise the state, the resulting domestic upheaval may spread beyond state borders and affect neighbouring countries and regions as a whole.

In the societal sector, the referent object of security is collective identities that can function independently of the state, such as religions and nations. In relations between states, significant external threats on the societal level are often part of a larger package of military and political threats. Therefore, societal threats can be difficult to disentangle from political or military ones. At lower levels of intensity, even the interplay of ideas and communication may produce politically significant societal and cultural threats; for example, Hassan al-Bana's rhetoric and the birth of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood were examples of the reaction of Islamic fundamentalists to the penetration of Western ideas (Moussalli 1993). Language, religion and local cultural tradition all play their part in the idea of the state, and may need to be defended or protected against cultural imports. If the local culture is weak, even the unintended side-effects of casual contact could prove disruptive and politically charged (Holsti 1982).

Threats in the societal sector may arise from the internal or external environment of the state, while an internal threat may be transformed into an external one and *vice versa*. Moreover, if societal security is about the sustainability of traditional patterns of language, culture and religious and ethnic identity and custom, then threats to these values come much more frequently from within states than outside them. The state-nation building process often aims at suppressing, or at least, homogenising sub-state social identities. As a result, internal societal threats may precipitate conflict between states if the latter wish to protect groups of people with whom they have close affinities and who find themselves in a state that suppresses their rights (see Belge and Karakoç 2015).

In the economic sector, the referent objects of security are more difficult to pin down and consequently, are the most difficult ones to handle within the framework of national security (Knorr 1975; Knorr and Trager 1977). The main problem with the idea of economic security is that the normal condition of actors in a market economy is one of risk, competition and uncertainty. Therefore, within the market system a significant number of economic threats which cannot reasonably be conceived as threats to national security exist. However, when the consequences of economic threat reach beyond the strictly economic sector into military and political spheres, three somewhat clearer national security issues can emerge involving linkages between economic capability on the one hand, and military capability, power, and socio-political stability on the other (Buzan 1991, 126). Economic pressure, however, also threatens the state's accountability and, thus, in the long run, may cause state weakness and insecurity (Richards 1995).

A state's military capability rests both on the supply of key strategic materials and the possession of an industrial base capable of supporting the armed forces. When strategic materials must be obtained from abroad, a threat to the security of the supply can be seen as a national security issue, particularly if the political climate changes as recently seen in the international response to the assassination of the Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Turkey. Similarly, an economic decline of basic industries raises questions about the ability of the state to support independent military production (Buzan and Sen 1990). For example, the desire of several Middle Eastern states to maintain or acquire production capability in key military-related industries has inserted a national security requirement into the management of the national economy. On the other hand, the pursuit of military research and development have prevented some Middle Eastern states from investing in their civil economy.

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Economic threats may also enhance domestic instability, especially when states pursue economic strategies based on maximisation of wealth through excessive trade. Where complex patterns of interdependence exist, many states will be vulnerable to disruptions in the flows of trade and finance (Keohane and Nye 1977, chapters 1 and 2). The link between economic and political stability generates a set of questions about development, which can easily be seen as a national security issue. For example, some Middle Eastern states that are not efficient producers find themselves locked into a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment from which there is no obvious escape. A special threat to stability can also be seen in youth unemployment which can bring economic and social problems as well as stability concerns (Fehlin et.al. 2015). Hence, the governments of those states find themselves having to choose between meeting their debt payments at the expense of lowering already very low living standards. Moreover, conscious external actions by other states resulting in material loss, strain on various institutions of the state, and even substantial damage to the health and longevity of the population constitute threats to national security. Finally, economic threats raise concerns about the overall power of the state within the international system. If the economy declines, then the state's power also declines (Kennedy 1988; Schlessinger 1970; Schultz 1973).

In the environmental sector, the range of possible referent objects of security is large, but the basic concerns are how human species and the rest of the biosphere are related, and whether this relationship can be sustained without risking a collapse of the achieved levels of civilisation and/or the disruption of the planet's biological legacy (Choucri 1993). Environmental threats to national security can damage the physical base of the state, sometimes to a sufficient extent as to threaten its idea and institutions. For instance, climate change has led to the rise of environmental threats in the Middle East, such as pollution, water distribution, and deforestation, linking activities within one state to effects in another. Moreover, climate change not only has a significant impact on Middle Eastern economies (economic security) but has also created the need of access to natural resources (river and lake waters). Access to water sources may thus become a cause of conflict between neighbouring states. Indeed, some others see already a 'hidden' water conflict in the region (Zeitoun 2012; Mukhar 2006).

The Relevance of Human Security

Since the individual human being is the constituting unit of any society ranging from local to global, as well as the most basic referent object of security, 'human security' becomes an essential tool for understanding security dynamics in any state or region. The basic idea behind the concept of 'human security' is the belief that threats are not isolated to a state but are placing everyone in a region or the world as a whole in some form of risk. This is not to say that human security implies that all threats are equal regardless of space and time. It rather means that some issues may originate in a particular country but eventually they may have a significant impact upon a whole region. For example, a political or humanitarian crisis in a Middle Eastern state has the potential of creating a humanitarian situation that could affect other regional states. The humanitarian crisis caused by the civil war in Syria is illustrative. Moreover, the risks of abject poverty not only threaten individuals in some Middle Eastern states, they can also destabilise governments. The existence of an unstable government can quickly lead to violence, putting a greater portion of a nation's population at serious risk, while the consequences of domestic violence may spill over to neighbouring states thereby affecting regional security.

Human security scholars have argued that national, regional, and global security are all menaced by underdevelopment (Duffield 2007, 111). However, they challenge the assumption that economic growth constitutes the main indicator of development. Instead, they suggest that sustainable development can serve as a foundation for domestic, regional and global stability. This belief is based on the observation that disease epidemics, terrorism, and political violence tend to emerge from states that do not have adequate resources to provide proper material benefits or opportunities for their populations. Thus, human security also depends on the level of equality in a state. As Dauderstädt (2006, 12) notes, 'rich elites compare the costs of democratisation with the costs of oppression, which will increase with the strength of the opposition'.

Thus, there are several areas of life to which human security applies and which are relevant to the Middle East. Personal security constitutes the most basic understanding of security as all people are at risk from physical violence, while some groups, such as women and children are at greater risk. All people in all places deserve protection from violence perpetrated by their state, other states, and in some cases even by their own groups. To the

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regional and global concerns associated with ethnic violence, one has to add concerns related to drug and human trafficking, or infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS that threaten mainly the most vulnerable part of society (Gökengin et.al. 2016).

Protection from various sources of violence is also extended to social groups such as families, communities, or organisations. Political security is required so that people can be active participants in their societies or governments. Human rights are needed so that people can express themselves without fear of repression or governmental control of ideas and information. Yet, since the Arab Spring uprisings, observers of the Middle East have witnessed an opposite trend. As Ayanian and Tauch (2016) in their study on Egyptian activists in the 2013 post el-Sisi coup uprising show, increased oppression by the military-led regime impacted risk perception and therefore collective action. Simultaneously, one can also observe, although that is by no means a problem restricted to the Middle Eastern region, more oppressive state-action against critical journalism and a free press more generally (Frykberg 2014). Nonetheless, the concept of political security has been folded into other categories to make it more action-oriented. For example, instead of simply stating that citizens should be able to participate in a democracy, human security now emphasises increasing the capacity for citizens to participate. A comprehensive strategy for capacity building includes respecting human rights, increasing economic opportunities, and securing basic education (UNDP 1994, 17).

Economic security is based upon the assumption that the ability to save or access resources is an important part of human life (UN Commission 2003, 73). The most basic understanding of economic security is that of people having access to regular work and consequently a reliable income that would allow them to meet their daily needs. Economic security is also viewed in terms of preservation of economic freedom in periods of crisis, and thus the expectation that global economic shocks will not decrease freedom (UN Commission 2003, 74). In the event that work is unavailable, economic security requires the existence of some kind of 'publicly financed safety net', such as social security and protection against unemployment (UNDP 1994, 4).

Food security implies that all people should have access to food. In turn, this requires the presence of conditions that would allow people to access food but also the existence of an infrastructure that would allow food to reach people. Yet, the question is not only access to food but, more important, *access* to *quality* food. Food security is based upon the logic that better nutrition increases the capacity of people to do things, especially to earn income and produce valuable goods and services. In turn, people can then use the money earned to buy even more food, and be even more productive. This points to the importance and centrality of economic security (UNDP 1994, 6).

Health security implies access to health services and the ability to afford at least a minimum level of treatment. Health is defined as 'not just the absence of disease, but as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being' (UN Commission 2003, 16, see also Hwalla et.al. 2016). Health security is of particular importance due to its impact on economic security. Thus poor population health poses serious threats to developing countries.

Environmental security is based upon the assumption that people require healthy land and resources to lead a stable life. Environmental security is more than just the protection from or government assistance for dealing with the results of natural disasters. It is also protection from and prevention of human-made environmental degradation. For example in the Middle East there is increasing difficulty getting access to clean water, while the life of communities is affected by the combined threat of deforestation and overgrazing that has accelerated desertification (Floyd and Matthew 2012).

From National to Regional Security

To understand the linkage between national and regional security, this volume will adopt Barry Buzan's Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) that was first sketched in the first edition of *People, States and Fear* (1983, 105–15). Updates to the theory were presented in Buzan (1991a, chapter 5), while a revised version of RSCT was introduced by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde in 1998 and Buzan and Wæver in 2003.

RSCT provides a theoretical justification for constructing world regions based on the degree of 'enmity' and 'amity'

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existing among states. 'Amity' refers to inter-state relationships ranging from genuine friendship to expectation of protection or support. 'Enmity', on the other hand, refers to inter-state relationships conditioned by suspicion and fear. Patterns of amity and enmity arise from a variety of issues ranging from border disputes and ideological alignments to longstanding historical links whether positive or negative (Buzan 1991, 190). Enmity can be particularly durable when it acquires a historical character between peoples, as it has between the Arabs and the Israelis or the Iranians and the Iraqis. To obtain a more comprehensive picture of regional security, to the patterns of amity/enmity one should add power relations among states. However, as factors the degree of enmity/amity between states are distinct from the power relations between them.

The term 'security complex' is employed by Buzan to label the formations resulting from patterns of amity and enmity among states. A security complex is defined as 'a group of states whose primary security concerns link together closely enough that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another' (Buzan 1991, 190). Thus, the term 'security complex' indicates both the character of the attribute that defines the set (security), and the notion of intense interdependence that distinguishes any particular set from its neighbours. Security complexes emphasise the interdependence of rivalry, as well as that of shared interests.

The idea of security complexes is an empirical phenomenon with historical and geopolitical roots. Specifically, ethno-cultural thinking, as well as religious and racial ties underlie much traditional historical analysis. Such ties constitute a significant factor in identifying security complexes since shared cultural characteristics among a group of states would cause them both to pay more attention to each other in general, and to legitimise mutual interventions in each other's security affairs in particular. This is particularly clear in the Middle East where the idea of an Arab nation and the trans-national political force of Islam combine to create a potent regional political realm. Therefore, it is not difficult to see how ethnicity (Arab) and religion (Islam) have facilitated and legitimised security interdependence among a large group of states in the Middle East. Yet, Arab nationalism and Islam weaken the identity of the local states, legitimise an unusually high degree of security inter-penetration and stimulate a marked propensity to establish regional organisations (the Arab League, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Arab Cooperation Council, and the Maghreb Group). They also play a major part in defining the main nodes of conflict in the region centred on two non-Arab states embedded within it (Israel and Iran), one of which is not Islamic while the other is the representative of Islam's principal schism.

Security complexes are also generated by the interaction of anarchy and geography in the sense that anarchy confronts all states with the power-security dilemma, while security interdependence is powerfully mediated by the effects of geography. Because threats operate more potently over short distances, security interactions with states in close proximity tend to have first priority.

The principal factor defining a complex is usually a high level of threat and fear, which is felt mutually among two or more states. The Arab-Israeli and the Iranian-Israeli cases clearly show the extent to which neighbouring local dynamics are conditioned by the security rhetoric of the states towards each other, by their military deployments, and by the record of their conflicts. On the other hand, the relationship between Egypt and Jordan indicates that a high level of trust and friendship can also serve as a binding force. This is because security interdependence can be positive as well as negative.

Another way in which security complexes can be identified is with reference to the role of economic factors. The latter play a role in determining both the power of states within their local security complexes and their domestic stability and cohesion as actors. They may also play an important role in motivating the patterns of external interest in the local complex as in the case of the United States and the oil-producing countries of the Persian Gulf. Yet, they can affect the prospects for regional integration, which can influence and determine how a given security complex evolves.

Defining and Delimiting the Middle East as a Region

If we apply the definition of 'security complex', then we can define the Middle East as a region composed of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely such that their national securities cannot

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realistically be considered apart from one another. Within the Middle East security complex, which Turkey and Afghanistan help to insulate from the European and South Asia security complexes respectively, one can currently identify three sub-complexes.

The first and defining core sub-complex in the Middle East is the one centred in the Levant between Israel and its Arab neighbours and which has given rise to many regional wars. This sub-complex is the result and the reflection of the local struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, which set up and sustained a much wider hostility between Israel, on the one hand, and its immediate neighbours, as well as the wider Arab world, on the other. To a lesser extent, this struggle has been shadowed by a conflict between Israel and the wider Islamic world. However, a case can be made that the Levant sub-complex also includes the Maghreb states, which Buzan and Waever have identified as constituting a separate albeit a very weak sub-complex centred on the shifting and uneasy set of relations among Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco. According to Buzan and Waever (2003, 193), the main regional security problem in the Maghreb has been the Moroccan annexation of Western Sahara in 1975, which led to tensions with Libya and Algeria, which backed the Polisario Movement against Morocco. The argument that the Maghreb countries are currently part of the Levant sub-complex is advanced for two reasons: first, today the Western Sahara issue is not strong enough to provide the basis of a wide Maghreb sub-complex which cannot account for the place of Tunisia; and second, and most important, the Maghreb countries together with those of the Levant sub-complex have many things in common. For example, the Maghreb states have had a considerable involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, they are members of the Arab League, partners in the European Union's Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and members of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

The second sub-complex in the Middle East is the one centred on the triangular rivalry among Iran, Iraq and the Gulf Arab states led by Saudi Arabia. To this core rivalry, one may add the peripheral rivalry between Yemen and Saudi Arabia. Scholars have suggested (Buzan and Waever 2003, 155; Clapham 1996, 128; Tibi 1993, 52) that the Horn of Africa sub-complex should be located within the African security complex. However, due to increasing patterns of security interdependence, a strong case can be made that today this sub-complex constitutes a third Middle East sub-complex with Sudan and Somalia as its principals and where Saudi-Arabia, Egypt, and the Gulf States have taken a significant interest.

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