

BOOK REVIEW

REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: SECTORS, VARIABLES, AND ISSUE

Bettina Koch & Yannis A Stivachtis. (2019). Regional Security in the Middle East; Sectors, Variables, and Issue. Bristol: International Relations Publishing

The contents in this book adopted a comprehensive approach to identifying and analyzing the dynamics of security in the Middle East. The contents are divided into three parts. The first part focuses on identifying threats operating within the political, economic, social, and environmental sectors. The second part seeks to investigate the impacts of various factors, such as geography, environment, available resources, and migration patterns. This section is deemed essential by the authors, as these factors significantly influence future security in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the third part provides an in-depth examination of the political economy, addressing topics such as the role and effectiveness of regional human rights organizations, the causes of religious radicalization, the use of religion to justify political conflicts, the role and strategies of regional non-state violent actors, and the dynamics surrounding the Arab Spring.

The Middle East has become a major topic of discussion, particularly in the 20th century, due to its oil and natural gas reserves, which have made the region a target for many nations worldwide. Consequently, the region has often experienced conflicts of interest among various countries, driven by the discovery of the world's largest oil reserves located within

the region. Its strategic importance is further amplified by its geographical position and rapid economic progress, notably in Saudi Arabia, which has emerged as a significant power in the region. However, the tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, ongoing since 1979, have turned the Persian Gulf into a source of global instability, affecting regional security. These Iran - Saudi tensions have evolved into a major issue, sparking extensive debates among scholars and expanding into the realms of politics, social economic, and the environment. Even though military issues are often considered the most critical when it comes to security, threats in other domains also warrant attention. Security in the Middle East is defined as the absence of existential threats to states, governments, communities, groups, individuals, and the region as a whole.

As explained by Buzan (in Alunaza et al., 2018, p. 63), security is interconnected with both domestic and regional factors. Security is also influenced by economic, military, and global political conditions. This is because the dynamics of national security are closely linked to the security of other states. Issues related to migration have been widely discussed in the context of Europe and also pose unique challenges for the Middle East as well. Addressing security issues requires



integrative understanding and integrative perspective. Regional security problems also have an impact on human security. For instance, political or humanitarian crises in the Middle East have the potential to create unsafe conditions that affect other regional states. The humanitarian crisis resulting from the Syrian civil war serves as a clear example. In addition to causing widespread poverty, the crisis has destabilized the government. An unstable government increases the risk of violence and has significant implications for regional politics (Koch & Stivachtis, 2019, p. 10).

The first chapter of this book explains that the primary causes of domestic and regional instability in the Middle East stem from weak states with relatively low social and political cohesion. For instance, Iraq and the Arab Spring highlight the relevance of the concept of weak states to Middle Eastern security. Weak states are characterized by concerns over threats originating from within their domestic sphere. These internal threats also significantly influence social security and the rise of radicalism in the Middle East. The sense of insecurity within society is viewed as a contributing factor to the proliferation of radicalism and terrorism in the region. Simultaneously, shared national-level threats emerged due to the inability of states to effectively perform their functions in addressing internal challenges and establishing a collective framework to tackle the issues they face.

In the subsequent chapter, the authors discuss examples of economic security and economic integration involving the Middle East and the North African region. The arid climate in North Africa exacerbates food insecurity, water scarcity, and infrastructure challenges. These issues are further aggravated by persistent dependence on hydrocarbon exports, rising social inequality, and high unemployment rates among the youth population. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) stands out as the most successful effort at economic integration in the Middle East. However, GCC also faces significant challenges in achieving cross-border regional integration.

Whilst in the final chapter, this book identifies environmental issues by highlighting the role

of regional governments in addressing these environmental challenges. Water scarcity, as a domestic issue, and distribution problems represent challenges faced at the regional level across nation-states. Other issues include pollution, food security, public health, and high mortality rates. Additionally, factors contributing to vulnerability in the Middle East include the influx of refugees and migration flows. The impact of demographic growth directly affects political, economic, social, and environmental security. An increasing number of migrants and refugees entering the Middle East leads to higher national expenditure. Simultaneously, this affects domestic politics and social interactions. A growing population structure also negatively impacts the national economic performance. Moreover, the rise in migration flows has significant implications for the security of individual states in the region and the overall stability of the region.

To address these issues, agreements and conflict management skills are required to handle the growing migration flows in the region. Reaching consensus and achieving consolidation are considered essential for attaining domestic and regional security stability. Governments are also seen as needing to pay special attention to the continuous migration influx, which impacts both local populations and national administrations. The increasing migration flows are viewed as potential obstacles to economic growth, the integration of political perceptions, and social stability. Local communities have expressed a preference for stricter control over cross-border migration. This perspective is based on considerations of economic uncertainty, budget deficits, rising unemployment, and growing anti-immigrant sentiment and concerns, which could influence cultural development as a foundation of national identity.

The Middle East should reflect on Hungary's success in limiting the influx of immigrants. As highlighted in Virginia Sherin's (2020, 62-84) article on the introduction of the "Stop Soros Law" as Hungary's migration policy. The article identifies three main factors behind the formation of the "Stop Soros Law" in Hungary. First, on a domestic level, there's a political transition, public support,

and the involvement of NGOs supporting the national government's migration policies. Second, economics and military factors led to the large budget needed to manage migrant workers. Lastly, international political conditions influenced Hungary's decision to adopt policies regarding migrants. This is based on the rationalization regarding the migrant relocation scheme that was seen as too burdensome for the government.

The three aspects mentioned in Sherin's writing have also been highlighted earlier in this book review. Economic and military issues, politics, social conditions and the state of global affairs significantly influence the stability of security in the Middle East. Not to mention the conflicts occurring between countries in the region, such as the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Syrian crisis, and radical movements operating under the guise of religion. Indeed, religious radicalism is often used as a means to achieve other objectives.

The points regarding sectors directly linked to security in the Middle East identified in this book include political security, social security, economic security, and environmental security, all of which are connected to domestic political conditions as well as regional and global political threats in sequence. Political security, as described, relates to the government's stance at the national level and plays a significant role in ensuring national security, which is also directly linked to human security within the national scope. Meanwhile, threats in the social sphere arise from the influx of refugees and cross-border migration flows, leading to national government budget deficits, economic uncertainty, and an increase in conflict and violence. Furthermore, large migration flows resulting in population growth also impact national economic development and pose a threat to economic integration, not only at the national level but also regionally. Meanwhile, threats in the environmental sphere stem from issues related to health and food security.

The variables impacting regional security in the Middle East include demographics influenced by migration flows, geographical location, and the abundance of natural

resources, particularly oil, which have rendered the geopolitics of the Middle East unstable and prone to frequent conflicts both among regional states and with the international community. Meanwhile, the issues that have emerged in the Middle East and are considered obstacles to regional security stability include conflicts rooted in acts of violence driven by radicalism and religious identity.

The book of Bettina Koch and Yannis A. Stivachtis specifically addresses the security issues in the Middle East using easily understandable words and straightforward diction. Each section is coherent and interconnected, supported by detailed examples. One of the strengths of this book lies in its explanation of the causes of global uncertainty originating from the Middle East. However, the book has certain shortcomings. The authors do not provide specific arguments regarding global norms in addressing the uncertainties that have persisted in the region. Additionally, the discussion on Middle Eastern regional security issues could be further elaborated, considering this region is consistently compelling for discussion. Furthermore, many nations have placed considerable attention on certain Middle Eastern countries, which are perceived as having strategic positions in the global political landscape.

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