



**Arab Middle East Governments: Security Concerns, Priorities and Policies\***

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The aim of this paper is to present an examination of the security concerns, priorities and polices in the Arab Middle East governments. The paper will argue that internal security issues are the main security challenges in the Arab Middle East world. The paper consists of several parts including, assumptions of the study, definitions of security, the security menu and approaches to deal with it.

The importance of the study is its point of departure from previous studies that concentrated on the regional aspects of security and ignored the internal security issues. They treated the external threats as the independent variable. This study will argue that external threats are the dependent variable and internal security issues are the independent variable (see Khatchik, 2003). Thus, if this theory is verified we can ask policy makers to change their view of security. More importantly it will affect our approaches of how to deal with security. The problem with security studies in the Arab world is the establishment of the causal relationships.

### **Glimpse on the Arab World:**

More than half of the Arab population is under the age of 20 years old putting the states of the Arab world on timely bombs that will explode on their faces in the short time unless real changes are to be taken today rather than tomorrow. (See Martin, 2003).

H. M. King Abdullah described the challenges of the Arab World eloquently:

“...The challenge of development. Reports show that per capita income has actually shrunk in the Arab countries during the last 20 years. One of every five Arabs lives on less than \$2 a day, and in the labor force, one in seven is unemployed. Youth, who are more than sixty percent of the population, can be especially vulnerable. When young people lose hope, they can turn to apathy or violence, and either course threatens the drive for reform, and the move towards modernity...“Today, the Middle East is on the frontlines, perhaps it is the frontline, of a global struggle for peace and development. In solving long-term conflicts, in achieving genuine development and reform, in living up to the values of our faith and heritage, in all these ways, the Arab World is engaged in a great enterprise. The results will impact the entire world.” (H.M. King Abdullah II, Munich Conference Feb. 8, 2004). The dilemmas of basic services, jobs and education are to be faced now rather than later. Thus, soft security issues are connected to real hard issues facing the Arab states regarding the changes in the regional balance of power and the lack of do not know how to deal with it is another dilemma. Martin (2003: 6) argued that the real challenges are not hard security issues. “Forget weapons of mass destruction: The biggest challenge to the Arab World is not to be found in the laboratories of evil scientists, but in countless cradles in the homes of Arab families.” Yet, we could describe the situation in the Arab world as tense and never got more tensed than these times. People are more aware of what is happening around them than government might expect or used to expect in the past years. Satellite

TVs is almost in the hands of so many people. So you will find average people on the streets of the Arab world are talking about the resignation of George Tenet, the director of the CIA, and the US scandals in the Iraqi prisons, the ineffective Arab League, and the internal corruption to name a few issues. In addition, the Taxi driver in any Arab capital is having his own theories about the Arab politics. It is worth noting that people are not afraid any more to talk too loud about it. It is considered a major development in the Arab world suggesting the eroding power of the military states in the Arab world.

In addition, it seems that when you ask them why they are not afraid any more. They will tell you: we have no thing to lose. If governments take us to prisons, we will find food and shelter and more importantly, we do not have to struggle in order to feed our families who barely find some thing to eat. This is suggesting another important security development that is the governments eroding power to feed their own people (See for Human security: Paris, 2001).

Regional developments are squeezing the states of the Arab world much more under the new American hegemony and left them with limited options, especially if you take the regime survival theory seriously, as an explanatory theory for the behaviors of the Arab states regarding dealing with internal and external security issues.

Moreover, the paper would argue that these times in the Arab Middle East are really interesting and challenging. Thus, the "22 catch" of the Arab world is a very complex dilemma. Their views of security as well as definition of security concepts vary. Thus, their approaches to internal-regional security is so limited or left on the hands of the U.S., which they do not trust at least due to its pushy approach, and lack of vision and misunderstanding of the security map in the Arab world. (See Talhmai, 2004).

### **Assumptions:**

This paper will base its investigation on the following assumptions:

- Regime survival is the dependent and the independent variable of security in the Arab Middle East world.
- Hard security issues based on the realist school of international relations may be not the major security issues in the Arab world. Adaptability to the new internal and regional as well as international factors is the new threat. Maintaining sovereignty and defending their borders are not the main issues. The Development security is the current and challenging security issue. (See: Paris, 2001, Griffith, 2002, Laitinen, 2002)

A state of confusion is surrounding the Arab states due to the followings:

- No real achievements are found after many years of planning. Incrementalism is the appropriate description of their policies to maintain internal stability.
- A Legitimacy crisis. Lack of elected governments in the Arab world and due process has put the Arab states under the need to broaden their political support. Some initiatives have been taken by several Arab states in the Arab world but they are still on the make up phase.
- A crisis of effectiveness. Arab governments have a problem of feeding their own populations, which led some people to question the need for their governments if they cannot offer food and individual security. Many also questioned the national income and equity issues in the Arab world. However, it is important to note that legitimacy and effectiveness are

intertwined. Empirical research shows that decline in both pave the way to state failure (See Muller, 1991, Dorff, 2003)

- The out side messages and interventions in the region cannot be separated from what is actually happing inside the Arab states. The Arab Israeli conflict and the Iraqi issue added to the insecurity menu of the Arab world. It effects their perception and approaches of how to deal with them.
- The Arab states lacks the know how to change, especially if change means they will stay in power. Nonetheless, opposition groups in the Arab world lack the vision and power to handle power and maintain security if some regimes collapsed. Because the central governments enjoy all powers, and deprived the opposition from real power. An exception may be noted to the role of the public in its scattered demonstrations, which can be described as moody and reactionary to regional developments.
- The gap between governments and people is increasingly expanding over the past years. The governments are most responsible for the current situation due to the decline on its services.
- No public expectations from the governments by their people, or put on other words, lost of hope of any positive changes are alarming the ruling powers in the Arab world. The Arab people do not want any thing from their governments. No need for the state is a new trend in the security map of the Arab world.
- A declining role by the states due to the wave of privatization in the Arab world, which have left the people bankrupt and have decreased the influence of the governments. It is important to note that privatization in the Arab world means

selling the public companies to the leading elite in the governments and it is not an economic progress by western capitalist standards.

- The dilemma of too much power is becoming a source of anxiety to some of the leaders in the Arab states. Most leaders in the Arab world stay in power in average of 20 years (See Fattah, 2000). Many argue that this is an important achievement for the current regimes, while many thinkers are starting to think this is not certainly the case. Things are starting to cause danger to the current regimes. Because giving some of their power to the people might mean a new trend of decline in their power and the need and demand for more power shares by the people, which is not in the best interest of the regimes, at least from their perspective. According to some critics of relative deprivation theory, people rebel not when they were deprived of power but when they start tasting this power and they do not want to lose it again. (See Hayajneh, 1999)
- Government behaviors, over the years, have set the agenda of security concerns to the Arab world. They have not done much regarding development. Most resources were spent on armament on the name of liberation and all development plans were put on the back burner. However, after more than five decades, no liberation has been achieved and worst, more occupation of Arab lands. The internal development was left untouched. In sum, now it is the time to open the Pandora's Box. You have to deal with it. Some may argue that what the Arab states are doing is to deal as much as they can in opening the Pandora's Box, because they know what is inside it. They have filled it over the years of doing the short-term necessities

rather the long term planning. Thus, their main concerns are that box is becoming too big and more importantly, it is not taking any more stuff.

### **Definition of Security:**

**Government security:** security means maintaining the regimes and taking all the necessary measures to ensure this major and continuous objective. Measures can include the use of force, economic incentives (welfare state) and creating broadened dictatorships. Thus, reform in the Arab world is seen as reform by the regimes and for the regimes rather than an open ended one.

**U.S. definition of security:** the US has created its own security concept that must be adopted by the Arab governments. It can be defined based on US actions, taking all the necessary measures to protect the vital interests of the US. In its top priorities is to fight terrorism and the conditions that may lead Arab people to attack American interests. Thus, the Arab states have done and started to do according to US demands. But the problem with this approach that any measure related to the US has created more criticism by the Arab public due to many well know reasons including people criticism to US policies in the region. Moreover, US sanctions will follow if US measures are not implemented by the Arab regimes. This catch is a dilemma effecting approaches of security in the Arab world and has left regime with almost no or, to say, limited options, especially if they want to maintain internal power distributions to secure regime survival.

### **The Security Agenda and the Security Map:**

It can be argued that the most important security concern for most governments in the Middle East is regime survival. Thus, the theory of regime survival is an explanatory theory for

deciding how to approach and how to deal with security issues (soft and hard). Most activities and behaviors internally and externally can be attributed to how it enhances or hinders regime survival.

The argument by many regional specialists that the security agenda of terrorism, Israeli occupation of Palestine and American occupation of Iraq are not actually the major security agenda for Middle Eastern Arab states. It is the State of the Arab world that affirms the security map, which is the independent variable that can explain very well these symptoms.

### **The Security Menu in the Arab World:**

#### **The Concerns and Objectives of Middle Eastern States:**

According to many scholars security concerns can be put on a long list because not much has been done to establish some thing right and good for the people. It is good if it serves the interests of the few namely the ruling elites. Nonetheless, a list is due now to uncover what is in the Pandora's Box in most Arab states:

#### **Internal Issues:**

- Political reform: It includes political recruitment in high posts, play divide and rule, military recruitment based on the tribalism, and democracy by the non-demarcates
- Clashes between the NGOs and the established governments over many internal issues.
- Clashes between Shiite and Sunnis.



- Abnormal political participation including "terrorism".<sup>1</sup> Many point to external powers for explaining this interesting phenomenon.
- The state of development: The accuracy of the information is under question. However, what is more troubling is that the same information is repeated every year with many errors and supplied by the governments.

In summary, internal security threats deal with people needs rather with sovereignty or borders etc. We can call it development security. Thus, it can be argued that internal issues are the real security challenges and it will influence regional issues and approaches to deal with them.

### **Regional Issues:**

Many point to Iran, Israel and US military presence as sources of insecurity for the Arab states. It noteworthy, that Arab states have lost most many of their regional wars in the past decades and the recent changes in the international system and the presence of the US forces have left them with no need on the regional balance of power.

Iran is considered to be as a major threat to the Arab gulf states to quote the Kuwaiti foreign Minister. Saudi Arabia has a problem of no military power to balance Iran and its power is not harmonious with its economic power, geographic power and its wanted role. The other Arab Gulf states have major economic achievements but they cannot protect it? Many have made the mistake especially in the Gulf region of relying so much on the US to do the security jobs for them. Jordan is threatened every day with the Israeli option of transferring the Palestinians to Jordan. The stateless Palestinians are a major threat to Jordan's security. Egypt enjoys a powerful

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<sup>1</sup> Many would argue that terrorism occurred only in Saudi Arabia, and it has been happening in the past eight years (1995-2004). No incident what so ever of terrorists attacks has happened on other Arab states. Many asked why Saudi Arabia is the only Arab oil country which has terrorist attacks and why not others. Some other Arab countries were threatened by terrorist attacks. Iraq is an exception to the rule because it has no state.

role in the Arab world due to its historic role and to its size. But the US is trying to minimize Egypt's role in the region. Syria and Lebanon are under US pressure to fight terrorism and to give up WMD (Syria). All Arab states, with the exception of few like Jordan, are under the US pressure to change their course of governing styles. In sum, one common dominator among all regional threats is the US role in the security agenda in the Arab world.

In summary, the regional threats are related to US intervention in the regional affairs but the state of the Arab world is most responsible.

### **Approaches to Security:**

If we can agree that security concerns are internal and that regional developments are symptoms meaning they are the results and not the causes of the security menu in the Arab world, we can offer the following approaches on how to deal with them.

- **Call the US:** it is the most and widely used approach in order to deal with regional security issues. (Henderson, 2003) According to system and structural theories of international relations no thing can be done to deal with the security issues with out the role of the US due to the distribution of power in the world. (See Hayajneh, 2004) Many facts support this theory including: The Arab Israeli conflict starting from the role of the US on the 1956 crisis and ending up with the Road map and all between. Most security related behaviors by the Arab states rely heavily on the US Call. However, this approach has been to used due to the lack of power of the Arab states or to the lack to use their power because it is connected to the regime survival theory which the US and Israel understand very well.

- **US Marshall plan for the whole region.** This is an approach that needs real US commitments to the long-term future of the region. However, only security methods of a plan are harmful to the Arab world. US experience shows only security interventions for US interests (see Pei, 2003, Dobbins, 2003). It shows also the failure of the Arab governments to find an Arab solution to the security problems. However, some time is needed to reshape Arab attitudes toward the US and after the success of Iraq (Powell, 2004). Nonetheless, Many Arab states face the dilemma of not wanting US military presence on their soil and not wanting Iran hegemony in the region and do not want a Shiite government in Iraq. They must realize what they want. Arab states have to find their own solution to their problems. No imported approaches are the order of security menu of the Arab world.
- **No approach:** the Arab states namely the masses should declare that they have no feelings, want to do no thing, everything is all right, no problem with the economy, and democracy and human rights are protected. Then the world may start to stop all its activities in the region and the Arab governments may start to change. Why? Because all the reports, the complaints and conferences about the challenges and the problems of the Arab world over the past fifty years, did not change any thing. It can be argued that if they know the problems and what needed to be done, why not they do it? Take the income distribution for instance, if 90% of the national income goes to the few and 10 percent go the rest of the people in its best cases in the Arab world, then the question is not what to do about it but how to do it, and start doing it. I am sure of one problem like the previous one if it is solved, we will have a change in many things in the Arab world. Thus, the solution to real security

problems in the Arab world begins with dealing with internal problems rather than from the TV headline news issues in the Middle East including the Arab -Israel conflict and the situation on Iraq. It is important to reiterate that those problems are the results and not the causes of security issues in the Arab world.

### **Looking Inward:**

The discussion of military distributions on the region and WMD and the rest of the menu are results rather than causes of the security concerns, which will determine approaches of how to deal with them. Looking inward and dealing with the real people problems will enhance the states capabilities and effectiveness of how to deal with the regional security problems. You will not find the US over your shoulders telling you what to do or Israel ignoring the feelings of 300 million Arabs in the region, because it knows under the current conditions no thing will be done. Turkey is a model. The statement by the foreign Minster of Turkey was stronger than all official Arab statements regarding the doing of the Sharon's government on the Palestinian territories. Turkey refusal to allow the US to use its land as jumping point to attack Iraq by democracy is a good model! Arab states have supported US invasion of Iraq, which has created this regional security conditions. The U.S. with their help created it and they have to deal with it.

### **Conclusion:**

In sum, we know now what to be done, but we do not do it? The first approach must be an American commitment to states and governments in the Arab world to ease their tensions. Governments are really tensed and do not know what to do and what to predict regarding US behavior in the forthcoming days.

The Arab states are relying so much on the source for their legitimacy by fighting terrorism with the US. Thus, their support is coming from the US. However, this legitimacy cannot last for a long time if US interests change in the coming years and more importantly this type of legitimacy will have negative implications on the public attitudes.

The security approach of governments in dealing with the opposition groups has to change. More violence will breed more violence. Thus, governments must find a new approach of including the opposition within the system. However, the governments will face a dilemma of the opposition groups' refusal to be part of the system especially if it serves non-national agenda like helping the US. However, the governments cannot leave them alone doing what they want to do.

The ideal approach is to deal the security problems by investing on the planning to work on the internal fronts especially with economic and political developments. Maybe the rest of the problems will be indirectly solved. This might seem an idealist approach in the short term. But we have to review previous approaches and we have to be honest with ourselves. They did not work and they must be changed.

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