

India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East

Written by Mark N. Katz

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MARK N. KATZ, APR 4 2011

Geoffrey Kemp's new book, *The East Moves West: India, China, and Asia's Growing Presence in the Middle East*, is a geopolitical tour de force about what the rise of India, China and Asia broadly mean for Middle Eastern countries as well as for the international relations of the Middle East. The bulk of the book documents the impressive growing interaction among India, China, Pakistan, Japan and South Korea, on the one hand, and the Middle Eastern countries, on the other. Some might find daunting Kemp's detailed account of the growth in trade, increase in military cooperation, number and types of contracts signed, and rise in educational and cultural exchanges between the Asian powers and the Middle Eastern states. But it is just this detailed account that demonstrates Kemp's point: China, India and other Asian states already have a very strong presence in the Middle East (particularly in the Gulf). This presence has grown rapidly during the past decade, and it is likely to continue growing into the future.

At the same time that the Asian powers have increased their interaction with Arab and other Muslim states, Kemp notes, they have also increased their interaction with Israel both economically and militarily. He writes that, "the most successful Asian countries regard Israel as a similarly successful country that they can do business with rather than a pariah to be boycotted" (p. 145). The Asian powers refuse to side with either the Arabs or with Israel on the Arab-Israeli dispute, but seek good relations with both sides. And so far, as Kemp observes, this has worked.

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The final chapter, “Alternative Scenarios and Uncertainties,” differs from the detailed factual discussion presented earlier and engages in a future-oriented analysis. Kemp examines the prospects for relations between the Asian powers, on the one hand, and the Middle East, on the other, under four different scenarios: 1) growth and prosperity; 2) mayhem and chaos; 3) Asian balance of power; and 4) international cooperation.

What the book makes clear is that, as the influence of Asian powers in the Middle East rises, American and Western influence is likely to decline. But, Kemp emphasizes, the Asian powers are not anxious to displace the United States in the region. Instead, they prefer to allow the United States to continue its efforts to defend the region — thus sparing the Asian states the trouble and expense of doing so, while allowing them to benefit from the American-sponsored security order.

In addition, the Middle Eastern states themselves appear quite comfortable with the rise of Asia. They are fortunate that it is not just China or India alone that is a rising power; that could result in their becoming uncomfortably dependent. The fact that India and China — along with others, to a lesser degree—are rising allows the Middle Eastern states to balance their relations between and among them. Further, the rise of Asian influence allows Middle Eastern states to increase their independence vis-à-vis the United States, while the continued American presence allows Middle Eastern states another avenue for avoiding becoming too dependent on the Asian powers.

The Middle Eastern states, then, have benefited from both their increased interaction with the Asian powers and the continued presence of the United States. At the same time, the Asian powers have benefited from their increased interaction with the Middle East, the American-established security order that facilitates this at no cost to them. Indeed, it is the continued American presence in the region that allows the Asian powers to avoid choosing sides in Middle Eastern disputes.

There is no guarantee, however, that this happy situation will continue for the Asian powers. As Kemp writes at the end of the book’s last chapter, “How long they can sustain their hands-off approach is questionable if, by virtue of their economic dominance and their own strategic stakes in the region, they get drawn into the messiness of Middle East politics at a time when the United States becomes disillusioned by the burdens of hegemony.” Indeed, declining American influence combined with rivalry among the Asian powers could lead to a Middle East caught up in the rivalry of more powerful countries from outside the region, just as it was during the Cold War.

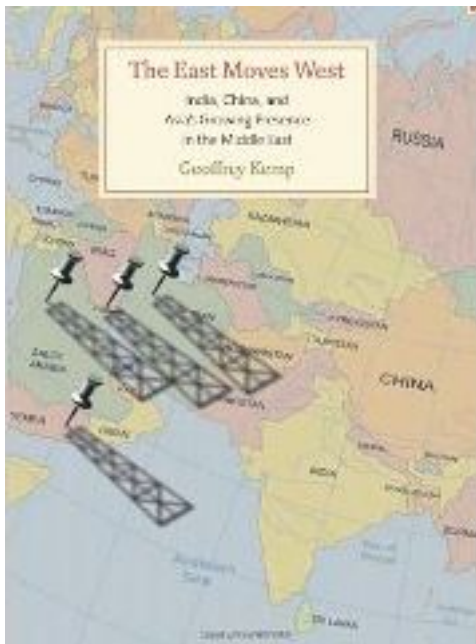
In sum, *The East Moves West* confirms Geoffrey Kemp’s reputation as a scholar who combines a broad geopolitical vision with an extraordinarily detailed knowledge of the many bilateral relationships between so many Middle Eastern countries, on the one hand, and so many Asian powers, on the other. It will be of great value to policy makers, journalists, scholars and students.

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Book Details

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The East moves West By Geoffrey Kemp

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