Alliances and Regionalism in the Middle East

LOUISE FAWCETT

Overview

This chapter considers the theory and practice of regional cooperation and the Middle East and how the Middle East experience fits into comparative studies of regionalism. International relations approaches to alliance making and other forms of regional cooperation in the Middle East have been influenced by the politics of power, or, in IR language, realist approaches. Interstate cooperation has been frail and transient; alliance-making, reflective of internal and external power balances; and regionalism, the policies of regional institutions, underdeveloped, particularly in contrast with other areas. In reviewing the experience of the Middle East in light of the international relations literature, this chapter suggests that it is more complex and diverse, both analytically and empirically, than commonly assumed. The Middle East is not a region without regionalism. There have been many forces making for cooperation, particularly in the Arab world, based upon common identity, interests and beliefs; multiple alliances that intersect the Arab and non-Arab world, and the potential for cooperation in both broader and narrower regional settings like the Gulf. However, regime insecurity, local rivalry, instability, and external influence inhibit attempts to create regional community. Global as well as regional trends and influences push the Middle East into new arenas of cooperation, but there is a need to map these onto local realities. Events since the Arab Spring have seen opportunities and challenges for Arab regional institutions. There are also new trends in studies of regionalism, which, by breaking away from Eurocentric models, allow us to rethink the role of regions from new perspectives.

Introduction

How and why states cooperate, form alliances and institutions, and how such institutions contribute to regional and global order are issues that naturally exercise scholars of international relations. They are vital to the Middle East region—one which has been identified as a continuing source of insecurity and as posing a challenge to not only regional but also global order. Theories have been designed and refined to answer these questions, and applied to different regions. This intellectual effort is important in terms of explaining and predicting state behaviour, particularly in highlighting the ways in which states can cooperate for pacific and mutually productive purposes, promoting regional and international community. Building regional peace and security is a stepping stone to the construction of a more secure global order. As such, it has been singled out as a priority since the end of the Cold War, notably in United Nations reports such as *Agenda for Peace* (Boutros-Ghali 1992) and later in *The Responsibility to Protect* (R2P), which stated: 'Those states which can call upon strong regional alliances, internal peace and a strong and independent civil society seem best placed to benefit from globalization' (ICISS 2001: 7). The Middle East is a particularly important arena for discussion because of the high levels of insecurity that have prevailed; a fact highlighted in the UN-commissioned AHDR reports. Despite multiple attempts to promote regional order by Middle Eastern states, external powers, and international organizations the region remains deeply insecure and its security concerns poorly understood, as exemplified by the effects of the Arab Spring (Monier 2015).

Like IR scholars, scholars of the Middle East are also concerned with these themes, but their focus is local and empirical, rather than global and theoretical. Alliances, cooperation, and regional order are important because they guide and frame the debates over domestic politics and society, about peoples and governments. In this way, the state and society, the region and the world, are intertwined.

The **Introduction** and **Chapter 1** have noted some of the challenges involved in combining the diverse strands of Middle East studies and international relations scholarship; this chapter addresses the problem in terms of the processes of alliance and region-building. Although alliances, 'formal or informal arrangements for promoting security cooperation' (Walt 1987) are often treated separately in international relations literature, they are closely related to regional regimes and institutions—certainly, any discussion of regional order in the Middle East cannot avoid considering the intersections between alliances and institutions. In doing so, it seeks to explain why, in contrast to other parts of the world, interstate cooperation in the Middle East appears fragile and institutional development limited. The chapter looks first at some problems of relevant theory and its application to the Middle East; second, at the definitional issues that arise when speaking of 'regions' and 'regionalism'; third, at the historical record of alliance-making and cooperation across the region; and finally, it offers a contemporary balance sheet, including a review of events since the Arab uprisings, which have contributed both to shifts in alliances and the regional power balance while, arguably, afforded new importance to regional institutions.

A study of regionalism—the theory and practice of regional cooperation—and its potential is central to the study of the international politics of the Middle East, not only because of wider global trends in regionalism making it an increasingly important feature of international politics (Farrell et al. 2005), but also because of the high levels of regional tension

and the nature of its security dilemma, which make the case for regional cooperation particularly pressing. As argued here, insecurity operates at three interconnected levels: the domestic, regional, and international—areas that regional institutions have the potential to address. Yet so far this insecurity has been only partially mitigated by the effects of cooperation between states. The short-term impact of the Arab uprisings saw attempts to strengthen regional institutions, evident in collective action and proposed reforms to the GCC and LAS, but given continuing regional instability, their long-term prospects remains uncertain (Rishmawi 2013; Al Tamamy 2015).

International relations theory and the case of the Middle East

Mainstream international relations theories depict alliance, or bloc building as self-interested, rational behaviour by states to enhance their security and power. When states cooperate, it is not because they seek to promote any greater regional or global good, but because their interests are ultimately served by so doing. Regional groups and regimes are seen as power and security maximizers. Strong states are often identified as key agents in this process, although weaker states also initiate cooperation to consolidate their strength or to balance opposing power (the GCC is a good example). States that lack security and influence on the international stage might be expected to construct alliances or regimes to bolster their power, or to look to stronger states for help in their construction and maintenance (Krasner 1985).

The most important of these theories, realism and neorealism, ascribe to states unitary properties, but while the former acknowledges certain human attributes or 'social texture' (Ruggie 1998: 7), the latter focuses narrowly on the structure and distribution of power in the international system (Waltz 1979). In giving prominence to security concerns and the state of anarchy in international relations, such theories have functioned well as all-purpose explanations of many patterns of state behaviour—relations between European states until the Second World War, for example, or the US and USSR during the Cold War (Mearsheimer 2001). In the Middle East, where cooperation between peoples across borders was far denser and which, until the Second World War, was still a state system in the making, they seem less appropriate. Nonetheless, realists view international cooperation as contingent upon the restless drive of states for security, evident in the alliance-making patterns of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and in the short life of the modern Middle East: whether in the arrangements linking Arab and non-Arab states—the League of Arab States (LAS), the Baghdad Pact, or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—or the different bilateral alliances, including those of the United States with Israel and Iran (before 1979), the USSR with Egypt and Syria during the Cold War or Iran and Syria since Iran's revolution. In this account, states are engaged in securing or consolidating their own positions and power, or balancing against the power and threats of others (Walt 1987). Indeed, every major regional alignment—from the positions adopted in the Cold War and the Arab–Israeli conflict, to the current post-Arab Spring divisions—has been thus explained.

Dominant states or regional powers—sometimes referred to as 'hegemons' for their willingness to lead and provide public goods—are often facilitators of such projects, for they possess the requisite power to shape outcomes in the international system (Nabers 2010).

Yet while the history of Europe, the Americas, and parts of Asia offer examples of the uses of hegemonic power, and the ability of strong states to positively exercise their influence in the regional and international system, this pattern is less evident in the modern Middle East (Lustick 1997; Fuertig 2014; Fawcett 2015a), although events since the Iraq War and the Arab Spring have seen the emergence of more powerful regional players such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. States historically have held such aspirations: Egypt has been seen as the natural leader of the Arab world and has at times displayed the characteristics of hegemony, particularly under the charismatic presidency of Nasser, and also in the immediate aftermath of the Arab uprisings, but this position has not been sustained. Saudi Arabia has displayed similar qualities in terms of claims to religious legitimacy or the power conferred by oil wealth; both Iraq and Syria have made different bids for regional dominance, using military and nationalist tools. However, if power is about the ability to influence outcomes and to demonstrate institutional leadership, it is clear that most Middle Eastern states have so far failed to acquire it (Nye 2003: 67).

One outlier is Israel, an obvious regional great power (at least in military terms), buttressed by US support, yet one that has not, so far, contributed to a viable and successful regional order, for reasons that relate to its regional isolation, external dependence, and domestic structure alike. Most Arab states are reluctant openly to ally or cooperate with Israel. Another is Iran, a powerful regional player, whose position was strengthened after the 2003 Iraq War following the weakening of Sunni-dominated Iraq. Like Israel, however, Iran's domestic structure and international posture—notwithstanding its 'Southern' appeal as an anti-Western state—have not been easy to reconcile with a wider regional or international constituency. Iran's relatively strengthened position since the Arab uprisings, both as a comparatively stable regional state and following a successful nuclear agreement with the P-5, could see it playing a more important regional role (Fawcett 2015b).

Looking to regional great powers and power-balancing to explain and predict the behaviour of Middle Eastern states in war and peace has thus provided only a partial picture. Middle Eastern states overall have been poor balancers and weak hegemons. This may be explained by a number of factors including persistent rivalries; the absence of obvious and durable hierarchies between states; the presence of powerful identities that overlap and even conflict with the existing state system, and the often contrary influence of external influences. Outside powers have attempted to impose their security agendas on the Middle East, whether France and Britain before the Second World War, the US and USSR during the Cold War, and the US since, all with mixed results. The Middle Eastern system may be deeply 'penetrated', but it has also proved resistant to external pressures for change (Brown 1984: 3). System-level analysis alone is therefore inadequate, because the behaviour of the Middle East also demonstrates the power of ideas—both shared and conflicting identities—and their constant interaction with regimes and peoples. The international relations of the Middle East are shaped, and reshaped, by criss-crossing local, regional, international, and transnational pressures.

The limits of realism in analysing the behaviour of regional states are only partly resolved, however, by a consideration of competing approaches. Admittedly, these are diverse and cannot be done full justice here. Within the tradition of liberal theories, liberal institutionalists—like realists—employ rationalist arguments to explain cooperative behaviour. Such arguments depart from traditional liberal or idealist claims regarding growing

interdependence, declining state salience, the emergence of supranational government, cooperative norms or the possibilities of a democratic peace, focusing instead on the possibilities and rewards of cooperation amid anarchy, through the positive role of regimes and institutions (Keohane 1984). Institutions, critically, allow states to overcome problems of collective action and enforcement, incomplete information, high transaction costs, and other barriers to efficiency and welfare (Barnett and Finnemore 1999).

Applying the latter type of theory to the Middle East has proved problematic. International regimes and institutions in the Middle East have been flimsy: states agree on certain principles and norms to govern behaviour, but cannot trust others to keep or enforce them; hence the rate of defection is high and the (relative) security of bilateralism, or 'minilateralism', often preferred. Bilateral alliances have proved robust and easier to maintain than regional cooperation. Formal institutions are still undeveloped and decision-making processes cumbersome. The weakness of institutions is related to the relatively weak interdependencies between states, at least of the tangible economic and political kind that would make states prone to cooperate, and here both regime type and the nature of the regional economy—notably, low levels of interregional trade—are important. Functional cooperation, as identified at the core of Europe, increasingly has taken place between Arab—particularly Gulf—states, but still remains limited in comparison with other regions. Oil policies, despite evidence of common strategy and design within the Arab states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)—notably, in the embargo of 1973—demonstrates the limits of economic cooperation, while diversity of regime type and interests, together with sustained external influence, has in turn constrained political cooperation. Taken together, both liberal theories of interdependence, and new institutionalism, have not greatly helped in explaining regional cooperation, though the GCC may prove to be the exception given the expansion of functional cooperation. This may still hold true for many regions outside Europe or the North Atlantic area, but the Middle East remains a relative outlier in comparative terms. In this respect also, the use of the European Union as a model for regional cooperation in the Middle East is arguably limited. Indeed, attempts to export the European model have often posed obstacles to cooperation (Telo et al. 2015).

A partial exception to the above is historical institutionalism (HI), which invites us to 'go back and look': to scrutinize the conditions under which institutions are founded, and how they change over time (Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 2, 27). This looking back is important. As Pierson writes, 'achieving greater clarity about how history imparts its effects on the present will open up real possibilities for a more constructive intellectual dialogue' (Pierson 2004: 7–8).

Other theoretical arguments explaining the international system through a core–periphery perspective in describing post-imperial orders help in explaining the position the Middle East (Hinnebusch 2003: 14–53) and a range of developing countries in the international system. They provide clues as to alliance-making and institutional patterns by showing how states' choices are limited: they are coerced to join groups sponsored by stronger powers or may attempt to balance against them. Because they also focus on the unequal distribution of power and resources—economic, political, and social—they suffer from some of the weaknesses of realism in their failure to examine the diverse capabilities of states. Colonialism, for example, is very important in understanding the origins and persistence of external influence in the region, even after formal colonialism ended, but states both experienced and

responded to the colonial legacy in different ways (Hinnebusch and Cummings 2011). But not all regional states can simply be classed as belonging to the periphery. In some cases, like Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Turkey, these once peripheral states are becoming part of the core. They are joining a group of 'rising powers', which are challenging and reshaping the contours of power in the international system (Nolte 2010). As such they are likely to play increasingly important roles in any potential regional organization.

Other approaches that critique traditional understandings of the international system add value in forcing us to rethink the appropriateness of existing paradigms (Bilgin 2010). This rethinking is particularly important when it comes to making judgements about parts of the 'non Western' world. Constructivism, with its attention to shared reality, historical experience and norms as opposed to the purely material attributes of states, appears useful in a region where conflicting identities.predominate (Barnett 1996). States and peoples have been drawn to Arab and Islamic causes that may contradict narrow national interests. Still, a focus on identity cannot be taken too far, as Sami Zubaida (1989) has demonstrated for the case of Islam in the Middle East. Rejecting 'essentialist' or 'orientalist' theses that demand a different starting point for a study of Middle Eastern politics, he shows how Islam in its modern form has grown and developed alongside the state system. Despite the emergence of radical groups that contest state boundaries, this is true today when multiple versions of Islam compete in the political marketplace and sectarian interests are used instrumentally by states to enhance their power (see Chapter 11). Shared identity matters, but diversity is a feature in Arab and Islamic contexts, leaving states as the supreme organizational players (Esposito 1995: 202). Despite predictions of the demise of the regional states system amid a plethora of challenges from non-state actors, this is unlikely to change.

Of these theories, realist and structural approaches, historical institutionalism and elements of constructivism, are useful, justifying an approach to the Middle East that is analytically eclectic (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). The region has a long history of external interference and dependence explaining the attractiveness of realism and structuralism, but the short lives and artificial nature of many states, together with the common, often transnational, bonds of history, language, and religion—among the Arab states at least—highlight aspects of constructivism. Domestic-level explanations, which question the state system as the determinant of regional behaviour, also have a role to play in explaining the state of regional cooperation. Regime security and a range of considerations including state–society relations, as well as regional and systemic constraints, are crucial to understanding how they will position themselves in the international arena. Such factors help to explain the expansion of the GCC both before and after the Arab Spring.

Understanding the behaviour of Middle Eastern states in the international system therefore demands a flexible and inclusive theoretical framework—one that incorporates the politics of power and influence, but also the role of diverging ideas, norms, and domestic considerations. It also requires us to study the region carefully, emphasizing the point that we need good area studies to understand the region's international relations. No single theory or level of analysis offers a way of exploring satisfactorily the shifting dynamic of interregional politics, or the international politics of the region, or of explaining why high levels of cooperation sometimes coexist alongside high levels of competition and conflict. One reason for this lies in the relationship between state and identity in the Middle East (see Chapter 7), which explains the relative weakness and insecurity of states. State weakness, in

turn, accounts for the low levels of institutionalism. Another reason is the high and continuing level of external interference.

This reiterates the difficulties that the Middle East presents for international relations scholars. The region defies attempts at generalization and resists explanations derived from Western experience. The unanticipated events of the Arab Spring, which refute popular arguments of exceptionalism, are a case in point. There is validity in the critique that theories of international relations have failed to take the developing world seriously and therefore cannot be relied upon to provide a guide to understanding its past or present (Ayoob 1995; Korany 1999a). This problem extends to the very language and terms used in the study of regionalism—often drawing directly on Europe's different history and experience of integration—questioning the appropriateness of IR theory in non-Western contexts.

Regions, regionalism, and understanding cooperation

Speaking of 'regionalism' and its properties invites a discussion of which regional unit or level of cooperation is optimal. The **Introduction** and **Chapter 1** noted the wide definition of the region now known as the Middle East—but, in talking about regional cooperation, is the 'Middle East' best understood as a single coherent unit, or as a set of distinct, if related, parts? If subdivision is necessary, which regional units are most useful? These are key questions, not only for the Middle East, but also for regions generally, as the process and practice of regionalism takes on greater significance in the international system.

The term 'region' has been analysed and explained in many different ways: from a geographical reality—a continent, a cluster of states or territories sharing a common space on the globe—to a more imagined community held together by common experience, identity, and custom. A common view describes a region as a group of states linked together by a geographical relationship and a degree of mutual interdependence (Nye 1968: vii). Alternative approaches focus on regional patterns or 'complexes' of security and conflict (Buzan and Waever 2003). Regions, however, can also be perceived differently by insiders and outsiders and this is part of the problem when thinking of the Middle East, as critical scholars have noted (Bilgin 2004).

If we think of the Middle East as a region, we can see how elements of such definitions are useful: geography, history, and a range of common security concerns do indeed 'unite' the region, at least in one sense. Certainly, any durable peace settlement of the Palestine–Israel or more recently the Iraqi and Syrian crises will necessitate broad regional engagement. But security and other interdependences do not imply cooperation. There are deep divisions reflected in the absence of 'pan-regional' (as opposed to pan-Arab or pan-Islamic) institutions, despite recent efforts by both Europe and the US to promote them in 'Greater Middle East' and 'Mediterranean' initiatives. Indeed part of the problem is that these initiatives, like definitions of the region, have come from the outside rather than the inside. Cooperation, when it occurs, particularly when prompted by outside actors, is often fragmentary and transient. Although some robust alliances have been constructed, the overall impression is one of a conflictual terrain where deep, institutionalized cooperation has been slow to develop.

If, at one level, the idea of the broader Middle East as a region or as a system has been a useful analytical and policymaking tool (Gause 1999; Hinnebusch 2002), at another it may be too general and artificial. Subdivision is needed to highlight patterns of affinity,

activity, and cooperation. The Arab states, for example, once formed an obvious system (Sela 1998)—a tightly knit community revealing dense patterns of conflict and cooperation. For Paul Noble, 'the Arab world is arguably the only meaningful international political system among the various continental or macro-regional grouping of states in the Third World' (Noble 1991: 72–3). This claim, however, makes puzzling its relative lack of durable institutional cohesion, the LAS notwithstanding. It also looks weaker today, as the Arab world appears more divided after the fall-out of the Arab Spring and rise of inter-Arab sectarianism. Other patterns and insights emerge when we consider subregional domains, in which groups of states—Arab and non-Arab—come together for different purposes in a variety of settings. Some of these smaller settings—the Gulf, the Northern Tier, and the Mahgreb (North African) regions are examples—provide useful points of departure in studies of cooperation. One difficulty in defining regions—a difficulty that is especially pertinent to the Middle East—is that such definitions have often been provided by outsiders. This was true of the Northern Tier concept, which gave rise to the failed Baghdad Pact, and, more recently, the different European and US efforts to promote regional cooperation (see Chapter 17). If there is not a good match between outsider and insider definitions of a region and its purposes, it is unlikely that regions will yield successful regionalisms.

Defining regions and their membership is important when we turn to a discussion of regional institutions. Different configurations have yielded different regionalisms. There is no single or ideal model. Europe is often cited as one, but in reality there are many different European experiences, and not all are transferable elsewhere. In discussing regionalism and the related processes of regionalization, it is therefore important not merely to borrow frameworks from European-style institutions and structures, but also to consider the wider experiences of global regionalisms and the lessons that they offer.

Regionalism is a policy-driven process in which states (and other actors) pursue common goals and policies in any given region. At its softer end, it may involve little more than the promotion of regional awareness or consensus—moves towards the creation of a regional 'society of states' (Bull 1977; Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelanez 2009). At its harder end, it is represented by more complex and formalized arrangements and organization. Although studies of regionalism have typically focused on states, recent scholarship highlights the roles played by non-state actors: forces operating above and below the level of the state—whether transnational, non-governmental, private-sector, or civil-society—which also play important roles in promoting dialogue and cooperation. In formal arrangements—certainly in the case of the Middle East—the state continues to play the predominant role and the bulk of the literature on regionalism focuses on the more measurable institutional forms of interstate cooperation.

'Regionalization' is a related term that refers broadly to processes (as opposed to policies) encompassing an increase in regionally based interaction and activity. Like globalization, although narrower in scope, it may arise as the result of spontaneous forces and can precede or flow from institutional arrangements. Concentrations of economic, social, or security activity may be the precursor to the emergence of formal organization. The regionalization of security, identified as a feature of the post-Cold-War environment, describes the way in which regional states and other actors have engaged with local security dilemmas by becoming providers of security replacing or complementing the role of great powers or the United Nations (Pugh and Sidhu 2003).

These twin processes of regionalism and regionalization have received much attention since the end of the Cold War. A new wave of regionalism has been identified, with important consequences for regional order (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995). Regionalization has been identified as an important process both in relation to regionalism, but also globalization and international order. This discussion is relevant to the Middle East not because the region is replete with examples of successful action, but rather to highlight the hitherto low levels of regionalism (Aarts 1999; Harders and Legrenzi 2008; Zank 2009). Despite areas of actual or potential regional cohesion and integration—whether in labour markets, migration, resource use, private-sector networks, or the disbursement of aid and development funds—their still-limited nature or relative absence in other key spheres is notable (Cammett, Diwan, Richards, and Waterbury 2015). Where the processes of regionalization have long existed, they have been slow to generate common strategies or agreements and are overridden by external initiatives.

The regionalization of conflict, for example, is real enough, but has failed to produce unified responses. In the important area of non-UN peace support operations for example, Middle Eastern actors hardly feature (Centre on International Cooperation 2010). In a world where regional agencies have increasingly come to play a role in determining the parameters of peacekeeping and other activity within their respective areas, or where there are real signs of regionalization—as cases in Europe, the Americas, South-East Asia, and Africa demonstrate—giving rise to new elements of economic and security community, the Middle East remains on the periphery. This was true at least until the Arab Spring, which arguably represented a new dawn for regional organizations, as seen in their engagement with international institutions like the UN and NATO, and their embarking on independent initiatives.

Middle East regionalism: a review

This section reviews the history and experience of Middle Eastern cooperation and regionalism from a comparative and historical perspective, looking at the Cold War and post-Cold-War periods respectively. As such it endorses the importance of an historical institutionalism perspective. This temporal division may be somewhat artificial from the Middle Eastern viewpoint. There, unlike some other regions, the end of the Cold War had limited effects in terms of region-building and conflict management, but from an international relations perspective, the Cold War and post-Cold War provide rather different frameworks in which to analyse the experience of alliances and cooperation (Laidi 1994).

A long view

Viewed from a historical and comparative perspective, Middle Eastern regionalism has quite a respectable pedigree. During the Ottoman period, a regional order—an informal regime by all accounts—was clearly recognizable. The sense of community and belonging, born of Islamic authority and custom, was strong. Cohesion was assisted by a degree of pluralism in the sense of religious and minority toleration. The collapse of the Empire, the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate, and the parallel emergence of a new state system had deleterious effects, although the notion of Islamic community persisted alongside the more recently discovered notion of Arabism.

In the period between the two World Wars, as the new states moved towards independence, the absence of the formal institutions of cooperation was unremarkable. States were concerned with the building of domestic structures, and no other regions in the world outside the Americas and Europe had well-developed institutions. Still, Middle Eastern states became acclimatized to the new culture of international organization through membership of the League of Nations. Persia (later Iran), although not an original member, was invited to join the League in 1919; by 1935, Iraq and Turkey (and Afghanistan) were members, and by 1938 Egypt (Zimmern 1945: 526–7).

Meanwhile, regionalism, in theory and practice, met with mixed responses from the founders of the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN), for whom universalism lay at the base of a successful international order. In the case of the UN, however, the demands of American, Arab, and Commonwealth states influenced the final wording of the Charter, highlighting—in Chapter VIII—the role and responsibility of regional agency (Claude 1968: 5–6). And membership of the UN and its related institutions—most Middle Eastern states, with the exception of the Gulf and North Africa, joined in 1945 (Roberts and Kingsbury 1993: 530–6)—became an important vehicle for representation and legitimacy.

As regards the LAS, it was the 'UN's historical twin'—founded in 1945 and part of a growing family of international organizations (Moussa 2012: 107). If Arab 'unity' was the theme that underpinned discussions over its shape and form, the organization was built around statist principles, its charter emphasizing respect for independence and sovereignty. State sovereignty and pan-Arabism were incongruous partners, but fear of hegemony and the competing agendas of different regimes prevented any deeper union: 'the loose form of association provided for in the Pact represented the most that Arabs could agree on in the circumstances' (Gomaa 1977: 26).

The Arabs, however, were not alone in achieving limited interstate cooperation. Unity and solidarity were also the goals of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), but the scope of its activities was likewise modest. Sovereignty was a prize to be nurtured, not one to be sacrificed on the altar of a 'pan-' movement, or one extolling the virtues of integration. This was particularly the case among states whose regimes were insecure. Other agencies and alliances emerging in this period had a heavily statist, and often specifically Cold War, agenda. Selective security pacts such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Warsaw, Rio, and Baghdad Pacts, and the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) developed as products of the East–West divide, designed in part to serve the interests of the superpowers. Outside NATO and the Warsaw Pact (until the end of the Cold War), superpower dominance and the absence of a regional rationale limited their acceptability and influence. The Baghdad Pact—later the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)—was seen as a Western instrument of Cold-War containment, superseding failed US attempts to build a Middle East Defence Organization. It excited the hostility of non-members, while failing to command the support of its own (see Box 9.1). Its regional justification dissipated after Iraq's exit in 1959. Subsequent US initiatives to construct an effective regional alliance system met with equally mixed results.

The LAS and Cold War alliances were not the only options. The West European experience of integration seemed to offer a different model and became a source of emulation elsewhere. It is true that the early European institutions had a strong realist rationale—that of securing Europe in an anti-Soviet alliance—but they went much further. The early successes

Box 9.1 Regional groups/unity schemes in the Middle East 1945–90

League of Arab States (LAS)	1945–	Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen
Baghdad Pact/Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)	1955–79	(Great Britain) Iran, Iraq (left in 1959), Pakistan, Turkey
United Arab Republic (UAR)	1958–61	Egypt and Syria
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	1971–	Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah, Ras Al-Khaimah, Umm Aal Qaiwain
Federation of Arab Republics	1971–73	Egypt, Libya, Syria
Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)	1971–	LAS states, Iran, Turkey
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	1981–	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE
Economic Conference Organization (ECO)	1985–	Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey (plus Central Asian Republics)
Arab Mahgreb Union (AMU)	1989–	Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia
Arab Cooperation Council (ACC)	1989–90	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, North Yemen
Unification of Yemen	1990	Creation of Republic of Yemen, uniting the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)

of the original six European Community members presented a new regional opportun which, although rooted in the particular experience of Europe, was seen as a starting p for other such experiments. Attempts to create common markets and free trade associati in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas proliferated.

In the Middle East, Arab attempts between 1957 and 1967 to create a common mar were too ambitious. The European example and the consequences of the Suez crisis of 1 encouraged the drive towards economic cooperation and common resource managem leading to the signature in 1964 (through the League's Economic Council), of a treat establish an Arab Common Market, scheduled for 1974. But lack of consensus over c mon tariffs and trade policies meant that the scheme, like similar schemes elsewhere, fa (Owen 1999). The relevance of the European experience to what were mostly poor and secure states with only the rudiments of a regional market, along with the assumption such states would benefit from a customs union or similar, was rightly brought into quest By the late 1960s, the different experiments in regional integration had faltered. Even Europe, their proponents questioned the relevance of regional integration theory.

External penetration, inter-Arab tensions, domestic politics, and the nature of the gional economy help to explain the fitful progress of cooperative efforts at the regional le Despite the potential benefits of functional cooperation, evident in areas such as resou management or regional labour movements which grew significantly in this period

durable achievements resulted. Regimes found that their economic and military interests were better supplied in either ad hoc or bilateral alignments; through oil sales to the developed world, or through the receipt of military assistance and material from one of the superpowers. This did not mean that schemes for greater Arab unity were irrelevant—they still served important rhetorical and even unifying purposes—but failed to provide a framework to overcome the security and development dilemmas that different regimes faced.

The limitations of an institution such as the LAS should, however, be placed in comparative perspective (Salamé 1988a; Pinfari 2009). If the idea of the League as a vehicle for collective security was largely unrealized, this was true of other similar ventures outside Western Europe. In a number of the different conflicts in which the League Council was involved—the Lebanon–United Arab Republic (UAR) conflict of 1958, the Kuwait–Iraq conflict of 1961; the Yemen civil war, 1962–67—the League played a significant negotiating role (Nye 1971: 161–5; Pinfari 2009: 12).

In the case of the Kuwait–Iraq dispute, LAS forces were deployed to thwart possible Iraqi aggression. Further, the League achieved unity of purpose in its stance against Israel—notably, in the Arab boycott of Israeli goods. Like the League of Nations, however, the LAS has been criticized for its failures and judged more for its 'high politics' record in conflict prevention than for its achievements in other areas, of which development support through the Arab Fund is one example (Cammett, Diwan, Richards, and Waterbury 2015).

Other attempts at union and cooperation, with mixed results, included the United Arab Republic (UAR), the Federation of Arab Republics, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and the Economic Conference Organization (ECO). In a different category—and not strictly speaking a Middle Eastern organization—was the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) (Box 9.1). While the UAR and the Federation offered the prospect of greater Arab unity, both were short-lived. The UAR revealed the many tensions inherent in any pan-Arab project (Kerr 1971). Behind the rhetoric of unity and cooperation lay the reality of state and regime interest. While those of Syria and Egypt briefly coincided, the UAR survived; when seen as a vehicle for Egyptian hegemony, it collapsed.

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These twin processes of regionalism and regionalization have received much attention since the end of the Cold War. A new wave of regionalism has been identified, with important consequences for regional order (Fawcett and Hurrell 1995). Regionalization has been identified as an important process both in relation to regionalism, but also globalization and international order. This discussion is relevant to the Middle East not because the region is replete with examples of successful action, but rather to highlight the hitherto low levels of regionalism (Aarts 1999; Harders and Legrenzi 2008; Zank 2009). Despite areas of actual or potential regional cohesion and integration—whether in labour markets, migration, resource use, private-sector networks, or the disbursement of aid and development funds—their still-limited nature or relative absence in other key spheres is notable (Cammett, Diwan, Richards, and Waterbury 2015). Where the processes of regionalization have long existed, they have been slow to generate common strategies or agreements and are overridden by external initiatives.

The regionalization of conflict, for example, is real enough, but has failed to produce unified responses. In the important area of non-UN peace support operations for example, Middle Eastern actors hardly feature (Centre on International Cooperation 2010). In a world where regional agencies have increasingly come to play a role in determining the parameters of peacekeeping and other activity within their respective areas, or where there are real signs of regionalization—as cases in Europe, the Americas, South-East Asia, and Africa demonstrate—giving rise to new elements of economic and security community, the Middle East remains on the periphery. This was true at least until the Arab Spring, which arguably represented a new dawn for regional organizations, as seen in their engagement with international institutions like the UN and NATO, and their embarking on independent initiatives.

Middle East regionalism: a review

This section reviews the history and experience of Middle Eastern cooperation and regionalism from a comparative and historical perspective, looking at the Cold War and post-Cold-War periods respectively. As such it endorses the importance of an historical institutionalism perspective. This temporal division may be somewhat artificial from the Middle Eastern viewpoint. There, unlike some other regions, the end of the Cold War had limited effects in terms of region-building and conflict management, but from an international relations perspective, the Cold War and post-Cold War provide rather different frameworks in which to analyse the experience of alliances and cooperation (Laidi 1994).

A long view

Viewed from a historical and comparative perspective, Middle Eastern regionalism has quite a respectable pedigree. During the Ottoman period, a regional order—an informal regime by all accounts—was clearly recognizable. The sense of community and belonging, born of Islamic authority and custom, was strong. Cohesion was assisted by a degree of pluralism in the sense of religious and minority toleration. The collapse of the Empire, the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate, and the parallel emergence of a new state system had deleterious effects, although the notion of Islamic community persisted alongside the more recently discovered notion of Arabism.

In the period between the two World Wars, as the new states moved towards independence, the absence of the formal institutions of cooperation was unremarkable. States were concerned with the building of domestic structures, and no other regions in the world outside the Americas and Europe had well-developed institutions. Still, Middle Eastern states became acclimatized to the new culture of international organization through membership of the League of Nations. Persia (later Iran), although not an original member, was invited to join the League in 1919; by 1935, Iraq and Turkey (and Afghanistan) were members, and by 1938 Egypt (Zimmern 1945: 526–7).

Meanwhile, regionalism, in theory and practice, met with mixed responses from the founders of the League of Nations and the United Nations (UN), for whom universalism lay at the base of a successful international order. In the case of the UN, however, the demands of American, Arab, and Commonwealth states influenced the final wording of the Charter, highlighting—in Chapter VIII—the role and responsibility of regional agency (Claude 1968: 5–6). And membership of the UN and its related institutions—most Middle Eastern states, with the exception of the Gulf and North Africa, joined in 1945 (Roberts and Kingsbury 1993: 530–6)—became an important vehicle for representation and legitimacy.

As regards the LAS, it was the 'UN's historical twin'—founded in 1945 and part of a growing family of international organizations (Moussa 2012: 107). If Arab 'unity' was the theme that underpinned discussions over its shape and form, the organization was built around statist principles, its charter emphasizing respect for independence and sovereignty. State sovereignty and pan-Arabism were incongruous partners, but fear of hegemony and the competing agendas of different regimes prevented any deeper union: 'the loose form of association provided for in the Pact represented the most that Arabs could agree on in the circumstances' (Gomaa 1977: 26).

The Arabs, however, were not alone in achieving limited interstate cooperation. Unity and solidarity were also the goals of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), but the scope of its activities was likewise modest. Sovereignty was a prize to be nurtured, not one to be sacrificed on the altar of a 'pan-' movement, or one extolling the virtues of integration. This was particularly the case among states whose regimes were insecure. Other agencies and alliances emerging in this period had a heavily statist, and often specifically Cold War, agenda. Selective security pacts such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Warsaw, Rio, and Baghdad Pacts, and the South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) developed as products of the East–West divide, designed in part to serve the interests of the superpowers. Outside NATO and the Warsaw Pact (until the end of the Cold War), superpower dominance and the absence of a regional rationale limited their acceptability and influence. The Baghdad Pact—later the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)—was seen as a Western instrument of Cold-War containment, superseding failed US attempts to build a Middle East Defence Organization. It excited the hostility of non-members, while failing to command the support of its own (see Box 9.1). Its regional justification dissipated after Iraq's exit in 1959. Subsequent US initiatives to construct an effective regional alliance system met with equally mixed results.

The LAS and Cold War alliances were not the only options. The West European experience of integration seemed to offer a different model and became a source of emulation elsewhere. It is true that the early European institutions had a strong realist rationale—that of securing Europe in an anti-Soviet alliance—but they went much further. The early successes

Box 9.1 Regional groups/unity schemes in the Middle East 1945–90

League of Arab States (LAS)	1945–	Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen
Baghdad Pact/Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)	1955–79	(Great Britain) Iran, Iraq (left in 1959), Pakistan, Turkey
United Arab Republic (UAR)	1958–61	Egypt and Syria
United Arab Emirates (UAE)	1971–	Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Sharjah Ras Al-Khaimah, Umm Aal Qaiwain
Federation of Arab Republics	1971–73	Egypt, Libya, Syria
Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)	1971–	LAS states, Iran, Turkey
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)	1981–	Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE
Economic Conference Organization (ECO)	1985–	Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey (plus Central Asian Republics)
Arab Mahgreb Union (AMU)	1989–	Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia
Arab Cooperation Council (ACC)	1989–90	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, North Yemen
Unification of Yemen	1990	Creation of Republic of Yemen, uniting the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)

of the original six European Community members presented a new regional opportunity, which, although rooted in the particular experience of Europe, was seen as a starting point for other such experiments. Attempts to create common markets and free trade associations in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas proliferated.

In the Middle East, Arab attempts between 1957 and 1967 to create a common market were too ambitious. The European example and the consequences of the Suez crisis of 1956, encouraged the drive towards economic cooperation and common resource management, leading to the signature in 1964 (through the League's Economic Council), of a treaty to establish an Arab Common Market, scheduled for 1974. But lack of consensus over common tariffs and trade policies meant that the scheme, like similar schemes elsewhere, failed (Owen 1999). The relevance of the European experience to what were mostly poor and insecure states with only the rudiments of a regional market, along with the assumption that such states would benefit from a customs union or similar, was rightly brought into question. By the late 1960s, the different experiments in regional integration had faltered. Even in Europe, their proponents questioned the relevance of regional integration theory.

External penetration, inter-Arab tensions, domestic politics, and the nature of the regional economy help to explain the fitful progress of cooperative efforts at the regional level. Despite the potential benefits of functional cooperation, evident in areas such as resource management or regional labour movements which grew significantly in this period, few

durable achievements resulted. Regimes found that their economic and military interests were better supplied in either ad hoc or bilateral alignments; through oil sales to the developed world, or through the receipt of military assistance and material from one of the superpowers. This did not mean that schemes for greater Arab unity were irrelevant—they still served important rhetorical and even unifying purposes—but failed to provide a framework to overcome the security and development dilemmas that different regimes faced.

The limitations of an institution such as the LAS should, however, be placed in comparative perspective (Salamé 1988a; Pinfari 2009). If the idea of the League as a vehicle for collective security was largely unrealized, this was true of other similar ventures outside Western Europe. In a number of the different conflicts in which the League Council was involved—the Lebanon–United Arab Republic (UAR) conflict of 1958, the Kuwait–Iraq conflict of 1961; the Yemen civil war, 1962–67—the League played a significant negotiating role (Nye 1971: 161–5; Pinfari 2009: 12).

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Cooperation (SAARC) (Barnett and Gause 1998). Despite its limitations, however, the GCC has proved over the years to be one of the region's more successful organizations, expanding its functional cooperation in a number of areas, even though the Gulf Wars and subsequent developments further tested its unity and independence of action, while exposing its limited capacity to act against powerful external threats.

There were other moments of collaboration for Arab states in this period. A high point of solidarity between 1967 and 1974 was followed by fragmentation until the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1990 (Sayigh 1991). During those years, a consensus emerged over the desired regional order—as evidenced in regular Arab summits, the 1973 October War, and the oil embargo—which briefly saw a coordinated set of Arab responses to the US–Israel position. However, the consequences of the war, the Camp David accords (1978) which saw Egypt and Israel sign a peace treaty, the lost economic opportunities, and the threatening regional environment caused introspection—a decline in support for core issues and a shift away from Arabism to state nationalism. The structures of cooperation were too fragile to endure: regional states proved as willing to break the consensus as they were to lead it.

Outside the region, there were other opportunities for Middle Eastern states to participate in diverse multilateral forums, in which bloc politics based on a looser 'southern' identity engaged different groups of developing countries. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) provided an important venue for Arab countries, while other developing states enjoyed the fruits of the short-lived Arab successes of the 1970s. Concerted action among Arab states in OPEC in raising oil prices was inspirational in terms of the broader Third World or 'Southern' movement, particularly in articulating demands by the G77 countries for a 'New International Economic Order'. These achievements proved ephemeral, but deserve mention in the context of broader regionalisms, seen as expressions of post-colonial resistance to the existing international order.

By the end of the Cold War, the collective achievements of Middle Eastern states were few. The system was in deep crisis, reverberating from the consequences of the Iranian Revolution, the Iran–Iraq War, and the Camp David accords, which exacerbated Arab divisions and resulted in Egypt's temporary expulsion from the LAS. Inter-Arab cooperation paled alongside the record of US and Soviet alliance building in the region. Neither superpower was fully satisfied with its efforts: the USSR, with the exception of Syria, failed to secure a reliable regional partner; and the US, despite a succession of initiatives, never achieved a viable containment strategy. Taken overall, however, the relationships forged between the US and Arab/non-Arab states—Israel, Iran (until 1979), and Turkey (a member of NATO since 1952)—and the USSR with Syria and (temporarily) Egypt, Iraq, and South Yemen provide a more robust memory of the international politics of the region than the sporadic efforts of the LAS or the GCC. Inter-Arab alignments, whether bilateral or multilateral, had proved transitory and fragile.

Beyond the Cold War

What changed with the end of the Cold War? From an international relations perspective, this was a period of major global change, with the perceived delivery of a substantial peace dividend and the expansion of the processes of globalization and regionalization. Globalization, with its revolution in communications, trade, and technology, assisted in the flow and fusion of ideas about politics and economics, and societies; regionalization, because of the

greatly increased levels of regional activity, suppressed during the Cold War, and guided by the powerful example of Europe, experienced a revival from the mid-1980s. The growth of regional purpose and empowerment—'new regionalism'—affected different parts of the world in unequal ways. For some states, the old world of international relations—of inter-state war, alliances, balances of power, and threats—became less relevant; for others, the change was outwardly dramatic, but ultimately less profound.

In the Middle East, the response to the Cold War's end was mixed, for the new era was characterized by both continuity and change (Sayigh 2000; Miller 2003). As **Chapter 4** demonstrates, the region's most important rivalries and tensions were not of the Cold War type: the Arab–Israel conflict, the Iranian Revolution, and the Iran–Iraq War were all influenced by the Cold War and its ending, but their causes lay elsewhere. More generally, there was a rethinking of external alliances and commitments, particularly where the USSR and Eastern bloc were concerned (important for Syria), and, to some extent, the US—although, for the latter, Cold War or not, regional security and oil remained top priorities and continued to condition regional alignments. Still, the fear of globalization and possible marginalization, common to many developing countries, was also felt by states of the region, prompting new cooperative ventures. Early responses to these trends came in the form of two schemes: the Arab Mahgreb Union (AMU) and the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC), formed in 1989. The revival of the Yemeni unification movement that year was also related to the changed post-Cold-War environment and the drying up of Soviet support for the South Yemen regime (Halliday 2002: 272). In 1992, following an Iranian initiative to bolster indigenous security initiatives on a different axis, the ECO was expanded to include the six Muslim Central Asian states and Afghanistan. These developments were matched by a proliferation of new groups elsewhere, including the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR) in South America, and the Asia Pacific Economic Conference (APEC) to name but two.

With regard to the Middle East case, a few points should be noted. The AMU was no new idea, and flowed logically from the renewal of diplomatic relations between Algeria and Morocco in 1988; it was also a response to, and borrowed from, the European experience. In its early commitment to a common market—commitments repeated in new regional experiments in South America and South-East Asia—the impact of Europe is clear. However, interregional trade was slow to take off and political quarrels kept AMU leaders away from the summit table. In contrast, relations between individual Maghrebi states and the European Union were consolidated as part of the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership, Neighbourhood Policy, and Union for the Mediterranean, respectively (see **Chapter 17**).

In relation to the short-lived experiment that was the ACC, it appears that the European challenge was also a factor; so was the chronic state of regional instability in the wake of the Iran–Iraq War and the eruption of the Palestinian intifada. Many speculated that the ACC aimed at containment of Iraq's power; as such, it was a failure. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 demonstrated the fragility of previous attempts to build regional order and revealed that the end of the Cold War, for the Middle East at least, had not diminished its security dilemma, or even—unlike other parts of the world—the spectre of interstate war (Human Security Centre 2005).

The emergence of these new regional alignments within the space of a few years highlighted the impact of regional and global change. Two related developments—both to some extent products of the new era—were of particular importance and interacted with the ongoing debate about post-Cold-War regional cooperation: the Gulf War; and the start of the

Arab–Israeli peace process in 1991. The former had enormous knock-on consequences for the institutions and axes of cooperation, killing off the ACC, dividing the LAS, and loosening Arab alignments. The war was a salutary reminder of the limits of regionalism. Ultimately, Arab states lacked the power and the will to match Iraqi might, and this task fell to a US-led coalition—a tactical alliance par excellence.

Declared preferences for *Arab* solutions demonstrated the continuing power of identity politics, but their failure to deliver results merely reinforced the futility of such ideas unless accompanied by the appropriate level of commitment, whether of the military or the diplomatic kind. Again, this was mainly supplied by outside actors. In other parts of the world, by contrast, regional actors and their institutions started to take on larger roles in the management of regional security—whether in South-East Asia, where ASEAN became involved in regional consensus-building; in Africa, where regional institutions have taken on security and development tasks previously within the UN's remit; or in Latin America, where the Central American peace processes and democracy-building have been fashioned at least in part by regional actors.

The Gulf War had a profound long-term impact on regional order. In the short term, the League's Secretary General resigned as the organization divided over the invasion: this was perhaps the most serious crisis that it had faced. Its survival, however, also demonstrated the resilience of institutions to overcome internal strife. The GCC also weathered the storm, although the 1991 Damascus Declaration, with its talk of a 'six plus two' arrangement, which would have brought Egypt and Syria into the regional security frame, did not materialize. The GCC, however, continued to expand its functional cooperation and plans to develop a regional market and customs union. If levels of interregional trade remained relatively low, the organization facilitated regional contacts and networks in services and trade (Legrenzi 2008). On the critical question of security, however, the organization's weakness in respect of its powerful neighbours, both Iran and Iraq (at least until 2003), and continuing dependence on the US remained an insurmountable obstacle to strategic independence. Nevertheless, the GCC has embarked on a further stage of institution-building and taken on new security roles.

In regard to the Arab–Israeli peace process initiated in Madrid in 1991, the consequences of the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War were important facilitators, prompting external and internal actors to frame new responses to the conflict. While these efforts are dealt with in **Chapters 12** and **13**, a few observations are relevant here. In the early post-Oslo days, there was widespread talk of a new regional order: part of the 'New World Order' of President George W. H. Bush, and the 'New Middle East' concept of former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres (Peres and Noar 1993).

The new order under discussion was inclusive and ambitious. Underpinning it was the belief that a peace settlement, and reduction of military expenditure, would free up resources for economic and social development, and promote wider economic integration on the European model. Reality soon tested such assumptions and, by the turn of the century, the hoped-for dividends of the Oslo accords, and the multilateral economic conferences that followed, failed to materialize. Still, many would agree that the initiatives of the decade, including the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership, remain an important point of reference and heralded the possibility of future change.

A snapshot of the region at the start of the twenty-first century, however, was hardly encouraging. The Palestine–Israel conflict had reached an impasse. Neither the intermediary efforts of foreign powers, including the European and US commitment to a Palestinian state,

nor those of Arab states—such as the Saudi initiative in 2002—had succeeded in brokering a durable settlement.

The region's difficulties were compounded by the unilateral turn in US foreign policy since 9/11, characterized by the interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq which added to regional fragmentation and realignment, igniting discussions about new regional orders. Sympathy for the attacks on the US of 11 September 2001 became more muted, with the elaboration of an 'axis of evil' and its remedy—a war on terror and weapons of mass destruction—both with particular focus on the Middle East. Regional ambivalence over the Afghan intervention turned to hostility over the Iraq War. Most Arab states publicly pronounced against US intervention, signalling that acquiescence or cooperation, of the sort that some had offered in the previous Gulf War or Afghan invasion, would not be forthcoming.

For their part, the hopes of Western powers that a new Iraqi regime would contribute to regional stability and cooperation were soon disappointed. Different initiatives to promote security regionalism along European or NATO lines, or through a bilateral US–Gulf defence pact (Legrenzi 2011), failed. Other projects (still on the table) included the 'Road Map', a peace proposal envisaging the staged development of a Palestinian state, devised by the 'Quartet' (the US, Russia, the European Union, and the UN), the 'Greater Middle East Initiative', stemming from the G8 Summit in 2004, and the different European measures to promote regional integration and confidence-building (see Box 9.2). While some progress has been made, this has been overtaken by recent events in the Arab world and hampered by an overreliance on external agency, and the neglect of regional priorities and actors.

In hindsight, rather than opening up new vistas of unity and cooperation, the post-Cold War Middle East revealed forces of fragmentation and division—exacerbated by the destructive events of 2001 and 2003—which key regional actors struggled to check. Identity politics—the broad Arab consensus, which in the past had seemed to offer a way forward—were challenged by the blows of recurrent wars, ongoing crises, and the dismantling of the Iraqi regime, which in turn strengthened alternative regional alliances—that of Iran and Syria, for example. The allegiances that had characterized the region assumed new colours, with Islamism competing with Arabism and states for popular support. Particular challenges were posed by the calls to violence from radical Islamic groups, which threatened regime (and regional) stability and invited external responses to the threat to states. Again, in contrast to other regions where 9/11 and subsequent events reinforced cooperation, Arab states (at least until the Arab Spring) made little progress on core security issues. This was true of the oldest regional organization, the LAS, despite some success at mediation in the 2005–08 Lebanese crisis (Dakhlallah 2012) and attempts to revive, in its 2007 summit, an earlier Arab–Israel peace plan. Similarly, while Islamic states in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (see Chapter 8) have laid some groundwork for cooperative strategies, so far these have had a limited, and often symbolic, impact (Esposito 1995: 202; Akbarzadeh and Connor 2005). And here contrasts can be drawn with the growth and expansion of Africa's regional institutions since the 1990s (Fawcett and Gandois 2010).

Until the start of the Arab Spring, regional developments on one level seemed to validate a realist paradigm of regional anarchy with the US, the external hegemon, holding, albeit with increasing difficulty, a regional balance of power between Israel and diverse Arab interests, on the one hand, and regional pretenders such as Iran, on the other. However, the regional, but also the global, environment has become more complex, with the US showing greater

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Box 9.2 Post-Cold-War regional initiatives

Arab Mahgreb Union (AMU)	1989–	Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia
Arab Cooperation Council (ACC)	1989–90	Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, North Yemen
Unification of Yemen	1990	Creation of Republic of Yemen (ROY), uniting the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) and the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR)
Damascus Declaration	1991	Egypt, Syria, the GCC
Madrid Peace Conference	1991	Multilateral conference to discuss peace between Israel and Arab neighbours
Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Programme	1995–	EU member states, Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey
Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA)	1997–	LAS proposal implemented in 2005
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Customs Union	2001–	Proposal to remove trade barriers
Greater Middle East Initiative	2004–	US proposal including Middle Eastern and non-Middle Eastern states
Mediterranean Free Trade Area (Agadir Agreement)	2004–	Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia
European Neighbourhood Policy	2004–	EU members, plus neighbours: Algeria, Egypt,
Arab Parliament	2004–	Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey
		Proposal for a permanent Arab Parliament
Union for the Mediterranean	2008–	EU, Israel, North African, Balkan, and Arab states
GCC/LAS support for UN Resolution 1973	2011	Arab support for Libyan intervention
GCC Union	2012	Saudi proposal for deeper GCC cooperation

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restraint and newer players entering the scene. Russia, China, and the Central Asian states all condition the regional balance of power on a different axis, through their relations with Iran, Turkey, and Arab states such as Syria. While Turkey's stance is both to the East and the West, with EU and NATO links a priority, the country has recently assumed more important regional roles, particularly in conflict mediation. Iran offers a different model: a beneficiary of the new regional balance of power following the Iraq War, it has developed strategies to make the most of its immediate environment, from building regional and extra-regional links, attempting to consolidate an anti-Western front and developing its own nuclear programme. Europe's potential to mediate—and to offer new roads to regionalism by policy and example—remains real, but still under-utilized (Peters 2012).

The limitations of external agency in addressing regional issues were brought sharply into focus by the unanticipated events of the Arab Spring, which accelerated changes in the regional balance of power and revealed the extent to which Western policies had failed in their stated goals. Above all, however, it shifted attention away from external domain and to

the realm of domestic politics (see **Chapter 15**) revealing how in understanding the region and its alignments the domestic domain deserves our close attention.

Beyond the Arab uprisings: new regionalism?

The rapid unfolding of events since the Arab uprisings, which commenced late in 2010, has affected the prospects for regionalism in a number of ways, although it is premature to assess their impact. Overall, there has been contradictory evidence of the Middle East embracing more fully the agenda of new regionalism.

Initial reactions to the uprisings saw action by Arab institutions, previously dubbed moribund, in response to regional events—in particular, in support of international initiatives to protect civilians against regime violence (Libya, Syria) and to promote peaceful regime change (Yemen, Syria). Regime change, and with it the possibility of wider reforms, may, in the longer term, encourage a regional environment more conducive to regional cooperation.

In respect of action by Arab institutions, a great deal of significance has been attached, particularly by Western powers, to their involvement and support for international initiatives in Libya such as the endorsement of UN resolution 1973, calling for a 'no-fly zone' and measures to protect the civilian population. Indeed, support from the GCC, LAS (and the OIC) was crucial in providing legitimacy to international action, and suggested also a move towards greater regional collaboration with multilateral institutions such as NATO and the UN. Such support also represented a break from these organizations' stance of strict respect for sovereignty and non-intervention, underwritten in their charters (Bellamy and Williams 2011) and as such a tentative move toward the acceptance of R2P (Elgindy 2012).

The LAS also supported talks to end the political crisis in Yemen, backing a GCC-brokered initiative under which President Salih handed power to his deputy early in 2012. Similarly, it called upon Syria's President Asad to step down, supporting two UN envoy's peace missions to Syria. In summer 2012, OIC members followed LAS in calling for Syria's expulsion from the organization. This regional activism, together with progress in areas like human rights, has prompted discussion of a new era for regional organization (Rishmawi 2010). Despite such positive signs, viewing the regional terrain in 2015, particularly given the continuing crises in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, rather than new regionalism, what is striking is the incapacity to act decisively, making any celebration of the LAS's new roles premature.

The GCC presents a somewhat different picture with a more sustained effort at unity amid multiple dangers. Indeed, it was partly in response to the events of the Arab Spring and the challenges posed to incumbent regimes, that King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia first called, in December 2011, for the deeper integration of the GCC. This was followed in 2014 for a call for inclusion of Morocco and Jordan to strengthen the axis of monarchies in the region (Al Tamamy 2015).

The significance of such developments should not be understated, but do not necessarily herald a sea change in the capacity for regional organization. The GCC's call for unity can be understood as a bid to enhance regime security against external threats. Such threats include not only the contagion effects of the tumbling of fellow Arab regimes, once dubbed 'presidents for life' (Owen 2012), but also the dangers attached to a resurgence of Sunni–Shia tensions, already aggravated by the Iraq War, but even more acute following the effects of

the Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS. The Sunni monarchs of the Gulf fear the implications of a strengthening Shia axis with Iran at its centre. It was in the light of such threats that the GCC announced an increase in its aid package to Bahrain and Oman, and used the Peninsula Shield force in Bahrain alongside Saudi troops and UAE police in spring 2011 to help to suppress Shia-led protests in the capital. However, GCC members, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, were openly divided over how to respond to the coup against the Muslim Brotherhood regime in Egypt in 2013.

It remains to be seen whether and how much the GCC states will move towards closer union; however a few observations about the nature of regional developments since the Arab Spring can be made. First, the activism of the GCC—notably, key states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar—suggests the deepening of a trend towards regional realignment evident after the Iraq invasion. The old Arab core—the republican axis, which once dominated the regional land-scape—has loosened, producing fragmentation, and the rise of new regional players and alliances as discussed in Chapter 10. This new regional dynamic, and the alliances it has fostered, is crucial to understanding order and forthcoming directions in regionalism. It is those Gulf states with close US links that currently exercise dominance in regional forums; their position, based on economic performance and other indicators, is likely to remain strong. Second, in relation to regime change and the future of regional organization in the wider region, it is possible that, with a set of more accountable regimes in power, a new consensus on regional issues such as the Palestine–Israel question, which has eluded the LAS in the past, could emerge in the long term.

Conclusion

This chapter has emphasized the limitations of regional cooperation in the Middle East, particularly when contrasted with other regions. Until the events of the Arab Spring, the region was regarded as a backwater of regionalism, with cooperation and alliance-building seen as superficial and transitory acts accommodated within realist state-centred analysis—the cornerstone of traditional international relations theory. Institutional cooperation identified by liberal scholars has been hard to identify. There is a poor match between the externally defined Middle Eastern 'region' and existing institutions; there is no effective network of institutional arrangements (as in Europe for example), limited free trade, no security community, and no longer even a core community of shared ideals. Despite some of the advances since the 1990s, highlighted here and in other chapters of this book, the different regional groups and initiatives remain limited, revealing weak impulses to economic, political, and security cooperation. Events since 2011 initially gave some grounds for optimism—newer players are calling for regional reorganization—but while the political picture remains so uncertain, caution is called for. The most dynamic regional organization, particularly given the absence of leadership in LAS is the GCC. However, the GCC has also faced new chal-lenges and the LAS will still remain important as a source of region-wide initiatives on larger security questions—the Arab Parliament is one example (Rishmawi 2013: 59).

It has been shown that institutional progress has been retarded by the influences of ex-ternal powers and the contested shape of the regional order. Yet it is also evident that re-gime security and state type are important in determining the positioning and capabilities of Middle Eastern states in respect of cooperation. The state remains the essential ingredient

in determining what makes for successful regionalism and cooperation in the long term. What initiates regional activity—external shocks or internal forces, for example—may not sustain it, so the role of states and domestic actors is central. Here, capacity and regime type are crucial: where regionalism and cooperation are to succeed, states, regimes, and interest groups have major roles to play in promoting and maintaining the processes that drive them. And when we look at state capacity and governance, in the Middle East, and a range of developing countries, the state is often weak, except in a coercive sense. It lacks legitimacy, being unaccountable to its own peoples—to say nothing of peoples and states belonging to any broader regional entity (Tripp 1995).

Middle Eastern states and regimes have often lacked both the capacity and the will to make cooperation and regional institutions work, except in a narrow and self-regarding sense; hence the need for short-term alliances or the propensity to turn outside to resolve their security dilemmas. In this formulation, regionalism and anything more than functional cooperation are merely a symbol: a valuable, but disposable, source of legitimacy for regimes whose own legitimacy quotient is low (Hudson 1977). The events of the Arab Spring have exacerbated these trends to weakening state capacity in key states and giving rise to contestation of borders and territories, making any united response difficult if not impossible. The rise of new alliances to protect regime interests is illustrative of this.

Democratization may be an important, if not sufficient, element in this process. It is true that successful, if still quite limited, cooperation at the regional level has occurred among soft authoritarian states in South-East Asia and this pattern may now be replicated among the monarchies of the Gulf. But it is also noteworthy that, in regions such as South America and parts of the wider Europe, the return or consolidation of democracy and more accountable government has helped to cement the processes of cooperation. In the Middle East, we may be witnessing a political transformation rather than a 'transition to democracy', with the prospects for enhanced regional engagement and cooperation lying beyond this transformationist phase. The prospects remain uncertain.

Tellingly, the UN-commissioned *Arab Human Development Reports* (UNDP 2003–12)—important documents cited elsewhere in this volume—highlight governance, modelled on universal democratic principles, as the key to change. While the reports are concerned with economic, or 'human', development, they stress repeatedly the necessity for fundamental political reform if the Middle East is to catch up with the rest of the world. And this relates as much to its international relations as to its economic and social development. The message here may be that only long-term regime change can finally give real purchase to the marriage of identity and interest, to viable forces and institutions of cooperation; hence the real interest in the possible implications of the Arab uprisings for processes of regional cooperation.

In the years following the Iraq War it was tempting to see the Middle East through the lens of US policy: part of a world of regions embedded in 'America's imperium' (Katzenstein 2005). This lens seems less appropriate however as the US downsizes its commitment, reduces its dependence on Middle East oil, and other states, like China and Russia become more involved not only in regional trade but also in politics. Nevertheless, Middle Eastern states have had few opportunities to develop collaboration and engagement at the regional level, and effectively to project power onto the international stage. For many, then, it remains a case of immature regionalism. But this is too simple a stereotype and is already changing. Regional progress has been encumbered by external influence, the product of its imperial

past, strategic vulnerability, and resource capacity. External powers have contributed to the democracy deficit by keeping the authoritarian state alive. However, external agency is both part of the problem and part of a possible solution in enabling the region to move forward. Alone, of course, it will not suffice, for progress depends critically on the successful and meaningful engagement of its own members. And here, as suggested, we need to look harder at the fabric of Middle Eastern states and societies to appreciate their current situation. There are multiple opportunities for regional-level action—engaging not only states, but also a range of non-state or civil society actors—to enable the region to connect with the broader processes of regionalization and globalization. These are precisely the kinds of connections that regional scholars have called for.

While identity remains a factor in explaining regional alignments, there has been a shift away from Arabism towards Islamism, on the one hand, and towards regional fragmentation, on the other. While Islamism in multiple forms is set to condition political outcomes in the region, we do not yet know whether it will be Islamism based on a more moderate Turkish (or Tunisian) model or on the diverging and conservative Saudi and Iranian models. What we have seen in the Middle East, as in other parts of the world, is the rise of emerging powers or centres of power—one example of which is Turkey; another, the GCC— with alternative visions of regional order in which identity forms a part, but not the most important one.

The hypothesis that multiple identities and linkages bind and divide the Middle East, and that these will invariably affect regional outcomes and choices, remains valid. But identity is not enough: if states feel threatened by Israel or Iran, or by a drop in oil prices, the politics of identity will not save them; there must also be compelling material reasons to act. The success of the European Union project depended in the first instance on US power, and shared security and economic concerns; identity construction came later. Similar material considerations explain the initial success of regional arrangements elsewhere—ASEAN or MERCOSUR, for example. Together, in different combinations, the quest for power and security, the agency of strong states, levels of interdependence, institutional frameworks, and shared values all play a role in promoting community and cooperation at the regional level. Ultimately, however, we must focus upon the domestic level of analysis to explain what makes such arrangements work. In the Middle East, domestic arrangements have inhibited, rather than promoted, meaningful collective action. Region-building has suffered from the same legitimacy deficits as nation-building: both have been tarnished by the effects of authoritarianism and the often contrary influence of the West. This is why the Arab Spring— and Western responses to it—is so important.

The limitations of international relations theory, and the need for a flexible and multilevel approach to understanding the region, has been a constant theme of this and other chapters. IR offers some clues to understanding regional patterns of behaviour, but ultimately models designed to fit elsewhere have worked poorly. The need for an eclectic approach which draws selectively and builds upon existing theory while paying close attention to the region is key and is well illustrated by Paul Noble (1991: 49): 'Foreign policies are shaped by national situations, values and perceptions of policy makers and global and regional environments. Systemic conditions provide opportunities or constraints to action and generate pressure that push or pull states in different directions.' The history of alliances and regionalism in the Middle East amply bears this out.

Further reading

Barnett, M. N. (1998) *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Colombia University Press)
   A constructivist approach to understanding inter-Arab relations.

Buzan, B. and Waever, O. (2003) *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
   Examines regional security patterns from a comparative perspective.

Cammett, M., Diwan, I., Richards, A., and Waterbury, J. (2015) *A Political Economy of the Middle East*, 4th edn (Boulder, CO: Westview Press)
   Comprehensive analysis of the region's political economy.

Harders, C. and Legrenzi, M. (2008) *Beyond Regionalism? Regional Cooperation, Regionalism and Regionalization in the Middle East* (Aldershot: Ashgate)
   Case studies and analytical chapters explore the limits and opportunities of regionalism.

Hinnebusch, R. and Ehteshami, A. (2014) *The Foreign Policies of Middle Eastern States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner)
   Analysis of the foreign policies of regional states, providing useful insights into their regional and their international relations.

Hudson, M. (1999b) *Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration* (London: I. B. Tauris)
   A comprehensive volume describing the different experiments in regional integration and cooperation across the region.

Luciani, G. and Salamé, G. (eds) (1988) *The Politics of Arab Integration* (New York: Croom Helm)
   A volume usefully read in conjunction with Hudson (1999b).

Questions

1. Why has the Middle East seen so few successful regional organizations?
2. Are theories of regionalism a poor fit for explaining Middle East regionalism?
3. Which have been the principal successes of the Arab League?
4. Have the Arab uprisings helped or hindered the prospects of improved regional integration?
5. Is the GCC an example of 'new regionalism'?