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The last decade demonstrated that threats to security vary greatly in their causes and manifestations, and that they invite interest and demand responses from the social sciences, civil society and a very broad policy community. In the past, the avoidance of war was the primary objective, but with the end of the Cold War the retention of military defence as the centrepiece of international security agenda became untenable. There has been, therefore, a significant shift in emphasis away from traditional approaches to security to a new agenda that talks of the softer side of security, in terms of human security, economic security and environmental security. The topical *New Security Challenges Series* reflects this pressing political and research agenda.

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Regional Insecurity After the Arab Uprisings

Narratives of Security and Threat

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For Alexander

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Foreword

The 11 chapters of this book not only link with the overall debate in security studies but also aim to push it further. This volume thus joins the few, still few, books on this region which aim to go beyond the traditional military-based “national security” concept and bring in identity, norms and narratives of threats from inside the region. Simply put, the book drives the point home that security has indeed “many faces”.

The book’s chapters bring to light some of the under-studied aspects of Middle East security. In the process, it enriches the overall world security debate, making it more reflective of various regional contexts. This debate will continue to become more universal as it continues to evolve.

In the 1960s and 1970s, traditional strategic studies with their emphasis on external and military threats were contested by “peace research”. Peace research attempted to attract attention to non-military threats and emphasized the need to go beyond the obsession with balance of power, deterrence and arms races. The end of the Cold War, without the feared nuclear collision, widened the “security debate” even more. It was then explicitly stated that “national-security” was not only too state-centred but could also be regime-serving. “Crying wolf” is used by many elites in power to drain national resources away from serious national problems and enable them to stay in power. “Human security”, since its inception by Mahboub El-Haq in a World Bank publication in 1994, promoted a more society-centred concern with security.

However, the spectre of the state as the basic referent continued to haunt security studies. This book, with its study of intra-state conflicts and regional organizations, is a further invitation to relax the unduly statist and unjustified straitjacket. Instead, it attracts attention to a Middle East security complex with its increasingly multi-layered threat dimension. The book also makes us think of potential insecurity spillovers: from al-Qaeda’s 9/11 internationalization to France’s semi-equivalent to 9/11 (*Charlie Hebdo*) in January 2015, and even potential Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (ISIS) attacks and the presence of a similar component of (un)civil society.

In fact, and as a result of this over-crowded map of threats, writing on the Middle East at the present more than at any other time should be humbling. You are shooting at a moving target. Actors and factors are not only too many, but their shifting connections and alliances add to

the complexity. A few examples make this complexity clearer and more concrete.

The fluidity of the regional security situation has been heightened by the violent emergence of Da'ash or ISIS. For instance, does the Assad regime continue to be foe number one, as was the case in 2013 or even 2014?

The "complexification" of threats and security calculations even in one country, Syria, indicates that the ranking of many conflicts is changing from "marginal" to "central" status or vice versa. For instance, the Arab-Israeli conflict used to be the main – if not only – prism through which most analysts studied Middle East regional security. But even this conflict layer started to change character after such milestones as Sadat's surprising 1977 visit to Jerusalem, the 1978 Camp David Accords, the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian mutual recognition agreement and the 1994 Jordan-Israeli Peace Treaty restructured this conflict's main issues of contest and means of action. Thus even at the level of "hard power"/military threats, Iran's potential nuclearization seems to be becoming more hot and "central" than Israel's. Sure, Israel's occupation policies and even occasional wars are still mobilizing the "Arab street". But Iran's revolutionary ethos and nuclear intentions are, and not only by the United States or Israel, increasingly securitized.

In the last four years – as the book's title shows – a regional milestone with security implications has taken place. The "Arab Spring" ushered in a new context whose security implications necessitate adaptation rather than easy sailing, as "democratic transition" after decades of political control and stagnation proves challenging. New political actors, such as youth, proliferate; also, old actors assume new political roles: Islamists or military as direct top decision-makers, tribes or sects take the driver's seat in Libya or Yemen. No longer is the state's legitimacy and authority threatened primarily from the outside by, for instance, border disputes; the worm is already inside, and threatens the state's very survival, with or without external incitement, for example the Sunni-Shia rift in Bahrain.

Indeed the increasing centrality of intra-state and identity conflicts is confirmed by all aggregate data banks. Thus Uppsala's Conflict Data Program, the International Institute of Strategic Studies in London and the many conflict/peace data banks in Australia and Canada agree on the increasing intensity of these intra-state conflicts compared to inter-state's (lower) intensity. Syria's death toll is quickly approaching the 140,000 mark; its refugees 3 million and internally displaced persons

5 million. This is more than a third of its total population of 22 million. We do not have precise data for those maimed, that is, handicapped for life, both physically and psychologically. Moreover, if this war were to stop now, estimates are that Syria would need 37–40 years to reach its 2010-level of development. So, although hopefully not displaced for long, Syrian refugees, and before them Iraqis and Sudanese, show that refugee status is no longer the monopoly of inter-state conflicts around Palestine.

The worm of tribal, ethnic or religious conflicts (real or manufactured) is also plaguing Libya and Yemen. Central authority is increasingly ineffective and society itself is “militia-factionalized”. When I wrote 30 years ago about the need to go beyond so-called A threats, that is, external military ones, I was actually thinking of socio-economic threats rather than state fragility. I did talk about the Arab state, “alien and besieged” as part of the lack of regime legitimacy and elite circulation, but I could not see the collapse of central authority that would occur 30 years later.

Directly or indirectly the impact of state’s lack of legitimacy and rising societal conflicts is no longer “domestic”, but transnational. And if there is any positive aspect in that bleak situation, it is the advance in our analysis and knowledge of what is going on. As the various chapters of this book show, our conceptual geography is at present more adjusted to the actual landscape. Moreover, compared to 30 years ago, our society-based concepts of security are becoming more data-based and operational. Security studies in the Middle East can profit from this advance.

The Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme is now adding to its indicators a new variable focused on the level of inequality. Given the most recent findings on world inequality, which countries in the Middle East reflect this new data of 1% owning 50% of national wealth, and with what impact? What are the security implications of widening inequality? Wasn’t one of the main slogans in Bourguiba Avenue and Tahrir Square about unemployment and unequal income distribution?

Another index that is getting perfected is the 12-variable Failed State Index. It has previously integrated its two economic variables, five social ones and five political ones to represent a coherent reflection of central authority collapse, but it has been recently revised and renamed the Fragile State Index. This is not a case of diplomacy by terminology, but could help us to capture imminent catastrophe and act as an early warning system before actual state failure becomes irreversible and the central authority vacuum is filled by organized crime or terrorist organizations.

The third index that could be mentioned in this respect is the Global Terrorism Index. For instance, we have already learned that since the year 2000, there has been a five-fold increase in the number of people killed by terrorist attacks, with 82% of them in five countries, three of which are in the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine and Syria); the other two are Afghanistan and Nigeria.

The crucial question then is: if we now know more, should we be able to help more and lessen insecurity? In other words, is there a way out from these accumulated and reinforced zero-sum patterns of interaction? What is the means for setting up transactional cooperation and an international security regime?

Many chapters in this book deal with institutions, regional or sub-regional, as well as with group dynamics, from gender to religious ones. But the way out is neither these chapters' focus nor in fact the book's explicit objective. We might have to think of examples outside the region and explore their adaptability to the present Middle East context and contest. Track two diplomacy has taken place outside the region but finally led to the 1993 Oslo Agreement. Can the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's so-called Helsinki process, with its various economic, political and military "baskets", be applied in the region and how? Should we not start to think of confidence and security building measures as the new rules of the game?

By mapping out the different layers and aspects of the Middle East insecurity complex, the book's chapters provide a needed springboard towards a new way of thinking and hopefully a way out from continuing and cumulative security complexes... Inshallah!

Bahgat Korany
January 2015

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