Studying Middle Eastern International Relations through IR Theory

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Abstract

The discipline of International Relations (IR) and the field of Middle East studies are often considered worlds apart, with little common ground between them. Today this characterization is too stark, but it is true that more work needs to be done to bring the two together, and particularly to bring the Middle East more into the center of IR theory development. This article argues that although IR scholarship does pay some—if not enough—attention to the region, it is in pedagogy that almost no effort is made to do so. Our university and college courses must do more to apply IR approaches and models to the Middle East, to show students how the former work and what the latter can contribute to it. Below four paradigms are suggested as ways to do so, including questions students can be made to think about to demonstrate why and how the two areas can be combined to further both our understanding of the region and our efforts to develop IR theory.

Keywords: IR Theory, Middle East Studies, Pedagogy.

Ortadoğu Uluslararası İlişkilerini Uİ Teorileriyle Çalışmak

Öz

Uluslararası İlişkiler (Uİ) disiplini ve Ortadoğu çalışmaları genellikle birbirleri arasında az sayıda ortak nokta bulunan, farklı dünyalara ait alanlar olarak kabul edilirler. Günümüzde böyle bir nitelendirme çok katı olsa da, bu iki alanı biraraya getirmek, özellikle de Ortadoğu'yu Uİ teori gelişiminin odak noktasına getirmek konusunda daha fazla çalışma yapılması gerektiği iterek bu ikisini bir araya getirmek için daha çok çalışma yapılması gerektiği açıktır. Bu makalede, Uİ biliminin bölgeye yeterince olmasa da biraz ilgi gösterdiği ancak bu konuda Uİ eğitimi bağlamında neredeyse hiçbir çaba sarf edilmediği fikri savunulmaktadır. Lisans derslerinde, Uİ yaklaşımları ve modellerinin Ortadoğu'yla ilişkilendirilmesi konusunda daha fazla çaba gösterilmeli ve öğrencilere Uİ yaklaşımları öğretilirken Ortadoğu'nun nasıl bir katkı yapabileceği gösterilmelidir. Bu makalede bu amaç doğrultusunda kullanılabilecek dört paradigma sunulmuştur; bunun içinde hem bizim söz konusu bölgeye yönelik bakışımızı hem de Uİ teorisini geliştirme çabalarımızı daha ileriye götürmek adına bu iki alanın niçin ve nasıl birleştirilebileceğini göstermeleri konusunda öğrencileri düşünmeye itebilecek sorular da sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uİ Teorisi, Ortadoğu Çalışmaları, Eğitim.

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دراسة العلاقات الدولية للشرق الأوسط عن طريق نظريات العلاقات الدولية
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خـلاصـة :

هنالك نقاط التقاء قليلة بصورة عامة بين نظام العلاقات الدولية ودراسات الشرق الأوسط، اذ يعتبر كل منها منتميا الى عالم آخر متميز. ان هذا التقييم وان كان يعتبر في يومنا هذا غير مستساغ كثيرا، فان الأمر بحاجة الى محاولات اكثر واعمق لجعل هاتين الساحتين يلتقيان، وبصورة خاصة جعل الشرق الأوسط محورا لتطور نظرية العلاقات الدولية. ان هذا البحث يظهر ان علم العلاقات الدولية يبدي بعض الاهتمام بهذه المنطقة ولو بدرجة غير كافية، وان الاعتقاد السائد هو انه لم يتم بذل الاهتمام والجهد الكافيين في مجال تعليم العلاقات الدولية. والواقع انه يقتضي بذل جهود اكبر في الدروس التي تلقى على طلبة الليسانس في الجامعات في مجال تطبيق نظريات ونماذج العلاقات الدولية على الشرق الأوسط ومواءمتها معه ووجوب تفهيم الطلاب بماهية ومدى مساهمة الشرق الأوسط في تطبيقات العلاقات الدولية عند القاء هذه الدروس عليهم. ويقدم المقال في هذا المضمار اربعة نماذج يمكن استعمالها، وتضم وجهة النظر نحو المنطقة المشار اليها اضافة الى احتواء المقال على اسئلة تدفع الطلاب الى التفكير والتقصي حول موضوع : لماذا وكيف يمكن توحيد هاتين الساحتين بإسم جهود تطوير نظرية العلاقات الدولية ودفعها الى الأمام.

الكلمات الدالة : نظرية العلاقات الدولية ، ابحاث الشرق الأوسط ، التعليم.

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Introduction

Middle East studies suffers from two self-inflicted wounds: One, a continuous stream of pieces highlighting and lamenting various "crises" in the field stretching back to the 1960s; and two, a series of fierce, even bitter, internal struggles between analysts and scholars opposing each others' preferences, perceptions, and intensions.[1] Amid these tensions and divisions a relative sea of serenity can be found in the application of International Relations (IR) theory to the region, in which the Middle East's politics is utilized as case studies to demonstrate the validity of IR approaches. This sea, though, is more like a pond, because the Middle East is under-represented in IR theory development (including theory testing and refinement): in Andrea Teti's bleak terms, Middle East studies and IR have been "historically unable to build interdisciplinary bridges."[2] There are several reasons posited for this condition, including accusations of Middle East studies' over-focus on description at the expense of rigorous theorizing and conceptualization; different frameworks and approaches inherent in the social sciences and area studies; a view of the region's actors as compelled to respond to external forces rather than act on their own; and politicization of issues and explanations.[3]

I argue that this unfortunate condition can be remedied in two ways. First, and more obviously, we need more direct usage of the Middle East in IR theory development. Second, and the focus of this article, scholar-professors need to make IR approaches to the region more explicitly part of their pedagogy. A perusal of syllabi of courses on International Relations of the Middle

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1   On the first issue, see for examples Lisa Anderson, "Scholarship, Policy, Debate, and Conflict: Why We Study the Middle East and Why It Matters," *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* Vol. 38, No.1, (June 2004), available at http://fp.arizona.edu/mesassoc/bulletin/Pres%20Addresses/Anderson.htm; James A. Bill, "The Study of Middle East Politics, 1946-1996: A Stocktaking," *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 50, No. 4 (Autumn 1996), pp. 501-512; Mark Tessler with Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda, *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). On the second issue, compare Martin Kramer, *Ivory Towers on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* (Washington, D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2001), to Zachary Lockman, *Contending Visions of the Middle East: The History and Politics of Orientalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

2   Andrea Teti, "Bridging the Gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the Disciplinary Politics of the Area Studies Controversy," *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 2007), p.118. See also Morten Valbjørn, "The Meeting of the Twain: Bridging the Gap between International Relations and Middle East Studies," *Cooperation and Conflict* Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 2003), pp. 163-173. But for an opposing argument, see Bahgat Korany, "International Relations Theory: Contributions from Research in the Middle East," in Mark Tessler with Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda (ed.), *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 148-158.

3   For some examples of these and other analyses, see Rex Brynen, "Between Parsimony and Parochialism: Comparative Politics, International Relations, and the Study of Middle East Foreign Policy," paper presented at the Annual Convention, *American Political Science Association*, Washington, D.C. (September, 1993); Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Study of Middle East International Relations: A Critique," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* Vol. 18, No. 2 (1991), pp. 208-220; Teti, "Bridging the Gap"; Morten Valbjørn, "Towards a 'Mesopotamian Turn' The Study of Middle Eastern International Relations within International Relations and Middle East Studies," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1, (2004), pp. 47-75.

East at American institutions underscores this problem. Most syllabi are not broken down into specific IR models and approaches. I do not mean to suggest that they all must follow a rigid pattern, but structuring a course in this way would allow for the teaching of a given theoretical paradigm or model and then its direct application to the Middle East itself. Most courses appear to incorporate a reading or two of some IR discussions, but the bulk seems to focus on describing historical and contemporary developments and issues that highlight the international relations of the region but not the *I*nternational *R*elations of studying it.

My argument is of necessity ethnocentric, in that I am interested in understanding how to promote the international relations of the Middle East within mainstream IR scholarship. Although sensitive to the notion that IR is a Western discipline which imposes its own categorizations and theories on Others,[4] it is clear that Western approaches (and within them, a core set of primarily American paradigms) are consistently diffused throughout and incorporated within non-Western IR scholarship and teaching.[5] In this context, because the discipline is delineated and dominated by Western ideas, what matters to Western scholars matters for IR. The importance of this is underlined by the findings of the 2008 Teaching, Research, and International Policy (TRIP) Project, which showed that on average IR scholars across a number of countries in different regions of the world regard the Middle East as the area of greatest strategic importance to their own country today.[6]

As well, there is much greater diversity of home-grown methods, concepts, and approaches in Western IR, allowing for open space for the incorporation of different regions. The lack of such space and innovation in Middle Eastern countries, for example, means that IR programs there are left either very vague or ill-defined, or reliant on Western and American models and textbooks.[7] Finally, it is clear that Western IR is the most dynamic, however inclined to faddishness it might be. In this context, the Middle East is in dan-

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4   Pinar Bilgin, "Thinking Past 'Western' IR?" *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 29, No. 1 (February 2008), pp. 5-12; Ken Booth, "Human Wrongs and International Relations," *International Affairs* Vol. 71, No.1 (January 1995), pp. 103-126.

5   Jörg Friedrichs, *European Approaches to International Relations Theory: A House with Many Mansions* (London: Routledge, 2004); Teti, "Bridging the Gap," p. 119-20. For the same argument regarding Middle East studies, see Pinar Bilgin, "What Future for Middle Eastern Studies?" *Futures* Vol. 38, No. 5 (June 2006), p. 576.

6   Richard Jordan, Daniel Maliniak, Amy Oakes, Susan Peterson, and Michael J. Tierney, "One Discipline or Many? TRIP Survey of International Relations Faculty in Ten Countries" (Williamsburg, Virginia: The College of William and Mary, February 2009), p. 71, available at http://irtheoryandpractice. wm.edu/projects/trip/Final_Trip_Report_2009.pdf. Interestingly, the TRIP survey also found that a respectable (by comparison) 8% of IR scholars surveyed focus on the Middle East as their region of study (p. 35).

7   See the chapters by Mahmood Sariolghalam, Bahgat Korany, Karim Makdisi, Arie M. Kacowicz, and Ersel Aydinli and Julie Mathews, in Arlene B. Tickner and Ole Wæver (eds.), *International Relations Scholarship Around the World* (London: Routledge, 2009).

ger of being left out of emerging literatures in IR, such as on language, emotions, visualizations and symbols, and memory.[8] If the region is not brought into this field more directly and more often, there will be less—or worse, ill-informed—understanding of the region by scholars, their students, and those they converse with.

This paper is therefore a call to directly bring the Middle East more into IR theory development. This call is somewhat repetitive, since all analyses of the gap between the two have done the same. What is new here are suggestions on how we might do so. To this end, the rest of the article is organized as follows. The next section lays the groundwork by noting the lack of IR scholarship on the Middle East. Then I focus on pedagogy and Middle Eastern IR: I suggest that at least part of the reason for the under-representation of the region in IR theory development is due to the manner of teaching the subject. First I explain this problem in greater detail, and second I propose ways to ameliorate this condition. The focus is on four IR paradigms that might structure such a course, and how students might be prompted to utilize them to explore and explain regional IR. The conclusion ties together the preceding arguments.

IR Scholarship and the Middle East

Despite some hand-wringing, it is not true that the Middle East is completely ignored in IR scholarship.[9] For example, two prominent applications of general IR theory to international politics use the Middle East as their evidence: Stephen M. Walt's neorealist *The Origins of Alliances* and Michael Barnett's constructivist *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.[10] As well, there have been several other works on regional interactions and foreign policy that have incorpo-

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8   Notable exceptions in prominent IR journals include Khaled Fattah and K.M. Fierke, "A Clash of Emotions: The Politics of Humiliation and Political Violence in the Middle East," *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 15, No. 1 (March 2009), pp. 67-93; Stuart J. Kaufman, "Narratives and Symbols in Violent Mobilization: The Palestinian-Israeli Case," *Security Studies,* Vol. 18, No. 3 (July 2009), pp. 400-434; Oded Löwenheim and Gadi Heimann, "Revenge in International Politics," *Security Studies,* Vol. 17, No. 4 (October 2008), pp. 685-724; Brent E. Sasley, "Affective Attachments and Foreign Policy: Israel and the 1993 Oslo Accords," *European Journal of International Relations,* Vol. 16, No. 4 (December 2010), pp. 687-709.

9   Korany, "International Relations Theory"; Valbjørn, "Toward a 'Mesopotamian Turn'," p. 49. For a good discussion of extant studies of state behavior in the Middle East, including several citations of sources that utilize IR models, see Bassel F. Salloukh, "Regime Autonomy and Regional Foreign Policy Choices in the Middle East: A Theoretical Exploration," in Bassel F. Salloukh and Rex Brynen (ed.), *Persistent Permeability? Regionalism, Localism, and Globalization in the Middle East,* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 83-87.

10   Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances,* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987); Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

rated IR models and frameworks.[11] But it is true that the region is under-represented in IR scholarship: Of the first two studies, what is significant is the time that has passed both between them, and since them: Walt's was published in 1987, and Barnett's in 1998. And although there have, as suggested, been other examples of IR studies of the region, they have been only few and far between.

Also very relevant are the venues in which such studies are published. There are, in relative terms, far fewer articles published in the mainstream, peer-reviewed IR journals than as books. Books are important elements of scholarship, of course, but journal articles are critical indicators of trends and patterns in any discipline. A recent study found that of the top three journals in the field (*World Politics*, *International Studies Quarterly*, and *International Organization*), there is a "relative absence" of studies utilizing the Middle East that is "noteworthy." Indeed, of all regions of the world, in the journals examined the Middle East accounted for only 1.9% of research articles, just above last-place Africa (at 1.3%).[12] The study also found that the scholars who publish in these mainstream journals come primarily from American institutions, indicating a lack of pluralism within the discipline.[13] For the Middle East, this means that its scholars' voices are more subaltern than not (when they are heard), contributing to the hazards noted above.

The main problem appears to be that the Middle East, despite how important it is perceived to be to world politics, is neglected or ignored by Western scholars as a source for theory development; and that too many IR scholars appear to view the region as too unique, or as not fitting very well into IR approaches. A further important distinction must also be made between IR scholars who use the Middle East as a case study for one of their projects, and Middle East specialists who are also "genuine" IR theorists. This distinction contributes to an additional problem: when studies do try to draw out general patterns of behavior for theory development, the focus is on the Arab world and the causes and consequences of its systemic interactions. This may seem natural given that the Arab states compose the bulk of the region's

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11   For example, Tami Amanda Jacoby and Brent E. Sasley (eds.), *Redefining Security in the Middle East* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Bahgat Korany and Ali E. Hillal Dessouki (eds.), *The Foreign Policies of Arab States: The Challenge of Change (*Boulder: Westview Press, 1991); Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990); Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002).

12   Marijke Breuning, Joseph Bredehoft, and Eugene Walton, "Promise and Performance: An Evaluation of Journals in International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives,* Vol. 6, No. 4 (November 2005), p. 456 and 455.

13   See also Ole Wæver, "The Sociology of a Not So International Discipline: American and European Developments in International Relations," *International Organization*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (Autumn 1998), pp. 687-727.

states, but for many it points to Middle Eastern exceptionality that inhibits generalizable theory applicable to other areas of the world. This is due either to region-specific analytical frameworks (where, for example, culture, identity, and religion are sometimes perceived as the relevant factors); or—once the regional system is expanded to include the non-Arab states of Israel, Iran, and Turkey—country-specific analysis that seems instead to highlight the individuality of these countries more than anything else.[14]

All of these are problems that need to be addressed, but they are not insurmountable. It is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive survey of existing studies utilizing the Middle East in IR theory development, but three texts in particular have been successful at making these connections. Importantly, all them discuss various IR approaches, choosing to settle on one framework among many for their purposes: Fred Halliday adopts a historical-sociological framework, Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami construct a neorealist scaffold (though they also incorporate several other conceptual elements), and Hinnebusch later expands on this by creating a multi-theoretical explanation based on historical sociology, structuralism, constructivism, and neorealism.[15] These are critical texts for studying the Middle East, but they are not enough. More is better, in this case. One valuable method of obtaining more—and one that seems to be neglected in analyses of the state of IR theory in the Middle East—is through more effective pedagogy.

Direct Application of IR Theory in Pedagogy

The task of incorporating the Middle East into IR theory development does not fall solely to scholars writing books or articles; it is a necessary assignment of teachers/professors as well. If it is true that "the Middle East's unique features defy analyses based on any one conceptual approach to international relations,"[16] then this should be the basis not of sterility regarding theory development but rather an ideal starting point for understanding both how IR theory "works" and how it can help us understand and explain Middle Eastern regional interactions.

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14   Israel is the only Jewish state in the world, Turkey is a Muslim-majority state with a constitutionally-mandated secularism, and Iran is both the world's only theocratic regime and the only state where Shia theology has been institutionalized into government. As well, all three are placed simultaneously in more than one geographic, cultural, and political space. Middle Eastern exclusivity might also be pointed out based on the existence of other kinds of actors as well: two large groups of stateless peoples (Kurds and Palestinians), and smaller, heavily-institutionalized non-state actors such as Hezbollah and Hamas. Both sets of actors shape many aspects of regional politics, and are certainly never ignored by the established states.

15   Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations: Power, Politics and Ideology,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Raymond Hinnebusch and Anoushiravan Ehteshami (eds.), *The Foreign Polities of Middle East States* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002); Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East, (* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

16   Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (UK: Manchester University Press, 2003)

Descriptive and primary sources are necessary elements for teaching historical developments. But even a quick perusal of American syllabus on the IR of the Middle East available on the Internet indicates that these sources dominate such courses and their reading lists, with less emphasis on theoretical, methodological, and—from these—empirical questions and debate, including little if any interest in broader questions of epistemology. In other words, the focus seems to be less International Relations and more simple description. The latter is not unnecessary, but if our goal is to bring the Middle East into IR theory development then it cannot be the only focus.

Take, for example, what has become a standard textbook, *International Relations of the Middle East*, edited by Louise Fawcett.[17] It is a very good book, covering a number of critical topics necessary for any deeper understanding of the region today; and the individual chapters are written by prominent Middle East scholars, some of whom also work in the discipline of IR. But—and without meaning to denigrate the book as a valuable text for courses on Middle Eastern politics—it is also representative of two further problems in the teaching of Middle Eastern international relations.

First, the book is organized not according to specific IR approaches or models, but rather specific issues and themes.[18] IR theories are incorporated into various chapters (though not all), but there is a lack of an overall organizing theoretical framework, and detailed examination of IR theory itself and how it applies to the region. Second, there is a tendency in the teaching of this area to list extant IR theories or models, and then argue that they are inadequate for explaining regional politics.[19] As Fawcett notes in the introductory chapter to the edited volume, IR theorists and Middle East specialists have tended to see their work as at odds with each other, as the former lean toward generalizable approaches that force the region into a universal or, worse, Western-shaped mould, while the latter believe that regional difference—predicated on unique cultural, geographic, and historical identities—precludes any such effort.[20]

But perhaps the time has come to avoid such dichotomous arguments, and simply teach the IR of the region. If it is true that the Middle East defies a single theoretical approach, then it would be more effective for the sake both

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17 Louise Fawcett (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

18 For example, Part 2 ("Themes") explores petropolitics, globalization, political reform, identity, and war and alliances; while Part 3 ("Key Issues and Actors") examines the Arab-Israeli conflict, Gulf politics, Iraq, and American and European involvement in the region.

19 Often this is followed by emphasis on historical development and domestic elements.

20 Louise Fawcett, "Introduction: The Middle East and International Relations," in Louise Fawcett (ed.), *International Relations of the Middle East*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 6-8. See also Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*.

of IR theory and Middle East studies simply to teach how various IR theories can explain specific events or conditions in the region, with the corollary that the specific approach or model chosen might depend on the research question at hand. If a particular theory or model does not fit with a given topic under discussion, then having students debate the advantages and drawbacks of that theory or model would only contribute to better and deeper understanding. In other words, students should be taught how the theories work in the case of the Middle East.

No textbook, of course, *has* to be organized in this way, nor should all such courses necessarily be either. But it is telling that a major textbook on the topic is not. I would like to suggest here some ideas for organizing a course on the International Relations of the Middle East by pointing out four broad theoretical paradigms. Obviously, there are many other approaches and models that can be used, and in some ways the choice of only four is arbitrary. But because they are broad, they can subsume other ideas. As well, they are more suggestive than determinative. More importantly, my purpose here is to demonstrate the importance of theory for knowledge generation, its organic nature, and its relevance to "real life" considerations and policy.

Systemic-Materialist Approaches

Theoretical explanations focusing on the causal nature of material factors stemming from the nature of the global or regional system are probably the most recognizable to students of the Middle East. Those versed in IR theory would quickly recognize realism in all its versions at play here, while others would note the importance of the Cold War, American hegemony, and the Arab-Israeli conflict as systemic pressures impacting on and shaping regional politics.[21] In some ways, then, this paradigm might be the easiest to teach students because of a ready array of well-tested texts and models.

Applying systemic models begins with defining a "system." Standard understandings would focus on the system as the stage on which actors engage with each other in their international interactions. Since there can be many levels of system (for example, global, regional, and so on), opening up the discussion to the nature of the Middle Eastern system brings in different IR concepts while highlighting their relevance for how we think about the region.

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21 F. Gregory Gause, III, "Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations," *International Studies Review,* Vol. 1, No.1 (Spring 1999), pp. 11-31, and his updated version in Turkish: "Ortadoğu Uluslararası İlişkilerine Sistemik Yaklaşımlar – 10 Yıl Sonra" (Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations—Ten Years After), *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol.1, No.1, pp.41-68; Hinnebusch, *The International Politics*; Paul Noble, "Systemic Factors Do Matter, But... Reflections on the Uses and Limitations of Systemic Analysis," in Bassel F. Salloukh and Rex Brynen (ed.), *Persistent Permeability? Regionalism, Localism, and Globalization in the Middle East*, (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 29-64.

Is there in fact, students might be asked, a Middle Eastern system? Or is it more difficult to delineate one? Which elements come together to form such a system? Who, then, would be included?[22] This could lead to conversations regarding the nature of actor interactions. Gause, for example, makes a good case that North African states might be secondary to such conversations because they are not integrated closely into the regular set of international issues the rest of the region engages in, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and transnational Arabism or Islamism.[23]

Other factors relevant to systemic analyses can raise further questions about regional actors and their goals and policies.[24] These include: the system as an independent force shaping actor behavior and the subsequent patterns that arise, the importance of capabilities, the nature of the actors themselves, and the influence of exogenous factors relative to internal ones.

Finally, discussions of systemic approaches can also raise questions about which actors matter most for understanding and explaining Middle Eastern politics. As Middle East scholars like to point out, IR theorists prioritize the state as the premier institution and the one to which theories much point— but that in the case of the Middle East itself, it is non-state actors who often influence domestic and regional politics more.[25] Into this discussion can be inserted consideration of external powers, such as the United States, Russia, Europe, China, India, or others.

Colonialism and Postcolonialism

Colonialism is not just a historical condition,[26] but a theoretical framework as well. In recent years, it has been subsumed under the broader rubric of post-colonial studies. Here we can instruct students to understand colonialism as more than just about physical control; it is about a state of mind as well, as way of *thinking* about the Middle Eat that conditions and shapes specific actions.

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22   See the differing arguments in Gause, "Systemic Approaches," Gerges, "The Study of Middle East," and Yaacov Bar-Simon-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers, and the War in the Middle East,* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987). Good empirical discussions are found in David W. Lesch (ed.), *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, 4th ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007).

23   Gause, "Systemic Approaches."

24   For good summaries as starting points, see Jeffrey W. Legro and Andrew Moravcsik, "Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Fall 1999), pp.5-55; and William C. Wohlforth, "Realism and the End of the Cold War," *International Security,* Vol. 19, No. 3 (Winter 1994/95), pp. 91-129. Note that I have focused here on security at the expense of economic factors as systemic elements, but of course the latter can and should be part of such a discussion dialogue

25   See Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations*, pp. 27-30.

26   On the physical manifestation, see James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Such analysis begins with Edward Said's *Orientalism*.[27] According to Said, the "Orient" is a European invention designed as an approach toward the region.[28] As Europe defined the Middle East in terms appropriate to its own perceptions, scholarship of the Orient became inextricably linked to European—and Western—policy toward the region. If the West viewed the East in specific negative terms (as backward, primitive, etc.), Said argued, then the task of European policy toward the East became easier. For example, as a way of thinking, orientalism facilitated Western occupation of the Middle East and prevented self-government for its peoples. If the Middle East was viewed as weak, irrational, and cowardly then it stood to reason that the West *should* rule over the region, depriving it of the right to sovereign statehood that the Western powers insisted on for themselves.

To demonstrate that theoretical debates are not barren and lacking in productivity, students could then be asked what colonialism as a paradigm means in terms of blame for the myriad of problems in the region today. How does colonialism as compared to domestic politics (discussed below) explain responsibility for war and conflict, lack of economic development, and authoritarianism among regional states? Where blame is placed has practical implications, for it affects the kinds of solutions one might offer to these problems. A colonialist framework would put responsibility primarily or only at the doors of the Western world. If Britain and France and the United States are culpable, the solutions to these problems lie in the hands of these external states, which might mean consideration of more favorable trade or security arrangements, debt reduction, and so on. But if instead Arab regimes are responsible, then change is required among them, perhaps even including their dismantling and removal. This conclusion was reached by the Bush Administration and contributed to the self-assertion of its role as democracy promoter in the region.[29] Practical effects, indeed.

As mentioned, an emerging area of study is postcolonialism. Building on Said's and others' work,[30] this broad approach is much more political in that

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27   Edward W. Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). For a broader discussion see Lockman, *Contending Visions*, Chapter 3. (Cambridge University Press, 2004) For a detailed counter-argument, see Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents,* (Woodstock, New York: The Overlook Press, 2006).

28   This, in turn, leads back to how we define the Middle Eastern system, and who, in fact, creates such a definition. See Gerges, "The Study of Middle East," pp. 209-12.

29   Christopher Hobson, "A Forward Strategy of Freedom in the Middle East: US Democracy Promotion and the 'War on Terror'," *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* Vol. 59, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 39-53.

30   For two prominent examples, see Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence (Grossberg, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271-313.

it is activist through specific recommendations of actions to rectify existing power imbalances. Its focus is on the dominant structures of the global system, as constructed by Western powers, and how they shape and influence non-Western regions and actors, to the latter's great detriment. In the case of the Middle East, the region is classified more as an appendage of the great powers than anything else, because these powers control what happens in the area for their own benefit. In addition to leading to deep ideational negatives such as stereotypes, prejudice, racism, and Islamophobia, it also contributes to an under-development of the region itself. By this understanding, then, blame for the region's problems clearly lies with those outside the region.

Tracing theoretical debates back to practical effects is perhaps even more obvious here. For some postcolonialists, like Frantz Fanon,[31] this paradigm is important not only for understanding what has happened to the Middle East (along with the rest of the colonized world) but also as something like a manual for those who would use postcolonialism to promote resistance and even violence as part of an activist agenda, as a necessity in order to correct the historical injustices done by the Western powers to peoples around the world. Without such resistance, many argue, these people will remain subject to ongoing control and suppression by the Western states.

A good case study for postcolonialism is the Arab-Israeli conflict, and particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[32] Professors might ask of their students a number of questions to determine how postcolonialism might answer them, followed by a comparison with other approaches. For example: Who is the "bad guy" in the conflict, and why? What is the nature of Zionism and Palestinian nationalism? What is the connection between Israel and the European powers vis-à-vis Palestine? Is—and if so, how—Israel a colonial power? Finally, postcolonialism offers different ideas about how to resolve the conflict itself. If Israel is a colonial state repressing the Palestinians in part by establishing its own state on their lands, then the solution must be either (a) based in violence, to drive the colonial-Israelis out; or (b) rooted in a new state structure—namely, a one-state solution. Obviously either solution has implications that require further discussion.

Domestic politics

This paradigm differs considerably from the previous two in that the focus

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31   Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. By Richard Philcox, (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

32   A good discussion of some of these issues is found in Philip Carl Salzman and Donna Robinson Divine (eds.), *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,(* London: Routledge, 2008).

is on internal or domestic factors and the manner in which they determine actor behavior. Usually the state is the focus, but any actor could be studied—for example, the politics of conflict between Hamas and Fatah within the Palestinian Authority. The point is that internal characteristics and structures should be the locus of study, since they are the elements that directly shape behavior.[33] Because these attributes are unique to every state or actor, we must understand these differences in order to see when or if states react similarly or differently to external stimuli. Do Israel and Iraq engage in war with their neighbors because of something internal to them, or are there other, common, factors that matter? Such factors are numerous, and could include anything from political institutions, to the ethnic make-up of the state, to economic factors, to bureaucratic politics.

Often it is the internal competition among societal actors that plays an important role in this equation.[34] Societal actors working to achieve maximum benefit for themselves engage in politics to be able to do so. Once a group "captures" the state and achieves power (by elections for democracies, by violence or coercion in non-democracies) they control the state. Thus state behavior represents the preferences of the main actors who control the state.

A very fruitful area to study the intersection between theory, perception, and practice under this paradigm is regime security. In Steven David's words, "[i]t is the leadership of the state and not the state itself that is the proper unity of analysis for understanding … foreign policy."[35] When applied to the Middle East, the concept is normally applied to the Arab states. By focusing on the regimes themselves, we can understand how the state will act; and in this way we can also understand how state behavior might be changed.

Under this conceptualization, the difference between *state* and *regime* is negligible. The construction of state institutions (bureaucracies, militaries, parties, and domestic security services) is often done by regimes in power to help maintain themselves in power. Narrowly-based regimes insert into the top positions of these institutions officials who are tied to the regime through family, tribe, ethnicity, or religion. Thus, state institutions serve the needs of the regime, so that the two become indistinguishable.

This melding of state and regime is a direct result of the illegitimacy inherent in both. If legitimacy is a "people's voluntary acceptance of their political

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33 Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization,* Vol. 42, No. 3 (Summer 1998), pp. 427-60.

34 Andrew Moravcsik, "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 51, No. 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 513-553.

35 Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," *World Politics,* Vol. 43, No. 2 (January 1991), p. 243. His focus is the Third World more broadly, but certainly the Middle East is part of it.

community and its structures of power"[36] then Michael Hudson's seminal argument—that Arab regimes, lacking the institutionalized nature and long historical acceptance of Western states, do not have internal or external legitimacy, making them precarious and insecure[37]—remains pertinent to any discussion of Arab states in the Middle East today, including their authoritarianism and how it connects to foreign policy. For example, Nazih Ayubi has argued that such conditions have forced the Arab regimes to generate legitimacy in one of two ways: by promoting nationalism populism, radicalism, and revolution (*thawra*), or by relying on kin-based relations and financial capital (*tharwa*).[38] These internal conditions have had considerable impact on foreign policy, particularly toward Israel as well as toward each other, often leading to an exaggeration of conflict and aggression.[39] Thus, understanding the genesis of these foreign policies through the application of theory not only provides a better understanding of them, but also how to deal with and perhaps mitigate them.

Discourses of Identity

A final paradigm useful for teaching how to apply IR theory to the Middle East is found in a focus on culture and identity of specific actors. This is a constructivist understanding of international relations: constructivism emphasizes the social nature of world politics, in that actor interactions are based not on an objective reality but rather how the actors themselves interpret that reality and, through their relations with each other, promote these different interpretations.[40] Identity acts as a blueprint for action by shaping actors' perceptions of who they are and how they should behavie within such a context, and, from there, regional interactions.

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36   Mustapha Kamel al-Sayyid, "Legitimacy and Security in Arab Countries, 1989-1996," in *New Frontiers in Middle East Security*, edited by Lenore G. Martin, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 51.

37   Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977. See also Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (eds.), *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance (*Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).

38   Nazih N. Ayubi, *Over-stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East,* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995).

39   Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* ; Rex Brynen, "Palestine and the Arab State System: Permeability, State Consolidation and the Intifada," *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (September 1991), pp. 595-621; Adeed Dawisha, "Arab Regimes: Legitimacy and Foreign Policy," in Giacomo Luciani (ed.), *The Arab State*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 284-299; Barry Rubin, *The Arab States and Palestine,* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

40   Thomas Risse, "Constructivism and International Institutions: Toward Conversations across Paradigms," in Ira Katznelson and Helen V. Milner (ed.), *Political Science: The State of the Discipline*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 599. Alexander Wendt's works have also become standard texts to understand this paradigm: see his *Social Theory of International Politics, (*Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), and "Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics," *International Organization,* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 391-425.

More specifically, one can identify two structures of identity: region-wide normative structures that condition how a set of actors function (e.g., Arabism, Islam, Middle Eastern), and individual country structures, in which a country's identity shapes its particular foreign policy.[41] In either framework, deep empirical analysis would necessarily support theoretical exploration of how notions of Self and Other condition actor behavior. If identity emerges out of social interactions with others, then states identify themselves at least in part in relation to—in contrast to—other states. If that is the starting point, then we must also recognize that identity is constructed on, or equals, difference. We cannot know who we are if we do not know who we *are not*. Without a comparison or reference point—an Other—the Self has no meaning and cannot be understood on its own.

From this point it is a small step to move from Difference to Otherness, and from there to categorizations of challenge, threat, and insecurity.[42] In the Middle East, there are several examples of this equation at play that students could explore, including various conflicts and wars, and shifts from confrontation to accommodations in inter-actor relationships.

Take Israel, for example. As one study argued—written by a simultaneously Middle East scholar and IR theorist—Israel long saw itself as a "good" state, moral and just.[43] During the 1980s, though, it began to act in ways that contradicted this self-perception, particularly the 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the first *intifada*. In both Israel acted harshly against others, violently enough that many Israelis began to ask themselves how they could treat others this way. Israeli self-perceptions were threatened and called into question, prompting behavior to reassert the prior self-perceptions by changing policy toward the Palestinians (that is, engaging in the peace process and eventually the Oslo Accords).

This study of identity touches on a number of issues and themes relevant

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41 For good works on the former, see Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*; on the latter, see Telhami and Barnett, *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East.*

42 Good analyses of these processes include David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War,* (London: Routledge, 2006); Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State,* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson, and Raymond Duvall (eds.), *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities, and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

43 Mira M. Sucharov, *The International Self: Psychoanalysis and the Search for Israeli-Palestinian Peace,* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

for understanding regional interactions, including the nature of specific actor identities (in this case, Israel as a Jewish state), and how it shapes domestic politics and from there foreign policy. It also can be used for comparison to other theoretical paradigms. For example, what is the difference between identity as studied here, and a domestic politics approach? To continue with the Israeli example, the prominence of the Likud and Labor parties, representative as they are of two opposite ideas on the Israeli political spectrum, and the political contest between them has considerable implications for Israeli foreign policy and the peace process with the Palestinians and Arab states.

Conclusion

The accusation that area studies scholars are too parochial, too concerned with descriptive exercises only, and too little versed in general IR theory may have been true at one point, but this is not the case any longer. But more work to bring the Middle East into the center of IR theory development is warranted. We cannot continue to call attention to the condition of Middle East studies and International Relations theory without doing more to address it. My purpose here was to highlight one area that is often ignored in such efforts: how we teach the IR of the Middle East to students.

I also do not mean to suggest that the situation is hopeless or desperate. There are some good, lone studies that do incorporate the Middle East and its individual actors in general theory development. Turkey, for example, despite the perception of its uniqueness, has been used to better understand the role of identity in shaping foreign policy[44] as well as the impact of the combination of ideas and coalition politics on policy decisions.[45] Such works make one optimistic about the future of effective "irrigation" of the drylands between the otherwise fertile grounds of IR and Middle East studies.[46] But as I suggest here, efforts need to also focus on pedagogy as opposed to just scholarship.

The Middle East is unique to the extent that any region of the world is unique, and continued emphasis on this undermines better understanding of the region. Political, economic, and social integration in Europe is unique, but that

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44 Brent E. Sasley, "Turkish Identity as Enabler or Impediment: Turkey in Central Asia," in Emilian Kavalski (ed.), *The "New" Central Asia: The Regional Impact of International Actors*, (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010), pp. 191-214.

45 Binnur Özkececi-Taner, "The Impact of Institutionalized Ideas in Coalition Foreign Policy Making: Turkey as an Example, 1991-2002," *Foreign Policy Analysis,* Vol. 1, No. 3 (November 2005), pp. 249-278.

46 The metaphor is Valbjørn's, "Toward a 'Mesopotamian Turn'."

has not prevented discussion from placing Europe in a comparative context to understand why and how to learn from it. Indeed, discussions of the African Union frequently reference Europe.[47]

I have focused here on detailing how specific IR paradigms and models can be used to teach Middle Eastern international relations. By helping to expand students' awareness of *both* Middle East studies and IR theory, such efforts will have a number of longer-term payoffs. These refer to the criticisms leveled at either field of study, and include a breakdown in self-imposed isolation and insulation; exchange of empirical and conceptual knowledge; productive wedding of description and theory; and a focus on specific research questions rather than general assumptions about expected research methods. Such cross-conversations can occur more frequently if scholars are more aware of what and how and how they should teach their students—who will then go on to conduct research and teach others what they have learned. Achieving such outcomes is an important, concrete, manifestation of efforts to close the gap between IR and Middle East studies, and should now be made a more explicit goal.

47   E.g., Thomas Kwasi Tieku, "Explaining the Clash and Accommodation of Interests of Major Actors in the Creation of the African Union," *African Affairs*, Vol. 103, No. 411 (April 2004), pp. 249-267.

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