



Middle Eastern studies

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1. *The Gulf States and the Horn of Africa: Interests, Influences and Instability*, edited by Robert Mason and Simon Mabon, Manchester University Press, 2022, 320 pages, £85 (Hardcover)

The Horn of Africa has become “a site of increasing interest and engagement” (297) among states in the Persian Gulf over the last 10 years or more. This edited volume is a timely contribution to the study of the rise of interregional connections between the Gulf states and the Horn of Africa. The book addresses the following questions: “What are the main foreign policy priorities of the Gulf states and other external actors in the Horn and Red Sea? What are the main Horn states which fall under external influence or alliance formation deconstruction, and why? What is the contemporary nature of these bilateral relationships, and could they shift over the short to medium term (6–7)?” It focuses on the rivalry of Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, with Iran, Turkey, and other international actors in main Horn states, such as Djibouti, Somalia, and Eritrea.

The book contains two parts—“the view from the Gulf” and “the view of the Horn of Africa.” Part I investigates the motivations, foreign policies, and multi-faceted engagements which have increased the presence of the Gulf states, Iran and Turkey in the Horn of Africa. It consists of eight chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the interests of the Gulf states in the Horn within a broad context of external involvement in the Horn from the Cold War until the present. Chapter 2 examines the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in the Horn, against the backdrop of US–Iran tensions, the Yemen conflict, the fluctuation of oil prices, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter 3 focuses on Iran’s foreign policy strategy toward Africa, showing how Iran has developed and consolidated its relations with Africa to “mitigate its isolation” and “balance against the US” (7). Chapter 4 describes the UAE’s foreign economic policies in the Horn, which “have produced mixed results on the commercial and economic fronts and some important

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wins on the peace and security fronts” (7). Chapter 5 explains “how the Turkey–Qatar presence in the Horn triggered further responses from other regional powers” (7), notably Egypt, Israel, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Chapter 6 turns to Turkey and UAE and shows how their involvement in the Horn has impacted “the intra-Horn political and security dynamics” (7). Chapter 7 depicts how the Qatar crisis triggered fierce competition between Qatar on the one hand and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt on the other, to win allies in the Horn. Chapter 8 focuses on Kuwait’s differentiated engagement in Africa. Instead of focusing on “relief work in the Horn of Africa as a result of war, drought and famine, Kuwait-funded sustainable development projects are more prominent in stable African countries” (8).

Part II looks at bi-lateral relations between the two regions from the side of the Horn, highlighting the “African agency” of the Horn states, which make use of the external penetration to serve their own goals of survival and relative autonomy. This part consists of three chapters. Chapter 9 analyzes how Djibouti has “def[ined] diplomatic gravity, balancing intra-Arab regional rivalries alongside competing local logistical and political pressures within the Horn of Africa as well as global rivalry between US and Chinese naval powers” (9). Chapter 10 examines how Eritrea, Somalia, and Sudan have sought to take advantage of the increasing involvement of the Gulf states in the Horn to “ensure regime survival and consolidation in the current political landscape” (9). Chapter 11 explores how Sudan’s foreign policy was influenced by the rift among the Gulf states during the Qatar crisis.

Scholars and analysts interested in the evolution, development, and effects of the Gulf–Horn relationship will benefit greatly from the rich material and insights in this book.

2. *The Political Science of the Middle East: Theory and Research Since the Arab Uprisings*, edited by Marc Lynch, Jillian Schwedler, and Sean Yom, Oxford University Press, 2022, 320 pages, \$85 (Hardcover)

This edited volume presents systematically the defining debates, research agendas, and theories of Middle East political science since the Arab Spring. It is the fruit of an “epic collaboration” among 47 authors of varying backgrounds, subfields, methodologies, and substantive areas of expertise, as well as career stages. They joined together for this book project after an annual conference of the Project on Middle East Political Science in May 2019. They were divided into 10 working groups. Each group held intensive discussions following a designated thematic lead that represents a topic richly debated among Middle East political science scholars. This work resulted in the book’s 10 thematic chapters (Chapters 2–11).

The book also includes an introduction (Chapter 1) and concluding reflection (Chapter 12). In Chapter 1, Marc Lynch, one of the book’s editors, makes a bold but confident claim that “after decades of marginalization, [Middle East and North Africa] MENA scholars took a central position within key areas of political

science, driving research agendas and being included organically in many of the broader debates across the discipline” and “inasmuch as the Arab uprisings perturbed the landscape of the Middle East, the events also allowed Middle East scholars to begin transforming political science itself” (2). He points to “six areas of exceptional growth and productivity” in the field of Middle East political science, namely “new research questions, new data sources, better conceptualization and theory, diversification of the field, the rebirth of international relations theory, and growing openness to cross-regional and transregional comparison” (7).

Chapter 2 examines the reconfiguration of authoritarianism after the Arab Spring and identifies four new trends that underscore this reconfiguration: “the resurgence of personalistic rule, deepening forms of repression, the cultural and ideological basis of compliance, and the heightened importance of international factors” (40). Chapter 3 reviews the study of protest in the Middle East and highlights ongoing debates surrounding “the political role of routine protests and seeming non-events, the affective dimensions of protests, and the outcomes of protest beyond questions of immediate success and failure” (63). Chapter 4 examines knowledge production about Middle East international relations, explaining how this subfield responds to five phenomena of international relations in the region, including the decline of US hegemony, shifting alliances and alignments, identity-based conflicts, proxy wars and armed nonstate actors, and the multiple understandings of (in)security.

Chapter 5 investigates new eruptions of political violence and new developments of both state and nonstate militaries across the Middle East over the past decade. Chapter 6 explores the impact of long-term institutional legacies, the enduring salience of distributive politics and neoliberal economic pressures, the role of crony capitalism, and the relationship between external rents and economic and political development to explain phenomena of sclerotic economic development in the Middle East. Chapter 7 reviews the debates rejuvenated with the Arab Spring on the relation between Islam and authoritarian persistence and the role of Salafi-jihadism in inspiring violence, before identifying several new areas of inquiry for the study of religion and politics in the Middle East, to “explore the full range of political, social, and economic impacts of religion and religious doctrine” (175) in Middle East politics.

Chapter 8 focuses on sectarianism as a marked form of identity politics in the Middle East and reviews recent literature on this issue that pays more attention to “sectarian-ization,” or “the process by which sect-based differences become politicized”, “catalytic moments for the reconstruction, instrumentalization and institutionalization of sect-based identities”, the “operationalization of sectarian identity”, and the tension between sectarianization and de-sectarianization (184). Chapter 9 reviews the progress of public-opinion scholarship in the Middle East in five areas: views on democracy, voting and electoral behavior, social values and relations, gender attitudes, and youth politics, as well as the methodological advance of this scholarship. Chapter 10 discusses theoretical debates, notable empirical cases, and avenues for future research in five areas of migration and displacement studies since the Arab Spring: the relationship between conflict and migration; labor migration; state-level governance of migration; global governance and international institutions; and the nexus between diasporas and states. Chapter 11 focuses on the upsurge of

scholarship on local politics in the Middle East, discussing in detail three themes in this field—oppositional politics and political subjectivities, local authorities and the distribution of public goods, and neoliberalism policies—and argues for “a relational approach that views the local in its own right” (275). The book ends with a concluding chapter where Lisa Anderson, a former president of the Middle East Studies Association, gives insightful reflections on the complicated tension between Middle East studies and political science as well as the challenges scholars and students face within their research on the Middle East.

This book is so far the most thorough, systematic, and authoritative survey of Middle East political science research efforts since the Arab Spring. It is a must-read for both current and future scholars of the Middle East.

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