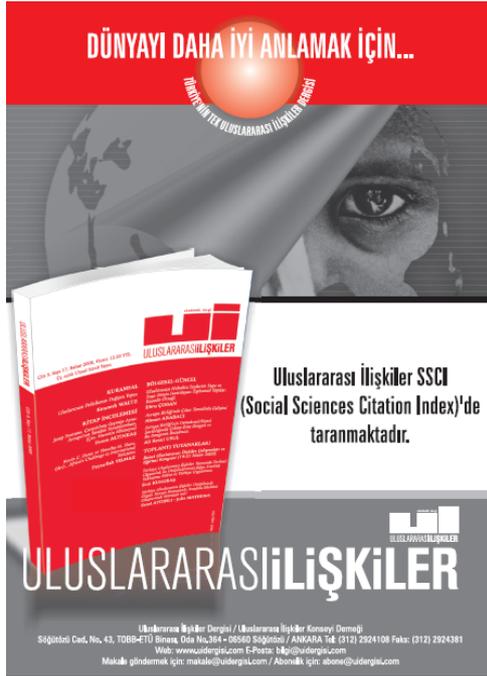


**Yayın ilkeleri, izinler ve abonelik hakkında ayrıntılı bilgi:**

E-mail: [bilgi@uidergisi.com](mailto:bilgi@uidergisi.com)

Web: [www.uidergisi.com](http://www.uidergisi.com)



## **BOOK REVIEW**

***Louise FAWCETT, International Relations of the Middle East***

**Gülriş ŞEN**

Part-Time Lecturer, Middle East Studies, Middle East Technical University

Bu makalenin tüm hakları Uluslararası İlişkiler Konseyi Derneği'ne aittir. Önceden yazılı izin alınmadan hiç bir iletişim, kopyalama ya da yayın sistemi kullanılarak yeniden yayımlanamaz, çoğaltılamaz, dağıtılamaz, satılamaz veya herhangi bir şekilde kamunun ücretli/ücretsiz kullanımına sunulamaz. Akademik ve haber amaçlı kısa alıntılar bu kuralın dışındadır.

Aksi belirtilmediği sürece *Uluslararası İlişkiler*'de yayınlanan yazılarda belirtilen fikirler yalnızca yazarına/yazarlarına aittir. UİK Derneğini, editörleri ve diğer yazarları bağlamaz.

# International Relations of the Middle East

Louise FAWCETT (Ed.),

Oxford University Press, Third Edition, 2013, 406 pages.

ISBN-13: 978-0521597418

## Hazırlayan: Gülriz ŞEN\*

Louise Fawcett's third edition of *International Relations of the Middle East* is a comprehensive and timely update of regional politics and transformations. As a compilation of seventeen articles written by established scholars, the book addresses a broad range of theoretical, historical and analytical issues pertaining to the Middle East and its international affairs. The latest edition devotes considerable attention to the Arab uprisings that have unsettled the region since late 2010 and continues to do so. Indeed, the Arab Spring constitutes the major axis of the book, as almost all chapters relate their analyses, arguments and predictions to the momentous events sweeping the region. Structured into three main parts, the book starts with a theoretical and historical overview and then articulates on the major themes that shape International Relations and Political Economy of the Middle East and in the last part it tackles key actors and issues in regional politics.

One of the remarkable features of the book lies in its theoretical quest and analytical focus. In an attempt to bridge what Valbjorn (2004) calls the "imaginary fault line" that has kept IR and Middle East studies apart (p. 2), the book aims to provide conceptual lenses to examine the region through an IR perspective, while it also acknowledges the richness of cases that the Middle East provides for different theories and concepts of the discipline, as Binder remarked in the late 1950s. Fred Lawson's overview of "International Relations Theory and the Middle East" is a novel chapter and it surveys the contribution structural realism, neoliberal institutionalism, English School, constructivism, post-structuralism, post-modernism as well as quantitative research and power transition and power cycle theories to the study of the Middle East. Lawson argues that security dilemmas of regional states require further investigation, while crucial questions about balancing and bandwagoning remain unresolved. He also suggests further systematic exploration of regional organizations that create preference structures for states (p. 25). According to Lawson, constructivist writings on IR of the Middle East remain firmly anchored in what Adler dubs the "middle ground" of the conceptual spectrum. They rather adopt conventional assumptions and cannot adequately explain particular events or changes in regional politics. (p. 30). Post-structuralist and post-modernist approaches on the other hand have a minor impact on the studies of the Middle East (p. 31). Lawson also mentions quantitative studies which paid close attention to events and trends in the region but notes that

---

\* Part-time Lecturer, Middle East Studies, Middle East Technical University, Ankara.

“widespread and persistent unfamiliarity with the facts of Middle Eastern cases-past and present-severely restricts the audience of well-grounded scholarship” (p. 36). He asserts that specificities of regional state system in the Middle East may invalidate some of the assumptions of IR theory, but he suggests greater and more deliberate cross-fertilization in order to integrate IR and Middle East studies (p. 36).

The quest for theoretical reflection is not solely confined to Lawson’s chapter. Different authors reflecting on different issues ground their analysis on theoretical standpoints. For instance, Bahgat Korany in his analysis on region’s history since the 1990s offers “intermestics” as an alternative to the “end of history” and “clash of civilizations” theses in order to account for the international politics of the region. Derived from a combination of the words “inter”national and do“mestics”, the proposed approach emphasizes the growing connectedness of the internal and external realms with the advent of globalization (p. 79). Korany argues that the term is even more convenient with the Arab Spring, for “the new socio-economics of globalization and mass protests, with their market vagaries, growing socio-political gaps, and involved social forces are increasingly apparent” and regional influx and new societal conflicts compound traditional state-centric geopolitics (p. 80). Fawcett in her account of regionalism asserts that no single theory or level of analysis offers a satisfactory way of exploring the shifting dynamics of interregional politics and of explaining why high levels of cooperation sometimes coexist alongside high levels of competition and conflict; therefore understanding the behavior of Middle Eastern states demands a “flexible and inclusive theoretical framework-one that incorporates the politics of power and influence, but also the role of diverging ideas, norms and domestic considerations” (p.189). Hinnebusch and Ehteshami’s chapter on foreign policymaking proposes “complex realism” as a framework to analyze the MENA region. Their approach starts with realist basics of survival, yet they also note that the region is more complex than it is depicted by realists (p.225). They analyze foreign policy within a multi-level framework of the MENA environment, comprising a hierarchical global environment marked by penetration of core countries; the regional environment built on the duality of states system and supra-state and sub-state identities; and the level of state formation p. 226). According to complex realism, states chiefly respond to threats and opportunities as determined by their relative positions. But other dynamics such as the level of dependency on the US, the extent of democratization, and the agency of individual leaders also carry significance for foreign policy (p.225). Philip Robins’ articulation of war for regime change in Iraq adopts a “level of analysis” perspective that concentrates on the interplay of the post Cold War and post 9/11 international system; a bifurcated regional system and unit-level analysis of Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia (pp. 304-318).

The first part of the book offers a historical overview with Eugene L. Rogan’s analysis on the emergence of regional state-system after the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire; Peter Sluglett’s take on Cold War in the Middle East and Bahgat Korany’s chapter focusing on regional change and transformation since the end of the Cold War. These chapters introduce key events and processes, which continue to shape contemporary Middle East. The consequent parts of the book provide the reader with broadened

historical analysis and exclusive focus on the Arab-Israeli Conflict and the rise and fall of the Oslo Peace Process in the 1990s.

The second part of the book continues with a thematic discussion of key issues in international relations of the region and reflects on the political economy, the challenges against political reform, the politics of identity as well as regional security and alliance building. Giacomo Luciani in "Oil and Political Economy in the International Relations of the Middle East" addresses the inescapable element of oil in any discussion of the region and explains role of oil over the consolidation of the regional state system, the shaping of state-society relations through rentierism and the evolution of inter-Arab relations. He underlines the significance of oil in the very emergence and survival of independent states in the Gulf, its instrumentality in definition of boundaries and acceptance of international arbitration and the centrality of the region to British and American strategies because of its vast natural resource endowment (p. 110). Luciani also analyzes the challenges posed by the Arab Spring to oil producer states of the region and observes that being an oil exporter is not an absolute guarantee against revolutionary contagion, but it helps (p.122). He also postulates that in the long run the relations between the GCC countries and the rest of Arab states will be determined by the eventual outcome of revolutions and the region may be back to the original dialectic between rich and poor Arab countries (p.123).

Augustus Richard Norton's chapter offers a critical update to the state of political reform in the region through incorporation of reflections on the Arab Spring. Norton discusses the obstacles to political reform and the "new historical phase" in the Arab World within which the contours of political power will be reconfigured through rising demands for accountability and recognition of citizens' rights (p.145). He argues that "never in the modern history of the Middle East, have so many millions demanded the dismantling of their autocratic regimes with such unanimity, perseverance and-it must be emphasized-courage" (p. 145). However, despite potentials, the future of political reform in the region continues to face serious obstacles because of the persistent authoritarian state model that sustains its domination over economy and society. Norton notes the detrimental effect of authoritarianism over fostering of collective sense of identity, economic development and liberalization as well as individual freedoms, and argues that the political system locks up the people into a framework of clientelism and corruption (pp. 129-134). Norton also mentions the role of external powers in the 1990s which usually did not go far beyond paying lip service to democracy, as they put little pressure on the governments to democratize and favored stability over democracy. The dramatic change came in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the US declared democracy as a panacea for region's "freedom deficit" and its hotbed status for terrorism. The author observes that US embrace of democracy led to heated debates in the Middle East, yet the chaos in Iraq discredited the idea. As Iraq could not transform into a "republic of freedom", then even sympathetic Arab thinkers started to view it as an example of *fitnah* (p. 133). US democracy agenda also stumbled; since electoral processes, such as the Palestinian Parliamentary elections in 2006 brought Hamas, known for its vehement rejection of American presence and

Israeli existence to power. In this respect, the “puzzle” of political reform, as Norton puts it, pertains to the circumstances within which the ruling structures would be compelled to abide by popular demands of change in the face of at best tepid external support for reform and autocratic hostility of Arab governments toward credible and genuine political transformation (p. 138).

The following chapters by Raymond Hinnebusch and Peter Mandaville take up the issue of identity. Hinnebusch’s account on the politics of identity focuses on the complex interplay of contending identities—Arabism, Islamism and state identity—in the region. According to the author, the Arab uprisings once again unleashed the ongoing conflict between these rival identities (p.157). Drawing on the incongruence of identity and territory, a pattern aptly attributed to the imperial designation of the region following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire (p. 149), Hinnebusch analyzes the role of identity as a source of revisionism and irredentism and how this ends up with interstate warfare in the region (p. 149). The chapter analyzes the declining power and changing nature of Arabism in the face of its Islamic and state-centric rivals since the mid-1970s and cites recent polls in 2009, revealing that those identifying themselves with the state and with Islam started to exceed Arab identity (pp. 151-152). Elaborating on the meaning and possible repercussions of the Arab Spring for politics of identity, the author refers to Philips (2011) and argues that the very denotation of the Arab Spring and its inspiring and contagious spread indicated a “shared Arab public space”. Yet as Rahim (2011) underlines, the demands and aspirations of social forces have been rather state-centric and they were not necessarily in pursuit of pan-Arab agendas. Moreover, the protests targeting republican regimes created by the earlier Arab Revolutions signal that Arabism, as in the case of Syria, is likely to suffer from its close association with repressive regimes (p. 157). Hinnebusch expects that greater democratization would diminish the impact of supra-state identities and bind people to their states through the bond of citizenship. In this regard, the real contestation will seemingly take place between liberal expectations and post-electoral strength of Islamic parties in the Arab World (p.157).

Peter Mandaville’s chapter discusses the role of Islam in International Relations of the Middle East by placing Islamism in historical context and highlighting its intrinsic relationship with the political economy and geopolitics of the region. Despite talks of “revival”, Mandaville argues that Islam has always been an integrated part of daily life and social movements since the 19<sup>th</sup> century (p. 176). However, contemporary agenda and power of Islamism is related to a number of developments among which the failure of secular state and the enormous oil wealth possessed by the aspirants of Islamic leadership could be cited. Islam as a contending ideology against pan-Arabism of secular Arab republics got enmeshed in regional geopolitics through regional and international implications of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, ensuing Saudi-Iranian ideological rivalry in the Persian Gulf and beyond as well as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which solidified jihadi networks financed and trained by the US and Saudi Arabia against the Soviet Union. These fighters would later seek a global jihad since the 1990s, once Afghan resistance fulfilled its objectives by compelling the Soviet troops to withdraw. Mandaville

identifies several roles that Islamism played in the field of international security during the 1990s. Accordingly, Islam replaced communism as the chief ideological “other” of the West and deterring militant Islam became one of the most vital issues in international politics following September 11 attacks. As he aptly notes, recent regional uprisings and successes of Islamic parties also stir questions in the West about the geopolitical alignments of these states (p.184).

Earlier in the volume, Bahgat Korany has claimed that the recent uprisings were tantamount to an “Islamist Spring”, albeit not to an Iran-inspired awakening, by citing the Islamist parties’ rise to power in Egypt and Tunisia and the expectation of a likely outcome in Libya (p. 93). Mandaville also maintains that the Arab Spring changed the landscape of Islamism by turning Islamic political parties into dominant political forces after years of autocratic repression (p.183). But power brought the Islamists the challenge of transforming themselves from opposition movements into governing parties as well, while trying to respond to economic problems and coping with the mistrust of vigilant secular forces and external actors (p.183). He argues that both the Iraq War (2003) and the Arab Spring had significant effect on Muslim transnationalism in the region. In this regard, the “Shiite revival” marked by growth in sectarian mobilization in Iraq, rising political clout and legitimacy of Islamist actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah with the regional developments in the early 2000s as well as Iran’s marked geopolitical preeminence shall be cited (p.183).

The detailed discussions over politics of the identity are followed by chapters addressing the problems of alliance-making and region building by Louise Fawcett and patterns of change and continuity in regional security by Matteo Legrenzi and Marina Calculli. Fawcett scrutinizes why in contrast to other parts of the world, interstate cooperation in the region has been fragile and institutional development remained limited (p. 186). She underlines that Middle Eastern states have been “poor balancers and weak hegemon” due to persistent regional rivalries, lack of obvious and durable hierarchies, the presence of powerful identities that overlap and even conflict with the state-system and the often adverse influence of external actors (pp. 187-188). The Cold War and its aftermath did not necessarily make a qualitative change with regard to regional security and alignments. Inter-Arab alignments, either bilateral or multilateral, proved transitory and fragile; interstate warfare through the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the failure of peace attempts to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli conflict by the end of the 1990s deepened forces of fragmentation (pp. 196-199). US intervention in Afghanistan and war for regime change in Iraq exacerbated deep-lying divisions in the region (p. 199). What does Arab Spring bring to this faltering picture of regional alignments and cooperation is an important question that Fawcett responds in her chapter. As she discusses whether recent turn of events amount to a “new regionalism”, she points to the rising activism of formerly “moribund” regional institutions such as League of Arab States (LAS) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and to the possibility that regime change and wider reforms may end up in a regional environment that is more conducive to regional cooperation (p. 201). Fawcett in this regard observes the decline of the republican axis and

argues that its fragmentation has allowed new regional players and alliances to emerge with concomitant calls within the GCC for deeper integration (p. 202). Yet, the author adds with caution that it is too soon to tell the success of new regionalism particularly in the face of persistent challenges and complexity of regional dynamics.

Matteo Legrenzi and Marina Calculli's chapter "Middle East Security: Continuity Amid Change" is a recent addition to the book, which tackles the theme of regional security within the context of the Arab Spring. For the writers, 2011 marked a significant change despite continuities in the region. In the wake of 2011 uprisings, the conceptualization of regional security and definition of threat have changed, while some geopolitical and geo-economic factors remained constant. The authors argue that recent changes are likely to rearticulate the internal structure of the Arab regional system and generate new threats on both intra-state and systemic levels (p. 205). They expect deepening of sectarian divides between Sunni and Shia and a renewed polarization between revolutionary and conservative regimes. The authors underline the exhaustion of an Arab-based political legitimacy and its replacement by an Islam-based legitimacy (p. 219). Legrenzi and Calculli observe strengthening of the monarchical axis with the GCC states' grasp of fertile opportunity in projecting power, a capability mainly related to the changing American strategy that favored "a cooperative transfer of political responsibility to the regional middle powers, considered to be the strategic partners" such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey (p. 206 and 213). Recent societal challenges derive Gulf kingdoms to step up efforts to strengthen their regimes in order to escape the fate of their republican foes and insulate themselves from revolutionary change (p. 205). The Gulf monarchies meanwhile face the challenge US military withdrawal from the region and its almost non-existent military commitment to the new areas of instability (p. 217). Ironically the transfer of responsibility does not necessarily dilute US patronage of some regional security pillars (p. 218).

The third and the last part of the book is a collection of essays that brings key issues and actors into perspective. Indeed these analyses confirm the dynamic interplay between regional agency and external actors in international relations of the Middle East. As the editor remarks at the very beginning, "no book on the contemporary politics of the Middle East can ignore the way in which external forces have shaped and continue to shape the development of the region's politics, economics and societies" (p.1) and the articles in this section probe changes and continuities in the role of both regional and international actors and their dynamic relationship. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami's chapter gives a concise account of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran's responses vis-à-vis social and geopolitical change in the region through a reflection on their foreign policy behavior during the 2003 Iraq War, the 2006 Hezbollah War and the 2011 Arab uprisings. Philip Robin's exclusive focus on war for regime change in Iraq also deals with Iraq, Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia's agency in post-2003 Middle East as the unit-level analysis of his chapter's "levels-of-analysis" approach. Robins maintains that even in the face of more powerful and systemic states, regional units were able to exert considerable agency in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq War (p. 314). According to him, the war also helped to reveal

that US hegemonic domination and invincibility was exaggerated (p. 304). The difficulties US encountered in Iraq in delivering stability, post-war normalization, reconstruction and state building helped the regional system to evolve with strengthening of actors such as Iran and Syria and erosion of regional positions of states like Egypt and Jordan. Gregory Gause III's chapter, "The International Politics of the Gulf" also confirms the post-2003 challenges posed to the power hegemony in the region and asserts that US failures in Iraq created heightened competition and struggle for influence among key regional players (p.286). According to Gause, the Arab Spring complicated these rivalries, as it coincided with President Obama's decision to withdraw American forces from Iraq in December 2011. But Gause too acknowledges that during the course of events the US played a largely "reactive" role and the Iraqi turmoil already put an end to the American desire to create the Gulf in its own image (p. 301).

Michael Hudson's piece on US in the Middle East and Rosemary Hollis' comprehensive account on the past and present engagement of Europe with the region deepen the book's analysis over the role of external agency in regional affairs. Both authors provide a historical trajectory of US and European involvement in the Middle East. Hudson argues that despite the steady rise and uncontested military presence of the US in the region since early 1990s, it failed to exert sufficient "soft power" to impose Pax Americana in the region (p. 335). After 9/11 attacks, during the Bush Administration there was a radical shift in US policy from its traditional stance of preserving the status quo towards a proactive and interventionist foreign policy that has unsettled regional balance and opened up new contestations as mentioned above (p. 336). President Obama's foreign policy in the Middle East aimed at reviving the peace process and reaching out to the Islamic world to mend fences and restore American credibility in the region. However, continuous Israeli settlement policy derailed both objectives. Hudson asserts that the Arab Spring proves to be a significant exemplar of the strengths and weaknesses of US Middle East policies (p. 339). The basic challenge is arguably in striking a balance between a broad and consistent position on the challenges against authoritarianism in the Arab world and recognition of specificities of each case; that is to say, balancing the "idealist" support for transition to democracy and "realist" prudence of preserving American interests (p. 339). Regarding US diplomacy in the Arab Spring, Hudson mentions that after a brief hesitance US supported Egypt and Tunisia, whereas in Libya and Yemen it chose to "lead from behind". In Bahrain it criticized Saudi-led intervention, yet eventually oil and strategic interests prevailed over democratic principles. In Syria on the one hand it supported the fall of the Assad regime, on the other hand it refrained from getting dragged into a war with Syria or Iran and chose to involve in the conflict through logistical, diplomatic and intelligence support for the opposition (p. 340). Hudson argues that despite challenges from left and right centers of power in the US, Obama's "nimble" policies and nuanced approach is largely approved by the "realist center" of US politics (p. 340). The author concludes that with the reawakening of mass politics, the legitimacy of compliant rulers would be highly contested and manipulation by outside powers would get more difficult (p. 341). Meanwhile it must be also stated that given the decisive role US domestic politics play in the making of its Middle Eastern policy (p. 328), the future political configuration of the

country would significantly bear on its stance and Hudson warns that counterproductive policies of earlier administration cannot be ruled out (p. 341).

Rosemary Hollis argues that with the decline of Europe after the Suez War and the rise of superpower clientelism, Europe's diplomatic engagement with the region was basically shaped by its commercial relations. In the post-Cold War era Europe attempted to tackle transnational security challenges through deployment of soft power and advocacy of norms, institutions and economic cooperation. In the 1990s, it embarked on creating a Euro-Mediterranean economic area of shared prosperity and security and it also engaged in conflict resolution through the framework of Quartet and provided funds for infrastructure of a future Palestinian state in West Bank. It preferred the strategy of "critical engagement" vis-à-vis Iran in the early 1990s which would later turn into "constructive dialogue" with the rise of reformists to power. However, the author maintains that EU's determination to export its values and neo-liberal model eventually gave way to anxiety over Islamist-inspired terrorism at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and greater preoccupation with control of immigration and "radicalization" inside Europe (p. 360). By the time the Arab uprisings erupted, Europe was struggling with its own financial crisis, which put the future of the European project in jeopardy. As Hollis aptly observes, the crisis marginalized other issues and constrained EU's agency, for it did not have much to offer on conflict resolution, whereas its previous initiatives of Union for Mediterranean and the European Neighborhood Policy, which aimed at supplanting the EMP failed to deliver intended political and economic reforms in the Arab world. Europe was also caught off guard by the Arab Spring. Facing millions in the squares, both EU and US decided to abandon their longtime allies in the Middle East. France and Britain took active role in the NATO intervention in Libya. Elsewhere in the region, Europe deferred to the GCC mediation in Yemen and chose diplomatic pressure than confrontation against Saudi-led intervention in Bahrain. In Syrian crisis, it faced its diplomatic initiatives blocked by Russia and China at the UN Security Council, while European powers feared getting bogged down in a costly and deadly conflict in Syria and lacked the capacity, cohesion and will to impose a solution (p. 360).

Obviously no analysis of the region and its international relations would be complete without assessing the role that the Arab-Israeli conflict has played in regional politics and structuring of states and state-society relations in the Middle East. As noted above, the book through Charles Smith and Avi Shlaim's chapters reflect on the history and evolution of this inter-state conflict and current impasse in peace efforts. Smith's chapter conjures up theoretical and historical assessment of the conflict by highlighting the role of constructivism as a useful tool for analysis in explaining state actions and he challenges the monolithic view of state interest through examples of contending visions in definition of state interest and security in Israel, Egypt and the United States (p. 246). Moreover he also draws on the complexity of actors and dynamics in the conflict, which conflates regional and external agencies. While Smith reflects on the history of the conflict from the creation of Israel up until 2012, Shlaim's analysis concentrates on the Oslo Process. He opposes the view that Oslo was off to a false start and argues that the failure of the process

was largely related to the Likud Party's reneging on its side of the deal. Apart from the violence perpetrated by radical groups in Palestine, he depicts the Israeli settlement policy in West Bank as the more fundamental cause behind the loss of momentum and trust in the process (p. 283). Shlaim's analysis ends with the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada in 2000. Charles Smith's chapter concludes with a number of likely scenarios for the future of the conflict after the Arab Spring. Smith predicts that Arab uprisings may make the conflict central to normalization of relations between Israel and those Arab states that have signed peace treaty with Israel (p. 264). Pointing out to the wider preoccupation with Israel and Iran, the Arab public opinion arguably found greater voice in Tunisia and Egypt and the drive for greater democracy is likely to push new governments to be more assertive in quest for peace and make them refrain from acquiescing to Washington's wills. In this regard, even though the future remains uncertain, Smith predicts that "the age of the compliant Arab dictators" is over (p. 264).

The analyses offered in the book reveal how recent uprisings in the Arab world have challenged the myth of a "stagnant and exceptional" Middle East and opened up regional landscape to changes in domestic governance and regional realignments, as Korany and others have succinctly argued. United by their embrace of piety (*taqwah*), Norton identifies the dynamics of change in the Arab world as the "repoliticization of public space, a new collective autonomy, radically changing terms of reference for politics and new political imaginaries" (p. 145). The rising salience of Islamist parties is acknowledged by most of the contributors examining the politics of identity as well as security and geopolitics of the region. In this respect, one of the questions awaiting answer is which brand of Islamism would succeed in the Middle East, as posed by Fawcett, Korany and Hinnebusch. In the words of Korany, will it be a "Saudi/Salafi type, Iranian revolutionary type or Israeli/Turkish type, attempting to combine religion with Western democracy or will it be a restrictive pluralist or hybrid regimes in Jordan and Morocco?" (p. 98). Mandaville argues that no matter which brand triumphs, "Islam is likely to remain an important feature of IR of the Middle East with continuing resonance of religious symbols and language in politics, media and its broad range of actors including states, political parties, NGOs and transnational networks" (p.184).

The chapters referred to the growing role of regional actors and emphasized the limitations of external agency in addressing regional issues. The regional agency and activism, however, still happened at the backdrop of continuing security dependencies of the Gulf States on the United States. The issue directly bears on the future of regionalism in the Middle East. As Fawcett asserts, the state remains central in the success of regionalism and cooperation in the long term; but lack of will and capacity of Middle Eastern states curtail regionalism seriously and reproduce the historical pattern of turning to outside powers to resolve their security dilemmas (p.201). Norton elaborates on the impeding effects of external powers' preference for stability over democratic aspirations in terms of the future of political reform in the region, which is already compounded by lack of serious commitment among the political elites (p.145). Alongside the challenges of political reform, the region is contested by a number of formidable socio-economic challenges.

Korany points to the significance of “low politics” issues—the demographic bomb and its impact on education and employment; information technology, social mobilization and the integration of the region in the global civil society; and the yawning gap between the aging, ailing leadership and the youth bulge— and advocates that they might result in “political decay and an increase in the number of “soft” or even “failed” states”, if not tackled properly (p. 94). Moreover, the future challenges identified by Korany in the form of water scarcity, information technology and identity issues cannot be handled through military means and their resolution demands political agency.

Despite its extensive focus, the book does not discuss the role of emerging global powers in International Relations of the Middle East and rather confines the debates on external agency mainly to the United States and Europe. Given the scope of the book on contemporary Middle East and momentous regional developments, the picture remains missing without an elaboration of the role of Russia and China in political economy and regional geopolitics. Therefore the readers of the book cannot find adequate analysis on Russian and Chinese involvement in Syrian crisis, Iran’s growing ties with these states to balance against the West, dependence of Chinese capitalism on Persian Gulf oil supplies as well as China’s growing trade and investment ties to this sub-region, which has recently inspired debates on the “Asianization” of the Persian Gulf. In this regard, the future editions of the book could elaborate more on these themes by incorporating chapters on Russia and China as well as providing in-depth analyses of regional developments and crises such as Iran’s nuclear programme and the Syrian Crisis, for they have assumed an international character. The political economy chapter of the book might be also expanded with greater focus on the challenges of globalization on regional economies and on the patterns of integration and marginalization as a necessary complement to the analysis of oil in the political economy of the region.

Louise Fawcett’s recent edition all in all achieves a daunting task in accounting for the complexities of regional politics through a balanced analytical and historical focus and lives up to its expectations by offering a “comprehensive, up-to-date, and accessible guide to understanding the international relations of the Middle East” as its editor put in introductory remarks. The book achieves its aim also through a well-structured organization of the chapters by presenting a brief overview of each chapter at the very beginning and a list of key events and further readings in the end and thus helps the readers to manage the complexities of analytical discussions and historical analysis. In a region marked by fluidity and widespread change, Fawcett’s edition stands as a must-read for scholars and students of the Middle East and International Relations.