

**Reassessing Order and Disorder in the Middle East: Regional Imbalance or Disintegration?** By Robert Mason (ed.), London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017, 236 pp., eBook, £54.95.

This edited volume attempting to reassess order and disorder in the Middle East is a fair and comprehensive take on the nature of evolving politics in the region. The basic premise of the book seems to be figuring out the establishment of political order across the region and the processes and variables that have contributed towards the disordering we have seen over time. This work is particularly useful as it situates ordering and disordering within the region vis-à-vis critical historical junctures. Some of the studies on different countries fall rather short in explaining the nature of the existing order and subsequent disordering, but the holistic picture that the book develops in terms of explaining the key regional and global variables at play is beneficial for those interested in the region.

The structure of this book is helpful, as from the beginning, the author attempts to provide the reader with context in regard to the politics of the region, along with providing an overview of historical developments. Particularly interesting is the brief debate on the theoretical paradigms that are helpful in pitching up explanatory models for regional politics and the ensuing trends. The author has argued for the need to adopt theoretical multiplicity encompassing distinct theoretical traditions, such as foreign policy analysis, neorealism and social constructivism, while also dealing with the foreign policy making and international relations of Middle Eastern states. It would have been interesting if, in addition to these established theoretical domains, some discussion had been included on the utility of neoclassical realism in the Middle Eastern context, since it takes into account the influence of both systemic and internal variables while charting foreign policy trends. The chapter detailing the contradicting approaches of the Bush and Obama administrations towards the region is useful as an historical account of political happenings including minor details while also explaining the ideological outlooks of the administrations and their impact upon policy making.

In terms of addressing the politicisation of sectarianism in the Middle East, the second chapter is a valuable addition to the whole. The authors try to conceptualise the phenomenon while also bringing together the concepts of translocality, which the authors suggest is a more grounded form of transnational politics, and geo-sectarianism, which essentially views processes of sectarianisation in a geo-political context. In this manner, the authors have attempted to produce a more nuanced explanation for sectarian conflict that has transcended national and regional boundaries. They use case studies of Saudi Arabia and Iran in addition to ISIS, therefore one point of

contention is on how this model incorporates the essentially political motives of ruling elites on both sides that drives sectarianism across the region, and what should we expect once this balance of power changes.

The chapters on Saudi Arabia and Iran give the reader some good insights into their respective foreign policies and how they have been countering each other within the broader Middle East. The chapter on Saudi Arabia is a good resource, especially with relation to Saudi activities in Bahrain, Yemen and Syria and how the policy line regarding these countries has progressed. Still the notion that the threat of ISIS could have contributed towards a Saudi-Iran engagement even during the time of King Abdullah seemed a bit far-fetched. In the Iranian case, the internal political dynamics of the regime and the objectives of President Rouhani have been outlined clearly. However, the argument that sectarian tensions within the region endanger Iran does not make much of sense, as utilising sectarianism and political and militant proxies has remained Iran's mainstay. Both the American invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring have exacerbated this strategy, which has paid geopolitical dividends for Iran. The description of Iranian-US engagement in terms of a multi-phase complex process with ups and downs but essentially rooted in structural enmity was the highlight of the chapter, yet the portions dealing with Iranian ties with the GCC and the outlook for Iraq were less convincing.

The chapters on the two proponents of political Islam, Turkey and Qatar, provides considerable insight into the ideological and systemic factors driving the foreign policies of both states. In the Qatari case, the birth of modern Qatar and its unique political identity built up on the benefits of political mediation has been well documented. There are fascinating details about the personalisation of policy making during the time of Emir Hamad Bin Khalifa Althani, and the characterisation of the former Qatari prime minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jasim. Moreover, the chapter explains how the lines between the state's wealth, private interests and foreign policy initiatives has become increasingly blurred over time. The chapter on Turkey summarises the changing contours of Turkish foreign policy and its regional outlook while also framing its competition with other regional powers, specifically Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, in the wake of the Arab Spring. The author argues that the Syrian conflict provided both the European Union and Turkey with an opportunity to engage with each other while also mentioning the vitality of the Kurdish issue for Turkey. The author seems justified in his claim especially after recent developments of an independent Kurdish statelet alongside the southern Turkish border, which Turkey considers a grave security threat. This threat will drive Turkey's policymaking.

The chapter on Israel is compelling as it explains the element of securitisation in Israeli foreign policy and how Israel has managed to portray its occupation of the Palestinian territories as a security requisite. The author provides a detailed and knowledgeable comparative analysis of the historical policymaking and strategies developed during the Sharon and Netanyahu governments. The chapter on Egypt explains Egyptian ties with Iran, its nuclear policy and water issues, yet it lacks any discussion on Egyptian foreign policy under the Morsi government and its engagement with regional actors, which is a considerable omission.

As an academic endeavour, this book falls among the scholarship produced after the Arab Spring to debate the reordering of the region. While it does go deep into the political dynamics of important regional players and explains their balancing acts both against external and internal actors, the reader is unable to decipher whether the region is still in a state of disorder, or whether the signs of a new order are there on the horizon.

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