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The Middle East: A Region-To-Be?

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ABSTRACT

The foundations of regionalism have always been in flux just as the meanings, ascribed to things by people, evolve in time. The goal of the paper is to draw up a blueprint for how to delineate the term 'region' and resort to it to comprehend whether the Middle East is a region or not, thus making future short-term and long-term predictions about the given area. The work aims to clarify economic, political and social, and military-security dimensions of the Middle East and support the main argument of this paper which is the security-related shortcomings prevent the Middle East to become a full-fledged region. A modest array of literature has been scrutinised to corroborate the main arguments of the paper. The paper posits that neither the Middle East is a region nor there is a chance for the Middle East to become a region in the short-term.

Keywords: *Middle East, regionalism, war on terror, the Arab-Israeli conflict, Arab Spring.*

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Introduction

"I, against my brothers. I and my brothers against my cousins. I and my brothers and my cousins against the world".

The conflict-ridden and war-torn Middle East is an embodiment of this saying. The paper aims to question and answer whether the Middle East is a region or not by focusing on the conflict-laden nature of the area. In order to scrutinise the regionness of the Middle East, the paper, first, draws a blueprint for comprehending 'what regionalism is'. Then, by utilising the aforementioned regionalism scheme the paper infers how much of a region the Middle East is. Thirdly, the paper delves further into three fundamental components strengthening the regionness of any area, namely political and societal, economic and military. Ultimately, the paper makes future predictions based upon previously mentioned components. The topic of the paper is imperative to understanding whether the disorder in the Middle East ushers in a new regional order in the Middle East or not. The research question of this paper is analysing the regionness of the Middle East in accordance with a certain definition of regionalism which is related to cohesion and peaceful coexistence. The paper accounts for why it is not a region and why there is not hope for a short-term solution for conflict-ridden area and why making long-term predictions about this war-torn area is major challenge.

1. Regionalism from a Theoretical Perspective

The debate about the definition of 'region' and regionalism has been ongoing since the 1960s and 1970s. However, these debates have not

spawned a revered and potent definition of 'what a region is'. Yet, there is a collectively acknowledged definition of 'region' which, in fact, enunciates no strict boundaries. Indeed, there is not a blueprint for defining 'what a region is', but the widely revered argument is that defining a region requires a myriad of queries which have not any particular boundaries. What this paper sets a high value on is regional harmony and region-wide political, economic, military and societal cohesion of the states located in the given territories. In other words, the features a region should possess are (a) geography; (b) regularity and intensity of connections; (c) various perceptions shared on a regional basis; (d) agency.[1]

There is no middle ground over 'what a region is'. Whether it is a spatial proximity[2] or a non-spatial phenomenon implying interdependence[3] or cultural resemblances. A number of academics from various disciplines, e.g. geography, political science and International Relations (IR), have uttered their presumptions over the query. Geographers focus on the geographical aspect of the term whereas political scientists regard regions as particular areas with

[1] Rodrigo Tavares, "The State of the Art of Regionalism, The Past, Present and Future of a Discipline", UNU-CRIS Working Papers, 2004, United Nations University, October.
[2] Andrew Hurrell, In *Regionalism In World Politics: Regional Organization And International Order*, 1st ed., 1995a, p. 58-66, New York: Oxford UP.
[3] Joseph S. Nye, "Patterns and Catalysts in Regional Integration", *International Organization*, vol. 19, no. 04, 1965, p. 870., doi:10.1017/s0020818300012649.

peculiar features within a state. In the meantime, the protagonists of IR pay attention to supra-national regions and cohesion in such territorial spaces. There are cross-border regions and definitions of regionalism centred on economic relationships as well. Indeed, regions are one of the most peculiar and significant foundations of scholarly works considered the world we live in. Moreover, they are imperative for gaining insights into world politics. Nevertheless, what this paper takes into account as 'region' is a territorial space with military, political, economic and cultural linkages.

The efforts for defining 'region' refers to a land with people on it. The width and length of this particular land and how many inhabitants that land hosts are irrelevant. The amount of states on the land in question is not certain. None of these states characteristics or features is relevant. Therefore, geographically speaking, any particular place on earth is a potential region. Yet, such an ambiguous definition does lack of a scholarly perspective so that an academic definition should not be built on such an equivocal perspective. What we evidently know is that regions are ontologically not there. They are epistemologically defined by us. Indeed, they are not out there in the world, but in our imaginations and minds. 'Region' is a product of human intellect. It is a phenomenon socially constructed by people talking and contemplating such an entity. For incident, the European Union or the African Union, which both separately covering whole continents, are regarded as regional institutions due to the fact that they are constructed as regional institutions in people's minds.

Out-dated interpretations of state-centric definitions of the term are questioned and substituted by a new understanding of the term which is related to economic linkages, cultural similarities and transnational connections.[4] Regions often and partially collide with or completely involve one another. For instance, Eastern Europe is fraught with post-Soviet states whilst it is a component of Europe which is simultaneously a region and a continent. As another example, while 'statehood theory of regions'[5] underscores regions' features which are similar with states' characteristics, the 'New Regionalism Theory'[6] regards indigenous clusters and transnational actors as a region's defining components. Demarcating the borderlines of any region, in conformity with new regionalism, is a challenge concerning 'region' is a term in flux. New regionalism concedes that geography matters. However, it exceeds spatial thinking and pays special attention to socially constructed features of 'region' which is fraught with cognitive terms including identity and culture.[7] It underlines that regional collaboration and coexistence evolve in time in compliance

[4] Raimo Vayrynen, "Regionalism: Old and New." *International Studies Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2003, pp. 25–51., doi:10.1111/1521-9488.501002.

[5] Luk Van. Langenhove, "What Is a Region? Towards a Statehood Theory of Regions." *Contemporary Politics*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2013, pp. 474–490., doi:10.1080/13569775.2013.853392.

[6] Björn Hettne and Fredrik Söderbaum. "Theorising the Rise of Regionness." *New Political Economy*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, pp. 457–472., doi:10.1080/713687778.

[7] Zoleka V. Ndayi, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness by Bjorn Hettne and Fredrik Soderbaum." *Politikon*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2006, pp. 113–124., doi:10.1080/02589340600618180.

with the ever-changing interests and identities of the relevant actors in the given region.[8] Indeed, new regionalism takes into account a nascent perspective related to interstate relations and scrutinises current trans-border reciprocal relations.[9]

There are five diverse definitions of regionness which are sociological, institutionalisation-related, geographic, regionalisation-related and supranational.[10] The first one concerning the sociological definition of 'region' depicts the social characteristics of the inhabitants residing in a certain area. The institutionalisation-related one describes what makes a particular land with certain demarcation lines is the political, economic, societal and military cohesion of the actors in a given area. The third delineates the terrestrial space and the limits of a particular land. The fourth portrays the cohesion of a society pervading all the area. The fifth one takes in consideration the particular and peculiar identity and legitimacy of a region.

Contradicting and theory-based interpretations of regionalism have been made for a long time. 'Region' is an intrinsically ever-changing term as a change of mind is an essential feature of humans. People continue to learn through their lives by their experiences, and their

[8] R. Guy. Emerson, "An Art of the Region: Towards a Politics of Regionness." *New Political Economy*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2013, pp. 559–577., doi:10.1080/13563467.2013.829434.
[9] James H. Mittelman, "Rethinking The "New Regionalism" In The Context Of Globalization". *Global Governance*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1996, p. 189-213.
[10] Ndayi.

understanding of 'region' evolves in a constant state of flux. Therefore, what is taken into account as 'region' decades ago may not be regarded as 'region' in years because of the fact that people ascribing meaning to such terms are in a constant philosophical progress. A region is delineated as a living organism due to people in that region are in a constant state of philosophical flux. The peculiarity of a territorial space depends on its characteristics such as societal, military and political. Hence, the students of IR who are on a quest to set the boundaries of 'region' face a constant challenge due to the cognitive ambiguity of their task.

All in all, the paper argues that there are certain features, which imply cohesion and coexistence, that a region must have. Yet, every territorial space with certain demarcation lines has their unique historical background, especially the Middle East. Therefore, the features of the Middle East as a region-to-be should be analysed in order to elucidate whether the Middle East a region or not.

2. The Middle East - A Region-to-be?

The Middle East has had various historical-critical junctures, which are colonisation, the Arab-Israeli conflict, September 11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' hitherto. September 11 is the latest critical juncture that has had a substantial effect on the Middle East. Its impact on Arab Spring makes it the most relevant critical juncture to

the contemporary state of affairs in the Middle East.[11] The states in the Middle East had to face the devastating military strength of the hegemon of the world. Therefore, a clarification of the complex and complicated economic, political and societal, and military foundations of the Middle East is much-needed in order to have a grasp of the multifaceted state of affairs in the Middle East after September 11.

The 'Orient' is a term made up by Europeans of the first European explorations period. The 'Orient', in Europeans' mind, has been delineated as a land which is fraught with primitive and violent inhabitants. The long distance of this special space to the West was pivotal to the construction of the 'Other' in the West. The next stage of this reasoning was the supremacy of the 'Self' over the 'Other' since the former is superior and the latter is subordinate. Despite such an assumption is a product of an earlier era, it is embedded in the daily life of commons in the West. Some authors even argue that the "Middle East" is the new "Orient".[12]

The "Middle East" as a term stems from British Imperial legacy. The area has become imperative to British Imperial interests' due to Imperial territories in Asia. It was located in the midst of the journey

[11] For further information http://edition.cnn.com/2013/03/17/opinion/iraq-war-arab-spring-husain/index.html.

[12] For further information Karen Culcasi, "Constructing And Naturalizing The Middle East", *Geographical Review*, vol. 100, no. 4, 2010, pp. 583–597, doi:10.1111/j.1931-0846.2010.00059.x.

to the far-away Imperial lands in the "Far East" and the "Near East".[13] However, the term, defining a land between British motherland and Imperial colonised lands in the East, had not had any strict demarcation lines. Therefore, the geographical borders of the term were rather vague and ambiguous.

The US interest and attention towards the Middle East has increased due to the area' geopolitical prominence in the Cold War. The term has obtained meanings related to events involving fundamentalism, 'Iran hostage crisis'[14] and various kinds of war such as the war in Syria[15] and the war in Yemen during the Cold War period.[16] Consequently, the term, from the beginning, has evoked empirical connotations affiliated with disarray, violence and terror in the American mind.

The paper delineates the Middle East as a whole, which is not monolithic in any sense, comprised of three integral parts, namely the centre, semi-periphery and periphery. It consists of the Levant, the Gulf and the Nile Valley, together with Turkey, Iran and North Africa. The centre is the Arab states, located in the Arabian Peninsula and

[13] Culcasi.
[14] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Iran-hostage-crisis.
[15] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Syrian-Civil-War.
[16] For further information https://www.britannica.com/place/Yemen/Civil-war-and-political-unrest.

Egypt. The semi-periphery consists of the other Arab states located in North Africa. Last but not least, the periphery is composed of the countries which are deeply integrated into the area, however, which are not the descendants of the same Arab ancestors as the aforementioned states. For instance, Turkey, as the only NATO member of the area, the direct descendant of Ottomans and a wannabe regional power, should be regarded as a component of the Middle East with her increasingly direct involvement in the politics of the region. Also, Iran, with her sectarian and revisionist power politics exerting influence over and projecting power to the area, is another vital part of the area. Moreover, Israel, as the outsider and so-called pariah of the Middle East, the most successful economic actor and a remarkable military power of the given area is an integral part of the area in question. Additionally, Egypt, after the takeover of the state by General Abdul-Fattah el-Sisi, has gradually become a pawn in the region-wide political rivalries. Yet, Egypt, with her vast population, geopolitical position and significant political history, should not be taken for granted in any way.

The Middle East possesses a vibrant and a long-standing past. Almost all the region was ruled by Ottomans for long decades with relative internal peace. The feeling of belonging to a community was rather deep-rooted and strong with the Islamic authority, custom and the

presence of the Caliphate as the head of the state.[17] Cohesion has stemmed from the peaceful coexistence of different religions and ethnicities, especially toleration towards minorities. The collapse of the Ottomans and the fall of the Caliphate, combined with the Colonising powers rushing into these territories, had a drastic and dramatic effect on these territories. Moreover, the concept of pan-Arab unity has been added to the Islamic identity of these lands.

The cooperation and interdependence efforts in the Middle East are influenced by inter-Arab disputes, the Arab-Israeli conflict, external powers exerting influence on and projecting power to the area and internal disarrays in the states located in the area. These have caused a regional disunity even though the benefits of cooperation and region-wide labour inflow which is economically imperative to but politically unsafe for the Middle East. The states in the Middle East are primarily concerned with their political, economic and military interests since those are the variables keeping the rulers on top, and such short-term interests are best secured in bilateral or multilateral configurations in such an anarchic regional structure. The export of oil to the developed countries and receiving military assistance and materiel from great powers are safe schemes for the states in the given area. Yet, the region-wide Arab rhetoric and discourse have always nourished umbrella Arab identity, together with Turkish discourse on Muslim identity, meaning ‘ummah’, and Iranian rhetoric emphasising

[17] Louise Fawcett, "Alliances and Regionalism in the Middle East," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

sectarian 'Shia identity'. Therefore, such diversity on a fundamental basis is the primary impediment to regionalism initiatives in the Middle East which is fraught with conflicts and violence because of basic rhetorical differences, inter alia. Even though there is an interest-driven, shared regime form which is 'monarchy', sub-regional clusters, such as Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), proves otherwise. For instance, the last Qatar-GCC crisis proves the shaky structure of similar initiatives.[18]

The shaky balance in the Middle East, which has been kept stable, one way or the other, for decades, has been disarrayed by September 11 and ensuing the US' 'war on terror'. The US' intervention in Iraq, and George W. Bush, President of the US (POTUS), 'axis of evil' speech were the first travails of a new order for the Middle East.[19] The 'war on terror' has caused splits among Arab states. Some of these states declared acquiescence whereas others cooperated with the US. So, the US' new initiative has created more fragmentation than concord. Frankly, the post-Cold War Middle East' state of affairs is unstable and ambiguous rather than cohesive and inclusive. The identity-driven consensus of Arab states is confronted by chronic wars and never-ending crises. Such an environment has paved the way for sub-regional cooperation initiatives in the form of bilateral or multilateral agreements, e.g. Iran and Syria. The surge of Islamism against pan-

[18] For further information https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/23/close-al-jazeera-saudi-arabia-issues-qatar-with-13-demands-to-end-blockade.

[19] For the video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btkJhAM7hZw.

Arab movements and radical Islamic clusters have soared in the Middle East lately due to the power vacuum or lack of authority in the Middle East.

Security-related interests come to the forefront when defining and identifying 'what the Middle East is' becomes the impulse of conceptual debates. Geographic entities are frequently described for security-laden purposes, e.g. Southeast Asia. Hence, it is security-driven interests of states that drew attention to the term 'region' in the first place.[20]

The term 'Middle East' has been used by British and American military officials to depict the Persian Gulf and its close proximity which was vital to British interests in the Far East and Near East and, for the same reason, needed to be secured.[21] The area delineated as the Middle East has always been geographically in flux due to security-related reasons such as newly-found oil reservoirs, which was obliged to secure, and Jewish exodus into Palestine which is still one of the primary sources of violence. Such security-related events in the territories adjacent to the Persian Gulf widened the spatial space of the Middle East. Therefore, the borders of the Middle East have never been fixed and definite.

[20] Pinar Bilgin, 'Whose 'Middle East'? Geopolitical Inventions and Practices of Security", *International Relations*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2004, pp. 25–41, doi:10.1177/0047117804041739.
[21] Bilgin.

All in all, the unique security impasse of the area, which is the Achilles heel of the Middle East, is the primary source of the lack of cooperation in the area. There are obstacles to regionalism which are the states' preference for national interests over region-wide collaboration, the regional dislike for reforms, the rent-economies instigating the annulment of social pacts nourishing the region-wide cooperation and the absence of elites who are regionalist and reformist simultaneously.[22]

3. Is There a Future for Middle Eastern Regionalism?

Even though Arabic components of the Middle East lay claims to the area, the Middle East is a combination of different ethnic, religious and ideological parts. Given such peculiarities of the Middle East what this paper focuses on, to question whether the area in question is a region or not, is a multidimensional perspective emphasising not only regional but also the international environment. It is argued that the lack of cohesion in the area stems from security impasse the region is in. This paves the way for tenuous and feeble structures of state and identity in the area, which explains the weak regional institutions and frail region-wide cooperation.[23]

[22] Fawcett.

[23] Clja Harders and Matteo Legrenzi, "Analyzing Regional Cooperation after September 11, 2001: The Emergence of a New Regional Order in the Arab World," in *Beyond Regionalism* (Hampshire, England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

The region-wide preference for national interests over regional collaboration, the regional dislike for reforms and the rent-economies instigating the annulment of social pacts nourishing the region-wide cooperation are the primary impediments to regional cohesion. Besides, the absence of regionalist and reformist elites who are against the status quo in the Middle East and the presence of business elites who are against revisionist and reformist policies weaken the possibility of a chain reaction or spill-over effect in favour of regionalism in the Middle East. The social forces are of vital importance to regionalism attempts. The paper's comprehension of regionalism dictates the presence of internal foundations for the region. These indigenous forces should challenge any external forces and prevent them from imposing order. These internal, meaning regional, forces should endeavour to bring the area under control. Their ability to do so is explicitly affected by economic, political and societal, and military anomalies among the states in the area. Also, it should not be forgotten that the Middle East is fraught with monarchies, republics, rich and poor countries with varying populations and regional centres of attraction and countries on the margins of the regional attraction centres.

3.1. Identity Politics

September 11 has prompted the 'war on terror' which has shaken the Middle East to its foundations. It has engendered a new foreign policy environment, militarisation of the Middle East, and enforced

democratisation of the states in the Middle East. Finally, all of these outcomes have spawned conflicts, weak states and slippery alliances. There is a particular focus of the states in the region, namely stability, which has been a focal point for governments in the area even before September 11. Yet, even though this foundational focus of attention predates the September 11, and 'war on terror', it is deeply impinged by 'war on terror'. There are two reasons of this phenomenon which are (a) gradually increasing disapproval of Arab states' foreign policies by their public and (b) the definition of 'Arab-Islamic identity' reshaped by the foreign intervention after September 11.[24]

The meaning of Arab unity has an ethnically inclusive definition and a religion-driven archenemy. The former definition, thrived on nationalist sentiments, is a secular form of Arab unity. The latter definition flourished on religious feelings, is an Islamic concept, namely 'ummah'. Such identity-related definitions have become crucial in the world politics after the 'war on terror'. Such definitions' meanings have altered from 'state' to 'state' so that have incited conflicts and never-ending debates.

The pan-Arab identity as an umbrella for a region-to-be in the Middle East is not the right choice due to, even though most of these states are Arab, there are components of the area which are not descendants of Arab ancestors. Neither linguistic nor ethnic, Arab identity is not a functional joint for regional cohesion due to there are integral parts of

[24] Harders and Legrenzi.

the area such as Turkey, Iran and Israel, which are not related to Arab identity in any way. The Arab umbrella identity also overlooks non-Arab, albeit stateless, populations such as Berbers and Kurds. Therefore, Arab identity disunites, more than it unites, the states in the Middle East. Even the history, culture, customs and dialects differ immensely from each other across Arab states. The aforementioned discrepancies bring about political divisions among Arab states such as Persian Gulf War as well.[25]

There is another strategy which is to protect stability via 'Islamisation' of public discourse. The governments are inclined to make use of religion which has been used by the Islamist movements to demonstrate and gain support against the formal state structures of the Middle East for a while. Securing internal stability through 'Islamisation' of public rhetoric and discourse has gained popularity after September 11.[26] The 'war on terror' has reinvigorated the debates on constructing a 'regional identity'. Such debates have been sprung from Arab chauvinism and Jihadism which are unequivocally divergent from one another.

Arab 'umbrella' identity and 'ummah' as an overarching and inclusionary term are taken advantage of in order to make such

[25] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War.
[26] Raymond Hinnebusch, "Alliances and Regionalism in the Middle East," in *International Relations of the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

ideologies official and legitimate state discourses. Such terms are especially valuable foreign policy tools. They underscore cohesion, collaboration, harmony and cooperation. Such identity-related rhetoric are imperative to solidarity in every level on a regional basis when the exogenous political and social demands are repressive.[27] Indeed, such relevant umbrella identity discourses become useful when the public feels economically, politically and militarily intimidated by the 'West'. So, the political environment emerged after September 11 provides a fertile ground for development of Islamist movements and renders them alternatives to the current governments. The exogenous pressures for democratisation and liberal tenets also push some clusters of these societies towards the Islamist movements whether they are moderate or Jihadist.

The intermittent fraternity ventures among Arab states are shadowed by the divisions and breakups. Such splits, first emerged after the Arab-Israeli conflict, became the Gordian Knot of the Middle East. After Israel has prevailed over her Arab neighbours more than once, the rifts occurred among Arab states such as Camp David Accords.[28] Therefore, the umbrella Arab identity and Muslim identity were never the only two identity options these states have had. There was always another choice which is unit-level nationalism. Therefore, the region-wide cooperation was always fragile and these states, most of the time, have chosen to break their alliances and change sides or remain

[27] Harders and Legrenzi.

[28] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Camp-David-Accords.

neutral whenever it fits their self-interests. Arab states which were found after the dissolution of Ottomans do not have ample experience on how to build and run a state. Therefore, their deep-rooted tribal ties and customs paved the way for authoritarian and illiberal polities. Such governments have unconsciously mobilised the masses which led to Arab Spring after September 11 which is a critical juncture for the states in the Middle East has enabled a conflict-ridden and anarchic regional environment.

3.2. The Economic State of Affairs

Domestically, the obsolete and outmoded regimes in the Middle East had a social contract granting welfare in exchange for political allegiance. Yet, there is a new 'informal' social contract based on clientelism which means illegal flows of commodities and wealth.[29] This preference for 'illicit provision' of things for people is caused by not only the inability of governments to provide services for people but also the governments' interest in depriving people of liberal channels to express their free will. This 'informal' social contract is what has incited the demonstrations in various countries in the area including Egypt, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon.[30] So, the 'war on

[29] Ellen Lust, "Competitive Clientelism in the Middle East," *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2009, pp. 122–135., doi:10.1353/jod.0.0099.

[30] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Spring.

terror' has stirred up public unrest and exacerbated the distaste of people for their governments and politicised the commons.

Economically, the rentier economies[31] and the social-economic structures which are offsprings of these rentier-economies constitute a stable region-wide structure in the Middle East.[32] This structure has been broadly confronted with 'Arab Spring', which has stemmed from the lack of economic reform, individual rights and social justice, and September 11 which ignited the violent conflicts in the Middle East. However, it has not been ousted on a regional basis yet. Yet, there is a political and economic discrepancy between quasi-democratic countries like Egypt, Syria or Iraq and monarchies such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. The states which have the numbers, meaning overpopulation, do not have economic growth or development which is enormously needed to thwart unemployment and vice versa. The labour migration has brought about a region-wide integrated labour market in the Arab world in the 70s.[33] Yet, refugee inflows, hotspots of conflict, terrorism and crony capitalism curb the success of regional integrated labour market. Indeed, the unequal distribution of labour and natural resources within the region engenders regional interdependency nowadays. The poor but densely populated states provide manpower while the wealthy states grant such states accession

[31] For further information Matthew Gray, "A Theory of 'Late Rentierism' in the Arab States of the Gulf," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2011, doi:10.2139/ssrn.2825905.

[32] Harders and Legrenzi.

[33]

to their market. Such an interdependency structure brings about a weak regional integration. Moreover, the trade partners of most of these countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are mostly developed states such as the US and the Western European states.[34] Hence, the Middle East as a region is economically and politically a lost cause. There are wealthy states of the Gulf with their rich energy resources and poor states of Jordan and North Africa. Some states have relative capitalist economies, Turkey and Israel, whereas there are socialist-nationalist mixed economies. There are several relatively democratic states such as Turkey and Israel whereas there are monarchies involving Saudi Arabia. Such differences have engendered conflict of interests, region-wide violence and conflicts, and they are the most palpable and patent hindrances to regional accord and harmony.

3.3. A New Regional Order without an External Statu Quo Hegemon?

One of the major outcomes of September 11 is the advent of the new regional order. This new region-wide order –disorder or reordering– is fraught with conflicts, refugee inflow, ideological fundamentalism and terrorism. Violence may be the most referred keyword of this new regional order. Another primary outcome of September 11 is the rise

[34] For further information
https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/sau/ and
https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/are/.

of transnational non-state actors such as migrants[35] and several Islamic or human rights movements, such as the Muslim Brotherhood[36] and the White Helmets[37] respectively. Some of these actors are weak, e.g. migrants, and some of them gather region-wide support, e.g. the Muslim Brotherhood. Especially, the Islamic movements, due to the negative perception of anything "Western" in the Middle East after September 11, have severely and vehemently scolded the West and obtained pervasive regional support. This has brought about political turmoil and demonstrations which caused either civil war or severe authoritarian measures implemented by the ruling elites.

Institutional cooperation has almost always been weak in the Arab Middle East except for the moments of fury towards Israel. Yet, even such moments have been long gone since the 'war on terror' had a profound and adverse impact on mutual perceptions. The relations between the Arab states and the US have been a longstanding crisis since then. Additionally, with the US and Turkey ending up in the opposite sides of the war in Syria, Saudi Arabia has become the only ally the US, or the Trump administration, has in the Middle East

[35] For further information Nadje Al-Ali and Khalid Koser, *New Approaches to Migration?: Transnational Communities and the Transformation of Home* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012); Barak Kalir and Malini Sur, *Transnational Flows and Permissive Polities: Ethnographies of Human Mobilities in Asia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).

[36] For further information http://www.ikhwanweb.com.

[37] For further information https://www.whitehelmets.org/en.

except for Israel which does not explicitly serve the US interests at all. Even the image of the EU, which relies on the US when it comes to 'conflict-resolution', has considerably strengthened in the minds of Arabs due to the biased and hypocrite foreign policy implementation of the US.[38] Yet, according to Harders and Legrenzi[39], A Jordanian politician contended once that the politicians of Arab states are for the US more than they are for the European states, which damages these states' interests. Therefore, the US' influence over the Arab leaders is still more potent than the European states. Yet, the US' policies, such as the military intervention and the support for Arab monarchies, towards the Middle East are less effective and promising than the European states' policies such as the support for democratisation and seeking dialogue channels between two cultures, namely liberal Western and Islamic Middle Eastern.

All in all, the September 11 has militarised the US's relations with Arab states. This has caused a drastic shift in the US foreign policy towards the Middle East. This shift has instigated reciprocal and malevolent perceptions of "Western" and "Arab-Muslim" terms. The US has not only militarised her relations with the Middle Eastern states but also retreated from the Middle East as the exogenous hegemon, which let the second phase of the new regional balance to rise. Indeed, September 11 and the subsequent the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 has triggered violence and insecurity on a regional basis. The

[38] For further information http://www.france24.com/en/20171222-palestinian-abbas-with-us-trump-peace-france-macron.
[39] Pp.38.

civil wars in Syria and Yemen and the failed revolution in Egypt[40] are all the consequences of this violent Hobbesian anarchic environment. Soaring violence in the area led to the resurgence of Iran, as a regional power, building and leading a Shia Bloc; and the return of Russia, as an exogenous power, insinuating herself into the Middle East with her role in the war in Syria, her alliance with Iran[41] and her support for Khalifa Haftar in Libya[42]; together with Turkey increasing her volume in the Middle East as a regional hegemon candidate. Also, it should not be forgotten that Saudi Arabia, combined with her orbit, namely the United Arab Emirates, has been exerting all of her influence over the Middle East to protect her antecedent region-wide privileges stemming from her traditional alliance with the US. Saudi Arabia endeavours to fill the power vacuum created by the US and with the support of the US. Besides, Israel has never halted her revisionist and expansionist policies at the expense of peace in the Middle East.

Hence, there is a chain reaction to the shift in the US foreign policy towards the Middle East. The spillover effect has created a war-torn and conflict-ridden area which is anathema to regionalism.

[40] For further information https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/01/02/egypts-failed-revolution.

[41] For further information https://theconversation.com/russia-and-irans-growing-cooperation-hints-at-a-new-middle-east-75181.

[42] For further information https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/08/russia-role-libya-arbiter-hifter-moscow-libyan-national-army.html.

3.4. The Build-up of Military Activities against the Backdrop of Resurgent Security Challenges

A new era has been initiated for the states with newly-formed internal institutions and newly-proclaimed sovereignty in the Middle East with the end of the World War I. The Arab tribes have gained sovereignty by praising pan-Arab identity and superiority of their tribes over others. Yet, they could not form an umbrella 'Arab identity' acknowledged by all the other Arab states. Although these newly-established Arab "nation states" did not have a collective national consciousness, the Jews, immigrating to the Middle East, had a cognitive structure with religious and national awareness. Therefore, the longstanding conflict, which is one of the primary foundations of the security impasse in the Middle East, was born, and it has been aggravated on September 11. The Arab states have the Other to ally and cooperate against whereas their cooperation does not stem from cohesion. So, their survival-driven cooperation stems from national interests than regional cohesive identity. Such survival-centred policies did let groups such as Hamas[43] and Hezbollah[44] to emerge, and politics in the area became chaotic with several paramilitary forces without any official affiliation to any state. Therefore, there are two contradicting identities regarding each other as the antagonistic 'Other', which amounts to a common, regional, inclusive and collective identity has not been achieved or constructed yet. Even though there are Lockean sub-regional anarchies among several states,

[43] For further information http://hamas.ps/en/.
[44] For further information https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hezbollah.

the regional anarchic structure is Hobbesian. In other words, there are countries which respect each other's sovereignty and treat each other as equals, there is a complete lack of common unconditional respect among all the states in the Middle East on a regional basis. These contentious sub-regional alliances are the primary impediments to regional cohesion.

There is a security-related interdependence between countries stretching from Morocco to Iran including Israel and the Arab states, even Turkey. Yet, interdependency does refer to neither cooperation nor cohesion when it comes to the Middle East. Therefore, the sharp rifts among the states of the Middle East accordingly become the primary obstacles to regionalism, regional institutions and regional cohesion since peaceful resolution processes necessitate inclusive and widespread region-wide cooperation. Sub-regional bilateral or multilateral cooperation initiatives are, most of the time, security-centred and ignite violent conflicts due to weak regional institutions and security culture of the Middle East against the backdrop of conflict-laden and violent past of the area. Such particular and conflict-related features of the area allow these states to ascribe negative meanings to the identity of the 'Other' in the eyes of the 'Self'. Indeed, such a tense environment lets the inclusion/exclusion rhetoric prevail and soar in the Middle East. For instance, the immense crack between the Arab identity and Israeli identity indicates the almost irremediable nature of both identities relationship. As another example, Shiite-Sunni conflict is a clear example of

contentious and conflicting identity-building processes of the states in the Middle East.

The Arab-Israeli conflict displays the rebalance of the Middle East with its short-term and long-term developments. The Palestinian issue has united and separated the Arab states in the Middle East with wars[45] and peace talks such as Camp David Accords from time to time. Israel has managed to accomplish her foreign policy desires by convincing the US to comply with her national interests such as considering of Hamas and Hezbollah as terror groups. This and similar successes of Israel have exacerbated region-wide violence as well. For example, the peace between Egypt and Israel is the first betrayal to Arab unity with colossal and dramatic effects. Then, Jordan[46] and PLO[47] made peace with Israel in the 90s. Syria has criticised the process. Consequently, from decolonisation to September 11 and subsequent 'war on terror', there are critical junctures that immensely affected the course of events of the regionalism attempts in the Middle East. The contradicting sub-regional identities in the area have enabled a conflict-ridden regional system to arrive in and pervade the Middle East. So, a monolithic and

[45] For further information https://www.britannica.com/event/Arab-Israeli-wars.
[46] For further information http://www.nytimes.com/1994/10/27/world/the-jordan-israel-accord-the-overview-israel-and-jordan-sign-a-peace-accord.html?pagewanted=all.
[47] For further information http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/israel-palestine-peace-accord-signed.

inclusive region-wide cohesion has become impossible. Bilateral peace talks and agreements have not spawned any solution. On the contrary, it is these bilateral talks damaging possible inclusive bilateral or sub-regional initiatives.

The Middle East is a region which does not fit into the definition of regionalism, i.e., builds a paradox. Despite the resurgence of regional powers and soaring regionalism initiatives throughout the world, the Middle East has been a black swan in such an environment. Since September 11, it is filled with conflicts, violence and rivalry whereas cooperation and cohesion are the terms which are absent in the area for a long time. The Arab-Israeli conflict, the war in Syria, the US invasion of Iraq, the Arab Spring, the war in Yemen and several other conflicts have rendered the Middle East a Hobbesian anarchic area fraught with violence and enmity. Such events render the Middle East an antithesis of regionalism. There are many reasons behind this assumption such as conflict of national interests, the thriving Islamic movements, i.e., 'political Islam', the deep-rooted Arab-Israeli conflict and the close attention and participation of external powers in regional affairs. Additionally, there are other reasons, which are firmly embedded in thoughts, behaviours and culture of the nations in the Middle East. These are negative images of others, biases against others, and stereotypes built in the collective minds of the people in advance.

Ultimately, there is only one way to construct a comprehensive and cohesive region which is an inclusive peace. Yet, a conflict-ridden

area does not afford a ripe environment for securing peace and focusing on cohesion and collaboration. So, the perception or definition of 'threat' in the mind of the 'Self' regarding the 'Other' needs to be altered. Indeed, all of the conflicts, beginning with the Arab-Israeli conflict, are begotten by destructive images of the 'Other' in these peoples' minds, and intersubjective meanings of 'what a threat is' should undergo a thorough and dramatic change.

Conclusion and Discussion

The contemporary turmoil and disarray emanate from bombs and bullets in the Middle East. The future of the area is shaped by rampant violence and widespread corruption. The political stagnation, prevailed across the Middle East and set up by colonial powers after the retreat of Ottomans to Anatolia, has been brought down in ruins. A new era has been coming into existence whilst state and non-state agents have been endeavouring to have a say in the future of the Middle East. The fight over the Middle East is violent and conducted by any means.

The pseudo-monolithic Arab states are already scattered over the Middle East after the 'war on terror' which had a dramatic effect all over the area. The constant conflicts have been weighing down these states and the commons of these states are on the verge of mental

breakdown. Simultaneously, the information revolution[48] has formed a basis for the rapid flow of information and freedom of speech. Indeed, a rights-based inclusive perspective has been spawned by it in the 90s. It was only a matter of time before the people uprose against their repressive governments and demanded the fundamental rights and freedoms. This has been displayed with Arab Spring diffused rapidly over the Middle East.

The Middle East is an area in flux and it will continue to evolve for some time. The war in Syria and Yemen, the disorder in Iraq, the purge in the Saudi royal family[49], the Trump administration's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel[50] and bilateral –Saudi and the UAE– and trilateral –Russia, Turkey and Iran– national-interest-centred frail alliances derange the regional balance of power. The depraved old system is long gone and what the future holds is obliged to be predicted by the policymakers to implement right policies for the sake of the states. It was not an easy task to foresee the dramatic end of the last regional order in the Middle East, and it is not a plain work to do so for the future since the Middle East became a war-ravaged and conflict-ridden area.

[48] For further information https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1999/10/beyond-the-information-revolution/304658/.

[49] For further information https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/1.821313.

[50] For further information https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/06/world/middleeast/trump-jerusalem-israel-capital.html.

The Middle East, as an area in transition, goes through drastic events on a daily basis. Even though the demarcation lines of the states have not been altered on a large scale yet, the internal boundaries in the conflict zones, e.g. the ebb and flow of ISIS[51], keep changing every hour. The inflow of refugees within states and the Middle East has become an everyday activity. It overshadows any foresight with the unpredictable nature of inflow. Also, the minority groups' aspirations for statehood, e.g. Kurdish region of Iraq[52], add extra fuel to the conflicts despite the impossibility of sovereignty for these clusters in the near future.

It is evident that a liberal order in the Middle East is not possible in the near future. Even though there are anti-government rallies in Iran[53], the commons of this area have not discovered the liberal tenets yet. However, the people's demands for far-reaching reforms have to be taken into consideration. The widespread conflicts cannot be resolved as long as the people's pro-democracy requests are not satisfied.

[51] For further information https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islamic-State-in-Iraq-and-the-Levant.
[52] For further information https://www.britannica.com/place/Kurdistan-Region.
[53] For further information https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/world/middleeast/iran-protests-rouhani.html.

The Saudi purge has already begun and it has already changed the tribal state system into a one-man rule. The conservative-authoritarian Saudi polity is on the verge of collapse due to Mohammad bin Salman (MBS)'s policy of putting all the eggs in one basket. Even though, in the near future, Saudi Arabia will keep exerting influence over the Middle East thanks to its vast energy resources, the long-term political interests are at stake. As a US' ally, Saudis endeavour to assume a regional power role. Yet, their policies related to Israel and Yemen hurt their reputation as the custodian of the two holy mosques and their international image of being a Sunni state.

The future looks darker than any other state in the Middle East for Syria. The civil war became a proxy war with too many sides to count. The presence of too many sides render the conflict-resolution attempts a lost cause for the foreseeable future. In the long-term, Syria, as a failed state, will break apart and every statelet born out of Syria come under the influence of either a great power, e.g. the US, or a regional power, such as Iran and Turkey.

Meanwhile, Turkey, after surviving a failed coup attempt, has intensely involved in Middle East politics. The unprecedentedly daring Turkish foreign policy moves have perils and opportunities. The dire economic condition of Turkey and the contemporary purge in the government agencies tie Turkey's hands. In the short-term, Turkey seems to have a few options to exert influence over the Middle East. Yet, in the long-term, what the future holds for Turkey heavily depends on the great powers' foreign policy choices. Therefore, since

the US interests are at odds with Turkish interests, what awaits for Turkey in the long-term is conflict and hard choices.

Iran, up to now, has gained significant influence over Iraq, Syria and Yemen thanks to the wrong foreign policy choices made by the US and Saudi Arabia.[54] The 'Shia Crescent'[55] is not a figment of Iran's imagination anymore. Yet, the economic strength of Iran does not meet her regional ambitions, i.e., the contemporary revolts. Iran, in the short-term, does appear to be the winner of the region-wide turmoil. Yet, their policies keep bringing chaos and conflict to the region, and it is that wildfire which is about to exacerbate the social unrest.

Egypt has had a revolution and a coup simultaneously in a very short time. People's will has ousted a strongman. Yet, another one has taken over the control of the country with cruelty and blood. Therefore, Egypt is a country with deep-rooted internal conflicts and unstable society. President Sisi strives for obtaining as much external support as possible while cracking down on non-state actors, especially Ihvan known as the Muslim Brotherhood. What the future holds for Egypt is either a failed state or a weak democracy struggling to bring order back to country.

[54] For further information https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/15/world/middleeast/iran-iraq-iranian-power.html.
[55] For further information https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2017/01/31/shia-crescent-middle-east-geopolitics/.

Frankly, the West's 'war on terror' has been worse than useless. The West's policy of changing sides in line with their interests exacerbates the violent conflicts. The West is pro-despot, invader, occupier and anything negative in the minds of the Middle Easterners. In the short-term, the victors and the losers of the new regional order will be identified. It is likely that the US will not be the only hegemon of the area, and will have to be in rapport with Russia. Russia's alignment with Iran and Turkey will stay intact as long as the US sticks with her contemporary attitude towards these two regional actors. The Middle East has never been a region in terms of regionalism which underlies regional cohesion and collaboration. The people of the states in the area still have nationalist tendencies and do not embrace a regional identity. This, combined with the presence of fundamentalism, is the explanation of how these authoritarian state leaders stay in power. Hence, the Middle East is in tatters, and foreseeable future is gloomy.

The Middle East had had peace during the Ottoman era. After the dissolution of Ottomans, a shaky balance in the Middle East was found by the European colonial powers. These newly found nation states have strived to build a regional identity build on umbrella identities, pan-Arab and Muslim identity. The Middle East has had various critical junctures during its pseudo-sovereign past, namely Arab-Israelı conflict, September 11 and the subsequent 'war on terror' and Arab Spring. The 'war on terror' has proven itself to be the historical-critical juncture of the new regional order which is still in transformation. The rearrangement of this new regional order was

initiated by a terror attack abroad. Hence, the area has become a source of violence and disorder. It has become an anathema to the terms, involving accord and peaceful coexistence, praised by new regionalism. Such an anarchic environment filled with conflict does not give any hope for being a peaceful full-fledged region.

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