

Analysing Middle East Foreign Policies: The Relationship With Europe

Gerd Nonneman (ed.)

Routledge, London and New York, 2005, £ 45.00, 280pp.

ISBN : 0-714-68427-9

Journal of International Relations and Development (2008) **11**, 83–85.

doi:10.1057/jird.2008.2

Disjuncture between theory and practice is anything but novel. Yet, recent American interventions in and increased attention towards the Middle East have exposed an acute gap between international relations (IR) (as practice) and IR (as discipline). In an attempt to better integrate the Middle East region into the study of IR, this edited text attempts to turn traditional scholarship on its head: instead of concentrating on the foreign policy of Western states towards the Middle East, it focuses on Middle Eastern state's foreign policies *vis-à-vis* Europe in particular, and the West in general. In support of this, Gerd Nonneman presents a research agenda that proposes a foreign policy analysis approach tethered to three interrelated environments — domestic, regional and international — that highlights the dynamics and tensions of foreign policy making in Middle Eastern states. The chapters presented in the volume utilize this approach to present and analyse foreign policy through individual case studies.

In the introductory chapters, Nonneman succinctly articulates the framework of the text, broadly considering the three environments of Middle East and North African (MENA) foreign policy. Drawing on the concept of omnibalancing — defined as the process by which 'policy makers must balance between internal and external pressures, in a decision context shaped by the main location of threats and opportunities' (p. 13) — Nonneman's intention is to propose a framework from which to interpret the interplay between the three environments of MENA foreign policy making. This approach recognizes that foreign policy decisions are complex and multi-faceted, and the nature of the state and social structures involved in these decisions. Nonneman concludes with an identification of nine features that impact MENA states' foreign policies towards Europe, ranging from the residual effect of colonialism/imperialism to various economic interests and conflicts. Having broadly presented this framework, the remainder of the text moves to examining the particularities of foreign policy in individual MENA countries, including the specific environments, actors and institutions involved in foreign policy decision making and the dynamics between them.

The chapter on Morocco by Michael Willis and Nizar Messari is one of the text's strongest, as Morocco enjoys a geographic, economic and cultural linkage with Europe perhaps unparalleled in the wider MENA region. The many 'worlds' of Moroccan identity — Islamic, Arab and African as the most prominent — are well presented in their relation to Moroccan foreign policy goals, particularly in relation to the dynamics of monarchical transition since independence. The chapter concentrates on the long-standing goal of returning the Sahara region to Moroccan sovereignty, and how this issue has informed Moroccan relations with



its European, African and Arab neighbours. The following chapter deals with Egyptian–European relations. Essentially beginning the analysis in 1973, Emad Gad examines Egyptian–European relations through the dichotomy of conflict and cooperation, arguing that particular periods gave rise to differing Egyptian positions *vis-à-vis* Europe. Particularly interesting in this contribution is his emphasis of the impact of international factors such as the October 1973 War, the Peace Process and the Barcelona Process and their impact on Egyptian positions towards Europe.

The first contribution by Raymond Hinnebusch on Syria presents the country's foreign policy as negotiating between regional conflict and European partnership. One of the strongest case contributions of the text, Hinnebusch focuses on the nature of identity, state formation and structures in Syria and their impact on foreign policy. He demonstrates that the imperatives of regime survival inform foreign policy directions, most visibly in the regime's careful negotiation between deepened links with the European Union (EU), regional geopolitics and pressures induced from economic globalization. Tom Pierre Najem's contribution reads more as a polemic against Syria's influence in Lebanon than a thoughtful analysis of Lebanon's foreign policy. He essentially reduces the restrictions of Lebanon's foreign policy to Syrian dictates, affording little agency to Syria's domestic Lebanese clients. As a consequence, he does not do justice to the overall theme of the text, as he avoids serious discussion of the impact of Israel on Lebanon's foreign policy or Lebanon's domestic sphere. As the only contribution with a historical perspective, Alberto Tonni discusses Iraqi foreign policy during the Qassim years (1958–1963), arguing that the Arab inter-state system was the major determinant of Iraqi foreign policy during this period. Tonni sheds important insight into the historical trajectory of MENA foreign policy as the outcome of regional rivalries, and also into the impact of colonialism and European influence on state formation and foreign policy.

As the only successful example of subregional integration in the MENA region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) provides an interesting study for collective foreign policy. Abdulla Baabood's chapter presents a sound analysis of the domestic and regional determinants of GCC foreign policy, presenting solid evidence in support of the concept of omniblancing. In a similar vein, a later contribution by Paul Aarts and Dennis Janssen evaluates the impact of global climate change politics on oil exporting countries. The last two case studies focus on Turkey and Iran, which are interesting insofar as they are the two non-Arab countries discussed in the collection. Mustafa Aydin articulates what he refers to as Turkey's 'insecurity complex' as a product of its position and influence in regional and international politics. The guiding influence of Kemalism is presented as the backdrop for understanding Turkey's historical and contemporary relations with Europe, despite tensions wrought by that country's cultural, geographic and historical identity. The chapter on Iran discusses three phases of post-revolutionary Iranian foreign policy (1979–1989, 1989–1997 and since 1997), throughout highlighting the tensions between pragmatist and ideological foreign policy pursuits. Concluding that Iranian–EU relations will likely remain limited, Ziba Moshaver notes the importance of the nature of the theocratic regime in the formulation of foreign policy.



In the final chapter, Hinnebusch revisits broader IR debates between materialists and those who privilege ideational factors, arguing that contradictions between structure and identity remain embedded in the regional order, and continues to define instability in the region. He provides an excellent summation of the theme of the text, demonstrating its contributions to IR constructivist theory based on the relationship between identity, interests and state structures in the explanation of foreign policy. The primary contribution of the text to IR theory is thus to build on the constructivist stream of IR scholarship by presenting a number of case studies demonstrating why interactions between people and communities cannot be examined objectively, but rather from the very perspective and self-identification of the actors themselves. The text thus calls for focus on the subjectivity of actors, and each chapter within it draws from this field of IR scholarship.

As an afterword to the contributions, the editor include a lecture delivered at the Royal Institute for International Affairs by Badr Bin Hamad al Bu Said, Under Secretary for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Oman, on Omani foreign policy in the age of globalization. A primary source document, the lecture provides a fascinating validation of the main arguments of the text, particularly in so far as it articulates a foreign policy approach grounded not in theory, but in the environmental realities and limits of a country such as Oman.

One of the most important contributions of the text is that it demonstrates the utility of constructivist approaches to the study of IR in the MENA region. Sound evidence is marshalled in support of the overall theme of the text, providing a solid foundation for the analysis and interpretation of the foreign policy of MENA states, particularly as it is grounded in the self-interpretation of the actors involved. The text also introduces a series of constructive terms, such as omnibalancing, which provide useful conceptual tools for further research on MENA foreign policy. In fact, the strongest characteristics of the text is the ability of the authors to simultaneously draw on, and contribute to, theory, while clearly demonstrating a superior knowledge of the countries in question. As a result, the text is a positive attempt at bridging the gap between theory and reality, as it appeals to both theorists and area specialists.

While the idea that MENA foreign policy is shaped by the interplay between domestic, regional and international forces is an extremely important contribution to foreign policy analysis, nowhere in the text is it clear how any one of these forces may ultimately be more relevant or important than another. While the contributions are excellent in identifying processes at these three levels which impact foreign policy, they fail to privilege one set of processes over another, leaving the impression that the three levels are essentially equally influential in policy making. Furthermore, while many of the contributions tackle the intervening variable of US policy, they fail to acknowledge the impact other regions in the world may have on MENA foreign policy. Nowhere is there discussion of such factors as China's economic ascendancy or international actors such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference or the Non-Aligned Movement as having influence on MENA foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Europe.

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