

## “WEAK STATE” SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST: A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION

ORTADOĐU’DA “ZAYIF DEVLET” GÜVENLİĐİ:  
TARİHSEL SOSYOLOJİK BİR ARAŐTIRMA

Mustafa KÜÇÜK<sup>i</sup>

### Abstract

*“Weak state” security conception has come into being as a major contribution of Third World and Critical Security Studies. This conception has improved on the traditional one, but the same cannot be claimed for the conception of “weak state”. Considering empirical, methodological and political controversies surrounding weak state security, this work does not assume it, but inquires instead into its origins and formation. It argues for historicising the “weak state” and contextualizing security issues thereof. To this end, this article explores “weak state” security through a historical sociological investigation of state formation inspired from Tilly’s bellicist theory of state in the Middle Eastern context. Middle Eastern experience vindicates the idea that state formation and production of security is a spatio-temporally distinct process. The work concludes with a discussion of both drawbacks and promises of the bellicist theory of weak state in explaining the conception and practice of security in the region.*

**Keywords:** Weak State, Security, Middle East, Historical Sociology, State Formation

### Öz

*“Zayıf devlet” güvenliĐi kavramı Üçüncü Dünya ve Eleřtirel Güvenlik Çalıřmalarının önemli bir katkısı olarak ortaya çıkmıřtır. Bu kavram geleneksel güvenlik anlayıřına karřı bir ilerleme olsa da, zayıf devlet kavramı için aynısı iddia edilemez. Zayıf devlet güvenliĐini kuřatan ampirik, yöntemsel ve siyasal tartıřmaları dikkate alan bu çalıřma, zayıf devlet güvenliĐini varsaymaz, bilakis kökenlerini ve oluřum sürecini arařtırma konusu yapar. Zayıf devletin tarihselleřtirilmesi ve güvenlik sorunlarının böylece baĐlama yerleřtirilmesi gerektiĐini savunur. Bu amaca yönelik olarak, bu makale devlet oluřumunu Tilly’nin savařçı devlet kuramından esinlenen bir tarihsel sosyolojik arařtırmayla OrtadoĐu baĐlamında zayıf devlet güvenliĐini tetkik etmektedir. OrtadoĐu deneyimi devlet oluřumunun ve güvenlik üretiminin zamansal ve uzamsal olarak farklılařan bir süreç olduĐu fikrini destekler. Çalıřma, savařçı zayıf devlet kuramının bölgede güvenlik kavramını ve pratiklerini açıklayabilmesine iliřkin sorunlarına ve imkanlarına dair bir tartıřmayla sonlanır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Zayıf Devlet, Güvenlik, OrtadoĐu, Tarihsel Sosyoloji, Devlet Oluřumu

<sup>i</sup> Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Ege Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Uluslararası İliřkiler Bölümü, mustafa.kucuk@ege.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-8286-546X

## I. INTRODUCTION

This article seeks to explore “weak state” security through a historical sociological investigation of state formation in the Middle Eastern context. Weak state security conception has emerged as one of the major contributions of Third World and critical security studies. Yet while the concept of security has largely been opened up in these areas of scholarship, the same can hardly be said for the concept of state. The weak state “security” has improved on traditional—systemic, statist and externally oriented—conception of security, it is not clear how the conception of “weak state” has progressed beyond traditional notions of state. Given that security is politically and normatively tied closely to the state, rethinking security entails historicizing and unpacking the modern state.

The renewed interest in state in security studies followed both “critical” turn and the scholarship on post-colonial sovereign statehood (Krause and Williams, 1996, 1997; Krause, 1998; Kardaş, 2006). The end of the Cold War, and uneven and contested processes of globalization also promoted it. A decline in the frequency and magnitude of inter-state wars relative to civil wars, ethnic, ethno-national or sectarian conflicts and social uprisings have moved the questions of weak states, state failure, ethnic and national identity, and social cohesion towards the center of new security studies agenda (Holsti, 1996). The state has ceased in critical security scholarship to be taken as ideal political communities, and its ontological and moral status has increasingly been questioned. An historical analysis of the modern state is seen as essential to decompose its unitary character and consider different implications of its varying institutional/historical modes of becoming on the concept and the politics of security.

While Africa grabbed the early and most political and scholarly attention, state weakness, failure and insecurity is nowhere more pronounced today than the Middle East. There are no shortages of claims for “the decline and fall of the Arab state” and the rise of its competitors (Ahram and Lust, 2016), like the Islamic State in Levant, Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria, and “the return of the weak Arab state”, giving rise to “the securitization of hitherto dormant sectarian identities” (Salloukh, 2017: 660; Kamrava, 2016) and to the “new Arab wars” (Lynch, 2016) in the wake of the Arab uprisings. Syria, among others, is said to shift from “a Leviathan capable of waging sometimes domestically unpopular but realist geopolitical battles in defense of strategic security interests to a weak state penetrated by regional actors and their sectarian proxies—both transnational and domestic,” (Salloukh, 2017: 661). A recent book-length treatment of the subject observed that “not only are several states in the Middle East chronically ‘weak’—Lebanon, Yemen, and the Sudan—but most others have inherent structural and institutional features that compromise their capacity, devoid them of legitimacy, and make them prone to weakness” (Kamrava, 2016a: 1). To specialists of the region, weak statehood in the Middle East is a major source of many regional security problems. “It is the weakening of Arab states”, argues Gregory Gause III (2014: 1), “that has created the battlefields of the new Middle East cold war”.

Such claims with regard to the apparent connection between “weak state” and “security” are not unfounded, however. A number of popular international indexes illustrate how weak/fragile and conflict prone many Middle Eastern states are. Take the *Global Peace Index*; the Middle East and North Africa in 2020 remains the world’s least peaceful region, and five (Sudan, Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Syria) of the ten least peaceful states in world are located in

the region (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020: 16). The region is conflict-ridden because it is populated by weak or “fragile”, if not failed, states. In the *Fragile States Index* 2020, Yemen tops the global list and Syria is in the fourth, Afghanistan the ninth, Iraq the seventeenth and Libya the twentieth place; Libya, Syria and Yemen are among the five most worsened countries in the past decade; Libya is also rated as “the most-worsened country in the world for the past decade”, and Libyan civil war is regarded as “one of the world’s most dangerous conflicts in 2019” (Fund for Peace, 2020: 7, 10, 27). All have been involved in civil wars or been subjected to external interventions in the recent past and at present. Such indexes and analyses, definitional and measurement hurdles aside, beg the question of whether state weakness causes conflicts and insecurities or the other way round. This invites historical research on state-making to see why states make wars and whether wars make strong states or not.

It appears nonetheless obvious that some states in the region persistently display well-documented pathologies of state weakness and are involved in conflicts, yet the presumed causal linkage between weak statehood and security is empirically either untenable or at best contested. Besides methodological issues, the concepts of “weak state” and “security” suffer from definitional disputes and analytical ambiguities. More reprehensible, however, is the political nature and consequences of the emergent dominant weak/failed state discourse particularly in Western policy-making circles, tainting weak state security scholarship and undermining the analytical value of the weak state security conception (Call, 2010). In fact, the weak/failed state discourse works as a convenient political device for external actors and domestic dissenters alike to call for and justify external interventions in the name of either international security, or peace- and state-building (Bilgin and Morton, 2002). This also suggests that today “Middle Eastern weak and failed states serve the same purpose as “empty lands” did during the colonial times” (Al-Eriani, 2018).

This work does not take the so-called “weak state” with a list of standard features and (in)security symptoms as given, but inquires instead into its origins and formation. To this end, it argues for historicising and contextualizing the “weak state” in the Middle East, however form and degree of statehood it assume. Many controversies surrounding the weak state literature notwithstanding, this study, concurring with Fred Halliday, considers “[t]he historical formation of the Middle Eastern state...an essential part of any understanding of the international relations of the region” (2005: 40). It does not assume but explores the security implications (conceptions and practices) of Middle Eastern state formation through a historical sociological inquiry.

This work proceeds as follows. The first section examines the emergence of weak state security conception within the new/critical security studies, Third World studies and beyond. Drawing on a dominant historical sociology of state formation, indeed “the bellicist theory of state” based on the European experience, the second section attempts to historicize the weak state security, and explores distinct security implications of state formation in the contemporary Middle East. It concludes with a discussion of both problems and promises of the bellicist theory of state on the conception and practice of security in the Global South.

## II. RETHINKING THE STATE AND SECURITY IN THE THIRD WORLD: WEAK STATE SECURITY

In critical security studies, Barry Buzan introduced early the concept of “weak state” to emphasize its distinct security problems than those of Western strong states. In so doing, he broadened the traditional concept of security to incorporate domestic sources of conflicts, to refer to security interests other than state survival, and to emphasize non-military aspects of security. In his view, a foremost defining feature of weak states is their lack of “socio-political cohesion” and institutional stability (1992: 97). Many post-colonial states are presumably weak as they find themselves, as recently decolonized, in the early stages of nation-state building. They strive for consolidating themselves as “state-nations” either from “a state without a nation” or “a state with many nations” (Buzan, 1991: 72-78). This suggests that many internal socio-political conflicts and identity contestations arise from the disjunction between state and nation. Unlike strong states, weak state security problems often appear in the form of endemic domestic violence and internally generated threats to the security of the government and of the people rather than systemic, external military threats to state survival. Buzan also outlined the kinds of specific conditions one would expect to find in weak states: high levels of political violence; a conspicuous role for political police in citizens’ everyday lives; major political conflicts over the ideological basis and organization of the state; lack of a coherent national identity, or the presence of contending national identities; lack of a clear and observed hierarchy of political authority; and a high degree of state control over the media (1991: 100).

Buzan’s discussion of strong and weak states has challenged in particular the neorealist conception of states as singular “like-units”, proposition of “anarchy” and its corollary “security dilemma” as the chief sources of inter-state conflicts, and assumption of “security” as “the highest end” of *states* wishing to “survive”. Strong and weak states exhibit high and low degrees of cohesion respectively with distinct security problems. In making such a distinction, Buzan relies on a sociological analysis in which the character of state-society relations reveals distinct security problems in different states, societies and regions. Strong states with greater socio-political cohesion are, as expected, more capable of providing not only protection from external threats but also domestic order and safety to their citizens at large, whereas weak states, lacking such a cohesion, often fail to supply security provision.

Unlike Buzan, Joel Migdal defined the strong state more in terms of “social control,” and its institutional capacity to mobilize its population and internal resources for its own goals: “The strength of the state organization in an environment of conflict has depended, in large part, on the social control it has exercised. The more currency—that is, compliance, participation, and legitimation—available to state leaders, the higher the level of social control to achieve state goals” (Migdal: 1988: 33). Weak states, on the other hand, are less able to penetrate and steer their societies, and achieve their objectives.

Another early perspective concerning the security plight of weak states emphasized, rather than state-society relations, the rise of a new international normative framework upholding external sovereign statehood in the Third World. In particular, Robert H. Jackson has argued that a new international regime of ‘negative sovereignty’ since the end of the Second World War has comprised of the key legal principles and normative institutions that sustain the survival of what he called “quasi states”, which “lack many of the marks and merits of

empirical statehood postulated by positive sovereignty” (1990: 1, 21-26; Jackson and Rosberg, 1982). It is important, however, to distinguish between quasi-states and weak states. The former came into being after World War II owing to a change in the internationally shared rules of state sovereignty (Barkin and Cronin, 1994); yet weak states have always existed in history (Jackson, 1990: 22-23, see also Warner, 1999; Hopkins, 2000). Following Jackson, many students of African politics (Clapham 1996; Reno, 1998; Zartman, 1995; Helman and Ratner, 1992/93; Rotberg, 2004) have argued for the decline of the Third World empirical statehood, and pointed to the phenomenon of “state failure” indicating a collapse of domestic security governance.<sup>1</sup>

Jeffrey Herbst (2000) attributed a key role to political elites in post-colonial states in the constitution and consolidation of territorial sovereignty. Postcolonial state elites have naturally welcomed the negative sovereignty principle, sanctioning fixed and inviolable state borders. Like Jackson, Herbst (1989; 1990) pointed out the benign character of the post-World War II international society that allowed the governing elite in weak states for establishing and imposing their power even at the expense of domestic political and social pluralism, inclusiveness and human rights norms. The resulting societal polarizations, ethnic strife and civil wars have led to a number of fragile and failed states today (Herbst, 1996/97). Rethinking the Third World state has enabled security scholars to reconceive security and come up with an alternative to its traditional conception. They have not ventured further to explore how weak state security has historically been conditioned. Nor did they ask how weak states did emerge in the first place. Tracing the emergence and varying trajectories of (weak) states entail historical sociological research.

In many historical sociological accounts, weak statehood appears to be a product of late state-making in an altered international context. The security problems of Third World states arise from their weak stateness, defined by a low degree of centralized control over territory and population, a lack of a legitimate monopoly over the means of violence within states’ boundaries, and a low capacity to penetrate society. As Ayoob (1995: 28) specified, “the lack of unconditional legitimacy for state boundaries, state institutions, and regimes; inadequate societal cohesion; and the absence of societal consensus on fundamental issues of social, economic, and political organization” rest apparently at the background of the weak state’s security. Such specifications are in fact typical symptoms of the early phases of the state-making process in the Third World, ones that afflicted today’s strong Western European states, who subsequently overcame in the process of war-making and state- and nation-building (Tilly, 1975; 1985; 1990).

Three major historical conditions are often cited in many historical sociological accounts for the emergence of weak states in the Third World or the Global South today: the colonial legacy, the changing international security and economic environment, and the existence of a benign international environment at the time of their emergence (Spruyt, 2007: 223-29). The colonial past created a certain kind of state, not congruent with a nation within its sovereign borders. The state and nation disjunction has made successful state and nation building rather difficult (Buzan, 1991: 98-99). Such incongruence also makes it demanding to achieve social

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<sup>1</sup> State collapse is defined by I. William Zartman (1995: 6) as “the breakdown of good governance, law, and order. The state, as a decision making, executing and enforcing institutions can no longer take and implement decisions”.

consensus on the organization and direction of the state and often results in internal clashes (Ayoob, 1995: 34-37). Second, while war and preparations for it had been principal conduits in forming the strong states of Western Europe, the Third World states have not experienced the same challenging, indeed existential, external threat environment. The decline of interstate wars and the absence of grave international threats to Third World state's survival at the time of their entry as new members to the international community may explain many of their weak state features. Changing both the external security environment and the nature of conflict has obviated the need for the Third World states elites to develop particularly coercive, fiscal and extractive, and social mobilizing capacities. Even if some facing a harsh geopolitics developed relatively extensive and cohesive states, such as China, Cuba, Israel and South Korea (Desch, 1996a: 242), many are smaller in size, far less developed institutionally and cohesive socially. They suffer from weak political authority, evidenced by low level of political institutionalization, underdeveloped state institutions, and chronic political instability. They have failed to develop strong fiscal and extractive capacities due in large part to little effective control of their economies. Lastly, the well-established institution of external sovereignty does not give the Third World states the right to and the option of exit. Their survival depends not to their internal capacities and functions but to the emergent international normative environment. The idea of negative or external sovereignty and the norm of inviolable borders account for the persistence of weak states in Africa and in other regions of the developing world (Jackson and Rosberg, 1982; Herbst, 1989; Ayoob, 1995: 78-83). State formation in the Third World has produced rather different state and social institutional structures than European ones.

The Third World/weak state security scholarship represents an improvement on traditional security studies. Amitav Acharya (1997:301), a leading exponent, regarded the security of the Third World state "a helpful point of departure for appreciating the limitations of the dominant understanding and moving it toward a broader and more inclusive notion of security". However, what Ayoob (1983/4; 1984; 1992; 1995) does is not fundamentally to challenge the orthodox conception of security but place it in a historical context so that he demonstrates its inapplicability to or limited explanatory purchase in the Third World. He leaves the conventional conception intact, and develops instead an alternative security conception for the Third world states based on their distinct historical and empirical realities. His argument is analytically powerful nonetheless, not least because he has emphasized and disclosed the historically conditioned character and agenda of security. Second, his conception moves beyond the narrow agenda of security studies on military matters to incorporate issues and threats that are political in nature. Ayoob does not entirely neglect non-military, such as economic and environmental, dimensions of security; yet he takes them into account if they "become acute enough to acquire political dimensions and threaten state boundaries state institutions, or regime survival" (1995: 9). Finally, his conception is not purely discursive, avoiding what Stephen Walt (1991: 223) reprimanded as "prolix and self-indulgent discourse that is divorced from the real world". However, there are still conceptual and methodological problems with Ayoob's application of historical sociology to the Third World state to account for the emergence of weak states and their security problems. This discussion will follow an application of his state-making framework inspired by Tilly's bellicist theory of state to the Middle Eastern states.

### III. A HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE EASTERN STATE AND SECURITY

#### **The Middle Eastern State in the Mirror of European State Formation**

Taking a long-term perspective, Middle Eastern state formation is best compared to the experience of European state formation (Blaydes, 2017: 501). This is because the state formation process in the Middle East is apparently similar to the European one in at least three respects: the inheritance of a long tradition of state making, the continuing reign of absolutist rulers, and the emergence of a challenging external threat environment featuring inter-state wars. These might explain why the Middle Eastern states are relatively stronger, and enjoy more stability and security when compared to, for instance, post-colonial states in West Africa.

To begin with, most states in the contemporary Middle East have deep historical roots. Though many gained their sovereign independence around the mid-twentieth century from colonial or foreign rule, the nuclei of state establishment have been there long before. As Iliya Harik (1990:3-4) argues, the Arab Middle East is populated not merely by old societies but also by old states. In fact, hydraulic societies in the Middle East created primeval institutions that were conducive for urbanization and the development of centralized and strong political authorities (Wittfogel, 1957; Allen, 1997). Likewise, Lisa Blaydes (2017: 488) argues that, “the most sophisticated and best-developed states in the ancient world” emerged first in the Middle East. They developed strong fiscal and bureaucratic structures both through state control and distribution of land, and the creation of military elite. Such institutional capacities then barely existed in Western Europe. The origins of contemporary Arab states (and also Turkey and Iran), save for three of them—Iraq, Syria and Jordan, can be traced back to the nineteenth century or a much earlier period. They are the products of largely indigenous forces, and are unrelated to and in most cases predate European colonialism. Harik based his argument on a conception of state that fits squarely with the one prevalent in the tradition of Weberian historical sociology.<sup>2</sup> The state is an organization with a set of administrative institutions performing certain functions, internationally waging war and internally mobilizing resources for the conduct of war.

Secondly, just like absolutist rulers were instrumental in creating centralized territorial states, powerful monarchs and presidents have ruled over many Middle Eastern states and been engaged in state- and nation-building (Hinnebusch, 2010). Today, strong reigning monarchs in the world are found mostly in the Arab world. The kings reign over Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan; and the Sultan over Oman, the Emirs in Arab Gulf States (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE). In Iran did the Shah rule until 1979, so did the kings in Egypt until 1952, Iraq until 1958, Yemen until 1962, and Libya until 1969. In contrast to most of the rest of their imperial domains, notably Sub-Saharan Africa, the European colonial powers either maintained existing monarchical regimes in the region or endowed new ones, for instance, in Iraq and Jordan. “These monarchs took root”, argued Lisa Anderson (1991:3),

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<sup>2</sup> The state is “an established authority which enjoys jurisdiction over a core territory and people for an extended period of time, stretching over at least several generations. The jurisdiction includes powers to implement the law, impose taxation, and demand military service, loyalty and allegiance to the established authority” (Harik, 1990: 5).

“not because of cultural and historical legacy but because there is an affinity between monarchy as a regime type and the projects of nation-building and state formation”. Monarchies in the Gulf remained highly resilient during the Arab uprisings 2011 not least because they “confronted social conflict early in the postcolonial era and thus rallied the coalitional pillars for their royal autocracies to survive” (Yom and Gause III, 2012: 82).

Even in such Middle Eastern states as Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, where republican regimes were instituted, a strongman or what Roger Owen (2012) called “strong presidents for life” dominates the state. Post-independence politics in the Arab world has been characterized, irrespective of their regime types, by highly centralized, personalized and enduring political regimes. Just as their European predecessors did, the Middle Eastern political regimes perform essential state-building functions, such as establishing centralized authority, monopolizing legitimate use of violence and exerting coercion.

Finally, the geopolitical environment in the modern Middle East is akin to the Westphalian state system, and has often been featured by rivalry, insecurity and warfare (Hinnebusch, 2015). A number of interstate wars took place; major ones included national liberation wars, the 1948, 1967 and 1973 Arab Israeli wars, the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War of 1990-91, the Iraq War 2003. The external threat environment supposed to produce strong states has always been there (Korany, 1993). Even if the effect of this threat environment and interstate wars on state strength has been limited, they have enhanced to some extent administrative reach and powers of the regional states (Heydemann, 2000).

Such similarities notwithstanding, a deeper historical sociological interrogation of the Middle Eastern state formation demonstrates some key departures from the European course.<sup>3</sup> As will be explained, these differences might question ready made applicability of the basic assumptions of state formation framework advanced by the bellicist theory of state.

State-making process in the early modern European context included three core state activities, as Ayoob (1985) observed, that many Third World states are following today. These activities include “war making”, “policing” and “taxation” or resource extraction (Ayoob, 1985: 22). This framework serves here rather as a foil to explore how these three major domains of activities have interacted with the formation of the Middle Eastern (weak) states and the production of (in)security in the region. European experience is not taken as an ideal to be approximated or a reference point to judge the Middle Eastern record of state-building and contemporary state of security. Middle Eastern experience vindicates the idea that state formation and emergence of security conceptions and practices is a spatio-temporally distinct process.

### **War Making and the Geopolitics of the Middle Eastern State**

The attitude towards and ideas about war and war-making in contemporary times have changed in many ways from the times of state making in early modern Europe (Fukuyama, 1992; Mueller, 1989).<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of war and war-making in the non-western world is no longer (seen as) efficacious in state-building terms (Centeno, 2003), and the actual conduct of it has increasingly been circumscribed since the end of the Second World War by the bipolar and unipolar system structures, the advance of nuclear weapons, and by the

<sup>3</sup> For a recent exposition of the history, politics and economy of the Middle East see (Erdağ and Yetim, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> John Mueller (1989) argued that major wars have almost become obsolete at least among developed states.

international community through a network of institutions, including international law, sovereignty norms, international/regional organizations, and peacekeeping operations.

In Europe, war-making and major uses of violence were instrumental in producing typical institutional forms of modern states, as we know them today. “The organization and deployment of violence themselves”, argued Tilly (1985: 181) “account for much of the characteristic structure of European states.” This meant that when war was present at the stage of state making, the successful use of force helped state rulers not only to defend themselves/their states against external competitors, but also to eliminate their domestic rivals, such as warlords or local militias, and to concentrate power in their hands.

Wars in the non-western world do not produce the same effects that they did before in the European state formation (the fortification of territories/boundaries, centralization of states, and the development of the state apparatus). This is because the nature of warfare, particularly its material context, has changed (Van Creveld, 1991; Cohen, 1996). The increasingly destructive capacity of new weapons technology in contemporary wars has adverse effects on state development and institution building. In addition to the technological “revolution in military affairs”, the increasing number of international peacekeeping operations during the Cold War and of humanitarian interventions in the post-Cold War era have redefined what war making is (Goldstein, 2011). Particularly the political economy of new wars and their transnationalized and globalized nature have altered the context in which state elites had to mobilize domestic resources for successful conducts of warfare. Moreover, the historic role of conscription as a melting pot for different societal and ethnic groups, and its integrative role of keeping the society, state and the army is waning.

Not just the material context of warfare has changed, but its international political cultural and institutional environment have also transformed. The war option is, no longer available for many post-colonial states after WWII as it was delimited and delegitimized by the general proscription of the wars of aggression in international law (Baratta, 1993; Korman, 1996) and by the United Nations Charter. Similarly, regional organizations constrain states from going to war in their respective regions. The Organization of African Union (OAU), for instance, explicitly ruled out, from its very inception, forceful alteration of borders among African states (Wembou, 1994; Gomes, 1996). In the Middle East, the Arab League emphasized the independence of the member states in the first and second articles of its Charter when it was founded in 1945.

Contemporary states find themselves in what Alexander Wendt (1999: 279-97) termed “a Lockean culture” of anarchy, in which the prevailing “role structure” of rivalry and shared norm and institution of state sovereignty are constitutive of contemporary use of violence and wars. Each culture or role structure “involves a distinct posture or orientation of the Self toward the Other with respect to the use of violence,” and a Lockean orientation of “rivals is one of competitors who will use violence to advance their interests but refrain from killing each other” (Wendt, 1999: 258). Shared ideas about violence and collective recognition of states’ right to sovereign life under the current Lockean culture entailed “self-restraint” regarding use of force. Even if states accept warfare as “normal” and “legitimate” instrument of statecraft, “wars tend to be limited, not in the sense of not killing a lot of people, but of not killing *states*” (Wendt, 1999: 283 emphasis is original). Territorial wars are so rare after the WWII that the mortality rate for states is very low (Waltz, 1979: 95; Wendt, 1999: 284; Fazal,

2004). The wars of conquest have declined, and if ever happen, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, they are often met with international collective responses to restore state sovereignty and the status quo. There is a well-internalized territorial integrity/inviolability norm that both stabilizes the borders of sovereign states and guarantees their survival. The benign international environment protects failed and/or weak states in the Middle East and elsewhere from disappearing. The overall international geopolitical and normative context for state making is very different than the one existing in early modern Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The international system does allow, however, other kinds of warfare, mostly civil wars, to take place.<sup>6</sup> The new wars concern statehood or the character of the state and the nature of community (Holsti, 1996: 27) and arise mostly out of identity politics, as argued by Mary Kaldor (2001:78), and they are fragmentative rather than integrative in nature. They are increasingly transnationalized under globalizing conditions, globally financed (Kaldor, 2001:101-107), and conducted by (often ethnic) groups against other social groups or political authorities (e.g., Jews and Arabs in Israel, Kurds against Iraq and Turkey). "War since 1945", argued Holsti (1996: 27), "has become de-institutionalized." New wars are of different and limited kind, and do not produce the same effects in state formation as traditional large-scale wars did in Europe.

The weak members of the international system refrain from waging territorial wars because they have already recognized that such attempts will be encountered by great power interventions and international sanctions (Zacher, 2001: 241-243). The firmly established international norms against territorial revisionism constrained territorial wars, but other kinds of wars have taken place to satisfy a variety of goals from regional hegemony, power balancing to helping allies.

As Ian Lustick (1997: 661-663) argues, frequent great power interventions have obstructed the emergence of a hegemonic regional order. Middle Eastern regional system is not a free area for states to go to wars of European state-making. The geopolitical significance of the Middle East for the great powers is meant that the regional system has constantly been subject to extra-regional (great power) interventions that have adverse effects on state formation and hinder the rise of regional hegemonies. During the Cold War era, the Middle Eastern wars were permitted to take place within the limits of superpower competition, and are currently waged under the purview of great powers. The Middle Eastern states have become the direct recipients of the US "War on Terror" following the terrorist attacks in New York on 11 September 2001.

The Lockean culture of the international system and its constraints on territorial warfare notwithstanding, the Middle Eastern regional system, argues Hinnebusch (2015: 155, 254-203; 2020: 358), is still characterized by "a Hobbesian anarchy" given the continuing prevalence of inter-state wars and long-standing strategic rivalries, in particular between revisionist and status quo powers. Four in five inter-state wars in the world have taken place in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era (Hinnebusch, 2020: 362). Wars have greatly

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<sup>5</sup> Mark Zacher (2001: 237) demonstrates that the territorial integrity norm has become so firmly internalized and institutionalized since 1976 that, "no major cases of successful territorial aggrandizement have occurred" during this period of time.

<sup>6</sup> During the period between 1989-1996, only six out of 101 armed conflicts were inter-state wars (Wallenstein and Sollenber, 1997: 339).

shaped the Middle Eastern politics, not least because their growing number and cost, argued Hinnebusch (2015: 202), “forced states to adapt themselves to the survival imperatives of a threat-drenched system”. In the region, “both practice and the continuous threat of war indicate that the range of legitimate reasons to go to war is wider than in the global inter-state society”, suggesting that war remains a “primary institution” in ordering Middle Eastern regional and domestic politics (Gonzales-Pelaez, 2009: 105).

The effects of war preparation and war making on state-building in contemporary times appear, however, to be uneven. In his detailed and nuanced analysis of the connection between war mobilization/making and state power in Egypt and Israel, Michael Barnett (1992) argued that the former did not necessarily bring about enhanced state power, nor did it promote a strong state.<sup>7</sup> It was because, a “restructural” strategy of national mobilization (including attempts to reorganize society with a view to augmenting societal contribution to war efforts and bargaining with domestic actors for access to their resources), not “accommodational” or “international” strategies—were key to transforming state-society relations and contributing to strong state institutions (Barnett, 1992: 256). This suggests that the effects of war on building strong states cannot be universally assumed but hinge upon some other conditions, like state elites’ strategic choices and war-making strategies (Barnett, 1992), ethnic homogeneity or social cohesion (Taylor and Botea, 2008), war financing strategies (internal or external), external military and diplomatic support or interventions, or the nature of warfare (Gongora, 1997). Faced with the dilemma of capacity gap (weak military power) and legitimacy gap (limited ability to mobilize society for war), small and weak states have diversified their strategic options of survival. In addition to preparing for and waging war occasionally, they focus on economic development and nation-building at home, and pursue international security strategies from diplomacy and alliances to regional cooperation abroad (Lemke, 2019: 1105). In his analysis of the relationship between war making activity and state strength in the Iran-Iraq war, Thierry Gongora concluded that “the modern conventional warfare” did not augment “state power”. As he (1997: 332) put it:

Different conditions of warfare, by affecting the types of resources that are required to prepare and wage war, can modify the relationship between war making and state making. In the case of the Middle East, the introduction of modern conventional warfare since the second half of the 1950s has had the effect of severing the link among war making, resource extraction, and state power growth.

Likewise, quantitative studies have supported the modified thesis of war-makes-strong states that strategic rivalries rather than actual conduct of wars between states contributed to state strength in the post-colonial world and the Middle East alike (Thies, 2004; Lu and Thies, 2012). Keith Krause (1996: 327) pointed to the different nature of bargain between state makers and social groups in postcolonial state-building processes than what Tilly observed in

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<sup>7</sup> In contrast to the common wisdom of a positive relationship between war making and state strength, he (Barnett, 1992:18) notes the paradoxical effects of the former on the latter: “After the June 1967 War, war preparation was central for bringing about tremendous changes in Israeli and Egyptian state power. And, rather than leading to the state’s aggrandizement, war preparation led to its very decline. ...[I]n contrast to Western European formation in which war was central in promoting the state’s domestic presence...war preparation contributed to both the growth and the diminution of state power in Israel and Egypt.”

the European war-making and state formation. In particular, state elites' resource extraction for war-making efforts has lost its erstwhile inextricable connection with the society in the contemporary developing world. Internationalization of or great power involvement in the Middle Eastern wars have changed the patterns of state-society relations, institution building dynamics of resource extraction and state makers' making of strategic choices in the region than those of the previous large-scale state-making European wars. It appears more useful to see in the contemporary Middle East that, as proposed by Spruyt (2017: 74) "warfare is neither a necessary condition, nor does warfare provide a sufficient condition for state formation." War-making in the Middle East needs to be located, as Fred Halliday (2007: 22; 2005) explicated, in "the intersection of three major, recurrent and contradictory, processes – the impact of the external, 'great', powers; the autonomous and competitive actions of regional states; and the incidence of social and political rebellion."

### **Policing and Pacification: Security Sector and Civil-Military Relations**

War and preparations for it has been the exclusive domain of the state in Europe since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, just as the state ultimately enjoyed, as Weber (1991: 78) remarked, "the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory." In the later stages of state-making in Europe since the mid-nineteenth century, the external and internal aspects of security (i.e., national defence and domestic order, respectively) have been separated. The former is regarded as the prerogative of the army, while the police are given the responsibility of maintaining internal safety. As Tilly noted, "in a phase of specialization, European states have consolidated the system of citizen militaries backed by large civilian bureaucracies, and split off police forces specialized in the use of coercion outside of war" (1993: 141). In the process of structuring security sector in the age of specialization were the spheres and responsibilities of the military (national security) and the police (domestic order) differentiated from one another. Policing in the European state formation emerged as an important part of making the state the only bearer of legitimate means of violence within a territory and of maintaining domestic order. As paradoxical as it seems, noted Tilly (1990: 206), "the pursuit of war and military capacity, after having created national states as a sort of by-product, led to a civilianization of government and domestic politics."

Many Middle Eastern regimes, however, have often abused their (external and internal) security provision by blurring the lines between national defense and domestic order, and cloaking regime security as national/state security. Furthermore, the patterns of civil-military relations in the Middle East do not follow the European course. Without strong civilian political control of the armed forces, Middle Eastern states often risk what Samuel Huntington termed 'praetorianism',<sup>8</sup> where the armed forces seek to control the state apparatus (1968:196; 1991: 231-251). Militaries may do so either to protect their distinct institutional interests or to pursue even personal interests of army officers (as typically in Latin America or West Africa) or to save the nation from disorder and sectarian cleavages as the self-appointed guardians of the state, for instance in Egypt, Turkey<sup>9</sup>, Sudan and Pakistan<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Praetorianism describes a situation in which military officers play a predominant political role owing to their actual or threatened use of force (Perlmutter, 1997: 90; Rappoport, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> See Hale, 1994; Birand, 1991; Heper and Guney, 2000; Sakallıoğlu, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> See Shafquat, 1997; Rizvi, 1998.

(Hurewitz, 1969:112).<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, the state and the military may develop a malign form of symbiosis, where the entire state (garrison state) or even society as a whole (a nation in arms) becomes thoroughly militarized in the Soviet Union, South Africa during apartheid and Israel (Barnett, 1992: 153-209, 225-243; Etzioni-Halevy, 1996; Ben-Eliezer, 1997; 1998; Peri, 1983).<sup>12</sup>

Given state weakness, expressed in low level of institutional stability, specialization and differentiation, internal security threats loom very large both to the state, regime and to other possible referent objects of security. It is because of a certain kind of civil-military relations<sup>13</sup>, the internal pacification—the dislocation of armed forces' coercive sanctions in administrative institutions and practices—to externalize the problem of insecurity (Giddens, 1995:192) fails to take place. The increasing intervention and role of the army in domestic politics and society remains as a barrier for the realization of civilianization, and for the empowerment of civil actors and the emergence of an autonomous civil society.

Compared with the European experience, the pattern of policing, pacification and civilianization varies in a number of ways:

- The army and its branch of gendarme perform a major part of the policing tasks.
- There is a parallel structure of Special Forces nearly as much armed and populous as the national army for the protection of regimes and the leaderships (Brooks, 1998; Quinlivan, 1999). These forces are recruited either from certain sects of the society, for instance the Alawi community in Syria (Seale, 1988: 453-455), or from foreigners—for instance, the Special Security Forces and the Royal Guard in Saudi Arabia are composed of mostly by Pakistanis who also serve in the Saudi army in great numbers (Thomson, 1990: 27-29). Foreigners are employed in the armies of such as the UAE, Oman, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Libya as well (Thomson, 1990: 28). This constitutes a significant deviation from the nineteenth and early twentieth century European conscription-based citizen-armies. Just as the modern sovereign state has become the sole legitimate monopoly of violence, the phenomenon of mercenaries has (private security) largely disappeared (Thomson, 1994). Security has become a public provision, and in particular domestic violence has been externalized.
- Armies of many Middle Eastern countries do not merely engage in military activities, but sometimes also they are domestic political and economic actors in their own right; in Egypt, Syria and Israel the armies are major corporate actors. In addition, the defense minister's responsibilities (in Israel for instance) are not clear. They might include many potential areas that are defined as a security issue (Peri, 1983: 70). The army is more engaged with domestic rather than external matters.
- The army is no longer playing the role of homogenising the society and assisting nation

<sup>11</sup> Between 1949 and 1969, armed forces successfully overthrew eight civilian regimes in the Middle East: Syria in 1949; Egypt in 1952; Iraq, Pakistan, and Sudan in 1958, Turkey in 1960, [in 1971 and in 1980]; and Algeria and Yemen in 1962 (Hurewitz, 1969:108-109).

<sup>12</sup> As Yoram Peri (1983: 70) noted, "The centrality of defense in Israel meant that control over that sphere, possession of its secrets and identification with its symbolic significance was the sine quo non for gaining power, while to remain in the power required success in performing security functions....There is a symbiotic relationship between the army and the party political system."

<sup>13</sup> Good civil-military relations defined in terms of the subordination of military to civilian rule depends upon a clearly defined and externally oriented mission for the military. A state facing primarily internal threats is likely to have weak and divided institutions of civilian authority (Desch, 1996b: 25).

building. It might in fact be a source of societal resentment, tension and political dissent owing to its discriminatory conscription policies. For instance, in Morocco, while a majority of the population is Arab or Arabized Berbers, nearly four-fifths of the soldiers of all ranks are Berbers. In Syria have Alawi officers come to dominate the national army since the coup d'état of 1966. In Israel the Arabs, and in Arab countries are the Jews barred from the military service (Hurewitz, 1969: 104).

Given that the security sector and civil-military relations have been organized along the lines noted above, one can observe the rise of region-wide phenomenon of national security state in the Middle East. Its hallmarks are the prevalence of the armed forces in the domestic structure of the state relative to other political and democratic institutions, and the hegemonic role of military institutions in domestic intelligence, security and foreign affairs. Having such a privileged role, the army influences not only foreign and security policies but also domestic politics, thanks in large part to state elites' high sense of insecurity from inside and outside. A particular security culture develops as a result, in which the distinction between civilian and military spheres is often blurred (Etzioni-Halevy, 1996). Concurrently, security is broadened to incorporate almost all aspects of social life. Even in Israel, a relatively strong state in the region, for instance, population dispersal, settlement, the establishment of industries, and even the development of agriculture are often regarded and debated as national security issues (Ben-Eliezer, 1997; 1998). Military symbols, methods and practices have become part of the dominant political and social discourse. In this militarized culture, the army officers enjoy the highest prestige. It is no accident that one can find in Israel an interesting pattern of a transition from the army to party politics. Many Israeli Prime Ministers and cabinet ministers had impressive military careers before entering politics.<sup>14</sup> They bring to politics their security approach, military values and its organisational culture. Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) exercise great influence through its articulation of military doctrines that constrain the choices of politicians relating to military operations and security policies. IDF involve heavily in shaping foreign affairs and defence policy (Ben-Meir, 1995; Hurowitz and Peri 1983).

Within Middle Eastern states, state-makers have achieved the monopoly of legitimate use of force within a given territory in the process of transition from colonial to postcolonial rule, but the process of monopolizing has not been followed by "nationalizing" and "democratizing" the means of violence, putting as well human and societal security at risk (Jung, 2006: 23; 2017: 236). A particular political economy of the region has reinforced militarization of the Middle Eastern state and its separation from its society.

### **Resource Extraction: A Political Economy of the Rentier Middle Eastern State**

Resource extraction has been one of the vital functions of the European states throughout their histories in their ability to wage successful wars, to develop strong state institutions, to gain allegiance of its peoples, and to penetrate society. It entailed bargaining with domestic social classes, which resulted in turn the development of early representative institutions and ultimately contributed to modern democracy.

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<sup>14</sup> Some examples of army-retired ministers in Israeli politics: Lieutenant General Itzhak Rabin, Lieutenant General Chaim Bar-Lev, Lieutenant General Mordechai Gur, Lieutenant General Rafael Eitan, Lieutenant General Ehud Barak, Major General Ezer Weizman, Major General Sholomo Lahat, Major General Rechavam Zaevi, Major General Itzhak Mordechai, and the current prime minister, Major General Ariel Sharon.

What significantly alters the Middle Eastern state formation process from the European path is the rentier character of many states in the region (Luciani, 1990). Theories of the rentier state suggest that when governments accrue a large share of their revenues directly from external sources, in the form of resource rents, foreign aid or workers' remittances, they do not need to extract resources from or tax their citizens. This makes them less accountable to their citizens.

Middle East scholars (Beblawi, 1987; Beblawi and Luciani, 1987; Mahdavy, 1970; Chaudhry, 1994; Shambayati, 1994) have developed this approach to account for the economic ills and erratic development of, particularly oil dependent economies, and of the dearth of democratic pressures on authoritarian political regimes as well as their poor governance records (see Ross, 1999; 2001). The rentier economy creates a weak state in terms of its dependency on international markets for revenues, low level of institutionalization (such as no taxation), and developmental problems (lack of a diversified economic structure).

In the Middle East, the rent comes either in the form of international aid as happened mostly during the Cold War, or the oil rent which directly goes to the state elites. In terms of foreign aid, unlike most African states, the Middle Eastern states occupied a strategic place in the global balance of forces. The weak state regimes did not need to rely on their own society and resources considering that the superpowers became the protective shield for them and provided necessary armament for their conduct of war (Wendt and Barnett, 1993; Krause, 1992). Egypt and Syria are the most evident examples that were heavily armed by the Soviet Union in their confrontation with Israel. They also received substantial financial support from oil rich Arab countries. They did not have to mobilize their own peoples in full to wage a successful war. The oil rent going directly to the political regime or state elite had freed them from their own societies and diminished their social control by disembedding the state from the society. As Joel Migdal (1988) articulates, these states are weak because of the low degree of "social control" they enjoy even though their image is reverse.

Taxation constituted an important part of the preparation for and the conduct of war in the European state formation process. Since the state agents had to rely on their own resources they bargained with their people to secure them. In return, this exchange gradually created representative institutions and viable state structures, and enhanced the legitimacy of the ruling elite (Tilly, 1990). Unlike European states, the dictum of "no taxation, no representation" seems pertinent in the Middle Eastern rentier states (Ross, 2001). It is no accident that Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco with the highest ratios of income tax to overall state revenue are actually the most state-like in the Arab world (Ayubi, 1996: 456).<sup>15</sup>

Rentierism, however, obviates the need for the pursuit of taxation policies, and obstructs the development of necessary administrative capabilities and institutional structures that allow the state to penetrate their societies. It hinders generating representative institutions in the course of changing state-society contracts. Rentierism instead feeds two types of political systems that are subject to instability or societal tensions: "neo-patrimonialism" and "populist

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<sup>15</sup> It is particularly direct taxation that increases the infrastructural power of the state and might push the governments towards political opening, making them more accountable to their citizens (Richards and Waterbury, 1990; Ayubi, 1996).

authoritarianism”<sup>16</sup>. They are inhospitable to the kind of extractive institutional structures underlying productive states.

For the purpose of weak state security, two versions of rentier state explanation deserve closer scrutiny: cognitive-societal and institutional. In the former, rentier economy makes governing regimes rather conservative and status quo oriented, and ties their interests to those of foreign actors. This alienates societal groups from the state. Moreover, productive, efficient, and inclusive economic institutions cannot develop in a rentier economy given that the state engages in mainly distribution or spending. Secondly, cultural and identity politics of legitimation prevails in a rentier political economy, because governments cannot appeal to economic performance in order to legitimize their rule (Shambayati, 1994). Similarly, Jacques Delacroix (1980) presents a useful way to understand the political cultural-legitimacy impact of oil. He argues that the principal function of the rentier state is *distributive* in the absence of taxation or domestic extraction. The relationship between the elites and the masses is not based on class relations associated with a complex division of labour, societal differentiation, and hierarchical state structure. As a consequence, as Delacroix anticipates (1980:11),

other structures of social solidarity will have to be activated. Alternative structures are, by default, traditional structures. The more recently incorporated into the world economy as a society, the more available are its traditional social structures. Hence, a distributive state ruling a recently incorporated society will experience a maximum of tribal, ethnic and religious challenges.

Rentier economies often suffer from acrimonious identity politics that divides rather than integrates society and that gives rise to social tensions and internal conflicts (e.g., societal and human security problems). Rentierism underscores why Middle Eastern “weak states” often suffer from legitimacy gap, often associated with regime, human and societal security concerns.

#### **IV. THE WEAK STATE SECURITY CONCEPTION: PROBLEMS AND PROMISES**

Ayoob takes the Third World states and regimes as his core referent objects of security. “If it is to give scholars a viable analytical tool”, argued Ayoob (1995: 11), “to use in grappling with the dominant concerns of Third World state elites and the major determinants of Third World state behaviour, the concept of security must be defined in primarily political terms and in relation to the challenges to the survivability and effectiveness of states and regimes”. However, as Keith Krause (1998:128) pointed out, Ayoob is not clear about what he was trying to explain apart from restating the major concerns and security interests of state elites and chief determinants of state behaviour. Second, he conflates state and regime security as he seeks to explain threats to the Third World state security through the eyes of state elites. This biased perspective privileges state and regime security, and fails to observe that most security threats emanate from weak state governments and regimes themselves and are directed

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<sup>16</sup> Daniel Brumberg (1995: 233) defines populist authoritarianism in terms of its several key components: a) the creation of broad coalitions that embrace all parts of the society; b) the discovery and use of official ideologies that celebrate the culturally authentic traditions of the society; c) the cementing of all the classes in the society, particularly the workers and the peasants, to the state through clientelistic, corporatist and single-party mechanisms.

against individual citizens and societal groups. For instance, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was constructed partly to address the domestic/regime security concerns of Gulf monarchies. The latter formed the GCC not for genuine regional security concerns but as a bulwark against domestic and regional threats to their regime survival (Acharya, 1992). Moreover, Ayoob's confidence notwithstanding, regime security does not necessarily enhance state/national security, nor does it ensure state survival, or promise human and societal security. On the contrary, many threats to the state, individuals and social groups arise from the authoritarian and repressive character of regimes. Third, Ayoob idealizes the Western / strong state within a particular and limited understanding of security. This is because his "conception of security rests on a narrow conception of 'the political' that privileges the state" (Krause 1998:129). As a result, weak state security is unnecessarily confined to the state and regime security in Ayoob's rendering, thereby violating the critical opening or "emancipatory" aspiration in Third World security studies by ignoring the societal and human dimensions of security that appear to be more pertinent in such contexts (for emancipation see Booth, 1991).

The historical sociologists of the weak state, like modified neorealists, assume that domestic anarchy—that is, the state's lack of effective control on its territory and population and of monopoly of legitimate violence—is the fundamental condition of internal wars. In many cases, however, "It is the *strengthening* of central authority—rather than its weakening or collapse—that is often the permissive cause of internal war" (David, 1998: 92 italic original). Another neglected aspect of internal conflicts in the Third World is that they may enhance human or societal security. Considering that the greatest threats to most of the people in weak states come not from internal conflicts but from their repressive and violent regimes and leaders, resistance in the form of revolutions (e.g., Arab Uprisings) might lead to the ousting of illegitimate and dictatorial regimes from power.

Both Buzan's and Ayoob's security conceptions have advanced a crucial corrective to the systemic, militarist and outward oriented Cold War mind-set of security (Booth, 1998). They provided a framework to incorporate the domestic political dimensions of the security, which did not receive due treatment in mainstream security studies. Their conceptions, however, deserve similar criticisms as regarding a particular assumption about and understanding of the state as the only provider of security in the domestic arena (Ayoob, 1995: 86). Ayoob and Buzan (there is no security without a strong state) promote the discourse of domestic anarchy in strong state's absence. Being engaged in state building, the Third World regimes or state elites are in need of time and space to construct strong, credible and legitimate state apparatuses. Even if not ignorant, they appear to be apologetic for adverse human and societal security implications of manifold efforts in the process of developing strong states. If state is seen as a "protection racket", politics is reduced to the ordering of the means of organized violence. State's vital and constitutive functions of welfare and identity provision are neglected.

Secondly, failing to see state-building as always a continuous process, Ayoob takes the Western strong state as a finished project (Ashley, 1988: 231). The state does not stand for a secure place; rather its primacy and sovereignty is always contested (Biersteker and Weber, 1996). Because its presence needs to be affirmed and its sovereign identity is constantly reproduced with diplomatic or other channels of interaction with other actors (Der Derian,

1987), it is the state itself who constructs external and internal threats through which its identity as a modern state is (to be) reproduced and re-inscribed (Campbell, 1993; 1998; Weldes, 1996, 1999). As David Campbell (1993) demonstrated, a certain kind of narrating/representing the Gulf War of 1990-91 has helped reconstruct the American identity as a superpower and its sovereign statehood. The state needs security threats both internally and externally. Therefore, the state itself may be seen as a source of insecurity, not merely a security provider.

The state formation process in the Middle East thus has some similarities and differences with the European case. To trace any state formation is not to bind anyone to make a comparison with, or let alone to privilege, the European experience. The idea of transplanting sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe to the contemporary era and the idea expectation of reaching a strong state at the end is a teleological argument, which implies seeing history in linear terms. No matter how problematic the application of this historical sociology, investigating the state formation processes reveals the security concerns specific to each country or a set of countries. The Middle Eastern case discloses the prevalence and the priority of the regimes' sense of insecurity. Regime security is interwoven with human, societal, national, regional and international security.

### **Regime Security: Implications for Human and Societal Security**

In the Middle East, security is often what state elites and political regimes make of it. Regime security often trumps all other security concerns or interests. It is not uncommon to observe that Middle Eastern states' internal and external policies reflect predominantly regimes' or state elites' security concerns (Kardaş, 2020). Third World regimes adopt, what Brian Job (1992:28) identified, three kinds of security strategies: militarization, repression and state terror, and diversionary tactics of war. Militarization involves in developing and arming substantial military and police forces; repression and state terror aims at eliminating (the perceived) internal threats or enemies by a *mukharabat* state (national security state); diversionary tactics are a scapegoat strategy that constructs external threats and enemies to attract the public's attention and to justify a wide array of security measures, including the build-up of large military forces. The regimes construct either internal or external threats and build large armies and paramilitary organizations in pursuit of their own survival (Quinlivan, 1999; Brooks, 1998). Security might not always correspond to an objective reality, but it is a social and political construction. "Security is profoundly political," argues Simon Dalby (1997:22), "what it is that should be rendered secure is an essential component of any discussion of security." In the region, security is usually debated around the question of regime survival. This security consideration alone and the heavy obsession with insecurity it generates have significant political ramifications, not only at the level of domestic (human and societal) but also at the state and regional levels. The delay of political liberalization, the obstruction of democratic reforms, the shrinking of the political arena, the restrictions of civil and political rights and freedoms, and gross human rights abuses are some typical human and societal security implications of regime security. What is distinctive is the increasing political violence in the form of abrupt arrests, violent suppression of popular demonstrations and riots expressing grievances or appealing to civil, economic, social and democratic rights. Minorities are also maltreated and excluded from political life.

The political considerations of regimes, and in particular the politicization of the armies in the region might also diminish the effectiveness of the military as a bulwark against external threats, thereby putting national security at stake (Brooks, 1998). The sectarian and clientelistic bases and biases of regimes, and the estrangement of the state from society at large makes it a difficult task to construct viable state institutions and to fortify the infrastructural power of the state (Crystal, 1994). At the regional level, state elites might label, often for internal consumption, other regional or external powers as enemies; thereby disturbing the regional balances (Ibrahim, 1993: 302-303). This proves the close connection between regime security and regional security patterns as well.

### **Interdependence between Regime Security and Regional Security Complex in the Middle East: The Gulf Cooperation Council**

There are three “security complexes” in the Middle East broadly.<sup>17</sup> One comprises Israel and the Arab-world (the Levant), another North Africa, and the third covers the Gulf region, a highly precarious sub-region where Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia have been competing with each other for regional dominance (Hanau Santini, 2017). The Gulf security complex is inextricably linked with that of the larger Middle East given that the ambitions of the Saudi regime can hardly be isolated from similar concerns and interests in the wider Arab world.

The only security organization in the region, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), was not established for creating an encompassing regional security community; rather it emerged out of growing sub-regional polarisation.<sup>18</sup> The GCC has arguably reinforced rather than ameliorating inter-state disputes and rivalry in the region. It has institutionalized conservative Saudi predominance while alienating the revolutionary Iran in the Gulf. Rather than contributing to regional security integration, it affirmed and solidified the regional division and polarization (Ayoob, 1995: 61-62). It has nonetheless enhanced sub-regional stability by upholding the security of conservative oil monarchies, suggesting that a strategic defensive, not community logic has characterized the GCC-centred security complex.

The GCC is not just about balancing Iran, but also countering domestic and transnational threats originating largely out of mounting identity politics after the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. The organisation has served the security interests of the member states’ regimes. As Amitav Acharya (1992: 163) succinctly put it, “In the perception of the regional actors in the context of their individual security predicament as well as their outlook on regionalism, the notion of national and regional security has in essence been a concern with regime security.” Likewise, Osama Harb (1986: 235-236) claimed that the rationale for establishing GCC in 1981 was “cooperation and co-ordination between member states to preserve security within

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<sup>17</sup> The term “security complex”, as coined and defined by Barry Buzan, refers to “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another.” For him, regional security systems are explained “in terms of patterns of amity and enmity that are substantially confined within some particular geographical area” (1991: 190). Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver (2003: 44) define regional security complexes as “set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another”.

<sup>18</sup> The Middle East is seen as the region where the regional security institutions, regimes and cooperative practices have not gained ground. The Middle East is the least mature region in terms of security institutionalization (Hinnebusch, 2013).

their territorial borders” understood as “the maintenance of public order as defined by the regimes in these countries”.

The GCC demonstrates ample evidence for the proposition that regional inter-state cooperation might take place when the interests of governing elites converge with regard to their shared perception of internal and/or external threats to their survival and to the stability of their regimes. The Arab Gulf regimes sharing similar perceptions of internal or transnational threats pursue parallel strategic orientations towards, and close linkages with extra-regional power centers. From a weak state security perspective, the pro-Western orientations of the GCC regimes and their sense of insecurity emanating particularly from revolutionary regimes and ideologies suggests that there is close interdependence between regime security concerns and external (mainly US-led Western) strategic and political orientations toward the region (Ayoob, 1986: 20; 1984).

## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The conventional historical sociological approach that inspired weak state security conception, particularly in Ayoob’s rendering, defines the international context of state-making in structural-materialist terms—war and money. The bellicist theory of state-making, as advanced by Tilly and adopted as an analytical framework by weak state security theorists suggest that, like neorealists in International Relations, warfare dictates an international system of like (strong) units. How accurately Tilly’s framework described European state formation is not intended in this paper, yet as Andreas Osiander (2001:278) demonstrated, European history does not sustain the idea positing a positive relationship between warfare and the disappearance of unlike or weak units. Many states have failed to survive today not because of warfare but because they were integrated through dynastic marriages, inheritance, amalgamation, or unification. Sovereign statehood was not based on military power or adaptation to external threat environment, but on what Hendrik Spruyt (1994: 32) called “the mutual empowerment”. The existence and durability of the so-called “fragile” or “failed states” today vindicates that states exist not just because “they are good at what they are supposed to do (provide security and economic growth, promote equality) but because a larger world culture supports them” (Finnemore, 1996: 332).

The warfare based historical sociology of state formation depends on a particular conception of the state defined in terms of the “legitimate” monopoly of violence by a single political authority.<sup>19</sup> This approach equates political authority readily with monopoly of violence. Authority, however, entails legitimacy, not merely coercive power (Hurd, 1999).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the empirical observations of effective monopoly of the means of violence do not necessarily vindicate the state’s legitimate authority.

Tilly’s historical sociology overall presents a materialist and rationalist account of the formation of modern states (see Ruggie, 1993; Barnett, 2002:117; Reus-Smit, 2002: 123-129; Smith, 2002). The role of cultural and institutional contexts that constitute weak states, or

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, Theda Skocpol (1979: 29) defines the state as “a set of administrative, policing, and military organizations headed, and more or less well coordinated by, an executive authority.” It is a relatively autonomous unit from societal dynamics, an institution capable of organizing itself.

<sup>20</sup> Authority stands for “the normative belief by an actor that a rule or institution ought to be obeyed. It is a subjective quality, relational between actor and institution, and defined by the actor’s perception of the institution” (Hurd, 1999: 381)

give historical and social meanings to material factors that are supposed to steer contemporary state formation are underestimated (Spruyt, 2007). In particular, the role of national identity and identity politics in constituting the states and security is underestimated (see Kardař and Balcı, 2016). The ideational are attached and relegated to the material conditions.

An improved framework to understand the Middle Eastern state and security needs to incorporate ideational/institutional/normative elements that might reveal the dynamics of weak state security from the perspectives of political authority, legitimacy and identity. This discussion suggests that the states/regimes in the region face basic challenges: creating a cohesive society and a strong national identity; and developing legitimate political authority and civilianization of domestic arena (Jung, 2017).

Tilly's account, however, should be more than a template for or a set of hypotheses inferred from early modern Europe about contemporary processes of state-formation. His key contribution was not that he outlined "a standard path" by which contemporary state formations in the Middle East and elsewhere are traced, but that he provided a method of state formation analysis—which challenged "the internal logic" that prevailed in both hegemonic weak/failed state discourses and many weak state security accounts, and economic determinism—with a strong emphasis on "spatio-temporal specificity and variation" (Kaspersen, Strandsbjerg and Teschke 2017: 13). An improved historical sociology of weak state security in the Middle East needs to attend both to the regional specificities and to the temporal variations or altered context of state formation and security production.

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