Whose 'Middle East'? Geopolitical Inventions and Practices of Security

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Abstract

Contesting those approaches that present the 'Middle East' as a region that 'best fits the realist view of international politics', this article submits that critical approaches are relevant to this part of the world as well. It is argued that instead of taking the relatively little evidence of enthusiasm for addressing the problem of regional insecurity in the Middle East for granted, a critical place for such approaches to begin is a recognition of the presence of a multitude of contending perspectives on regional security each one of which derives from different conceptions of security that have their roots in alternative worldviews. When re-thinking regional security from a critical security studies perspective, both the concepts 'region' and 'security' need to be opened up to reveal the mutually constitutive relationship between (inventing) regions and (conceptions and practices of) security.

Keywords: *Arab national security, Critical Security Studies, Mediterranean security, Middle East, Muslim Middle East, regional security, security community.*

The 'Middle East'[1] has for long been viewed as a region that 'best fits the realist view of international politics'.[2] Although there has begun to emerge, in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks against New York and Washington, DC, some awareness of the need to adopt a fresh approach to security in the Middle East,[3] it remains a commonplace to argue that whereas critical approaches to security[4] may have some relevance within the Western European context, in other parts of the world – such as the 'Middle East' – traditional approaches retain their validity.[5] The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the stalling in the Arab–Israeli peacemaking amid escalating violence between Israelis and Palestinians, the US-led war on Iraq and the seeming lack of enthusiasm for addressing the problem of regional insecurity, especially when viewed against the backdrop of increasing regionalization of security relations in other parts of the world,[6] do indeed suggest that the 'Middle East' is a place where traditional conceptions and practices of security are still having a field day. Contesting such approaches that present the 'Middle East' as an exception, this article will submit that critical approaches are indeed relevant in the 'Middle East', while accepting that some of the items of the old security agenda also retain their pertinence (as in Western Europe). Instead of taking the seemingly little evidence of enthusiasm for addressing the problem of regional insecurity in the 'Middle East' for granted, a critical place for such approaches to begin is a recognition of the presence of a multitude of contending perspectives on regional security each one of which derives from different conceptions of security

that have their roots in alternative worldviews.[7] When re-thinking regional security from a Critical Security Studies perspective, both the concepts 'region' and 'security' need to be opened up to reveal the mutually constitutive relationship between (inventing) regions and (conceptions and practices of) security.

Regions as geopolitical inventions

The burgeoning literature on regions and regionalism has emphasized the 'invented' character of regions as opposed to some earlier conceptions that viewed regions as 'eternal',[8] the point being that there is nothing 'natural' or 'neutral' about geographical assumptions and language. Throughout history, the driving purpose behind the identification and naming of geographic sites has almost always been military strategic interests. Indeed as Kären Wigen and Martin Lewis note, 'some of the most basic and taken-for-granted "regions" of the world [such as Southeast Asia and Latin America] were first framed by military thinkers'.[9] In other words, the origins of regions have had their roots in the security conceptions and practices of their inventors.

In the case of the 'Middle East' the invention of the region is usually ascribed to Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan, US naval officer and author of key works on naval strategy.[10] In an article published in *The National Review* in 1902 Mahan suggested that Britain should take up the responsibility of maintaining security in the (Persian) Gulf and its coasts – the 'Middle East' – so that the route to India would be secured and Russia kept in check.[11] The term 'Middle East' took off from then onwards but as time progressed, the area so designated shifted westwards. In the inter-war period the discovery of considerable quantities of oil in the Arabian peninsula and the increasing pace of Jewish migration into Palestine linked these chunks of territory to Mahan's 'Middle East'. During the Second World War British policy-makers began to use the term with reference to all Asian and North African lands to the west of India. No definite boundaries were set to the region during this period. In line with changes in British wartime policies, 'Iran was added in 1942; Eritrea was dropped in September 1941 and welcomed back again five months later'.[12] Towards the end of the Second World War the United States got involved in the 'Middle East', adopting the British wartime definition. These switches from one definition to another took place so swiftly that it prompted a well-known historian of the region, Roderic Davison, to ask in the pages of the *Foreign Affairs*: 'Where is the Middle East?'.[13]

The argument so far should not be taken to mean that it was solely the military strategic interests of western powers that have been the driving force behind the invention and re-production of such representations. Throughout history all societies have produced their own representations of the world. The term 'Maghreb' ('the West' in Arabic) has its origins in the geopolitics of an earlier epoch, that of the first waves of Arab invaders who came to North Africa in the 7th and 8th centuries. However, not all societies have been able to impose their

maps on to others. This is where relative endowment of material resources comes into play in deciding whose discourse emerges as the dominant one. To put it another way, the reason why the lands to the southwest of Asia and north of Africa have been lumped together in the mind's eye and labelled as the 'Middle East' has its roots not merely in the military strategic interests of Great Britain of the late 19th century, but also in Britain's material and representational prowess.

It is not only the relative endowment of the material resources of rival powers but also the changes in communications and transportation technologies that have an impact on the way geographical categories are invented and adjusted. As the military strategic interests and capabilities of the major geopolitical actors of the time changed, the 'Middle East' shifted in tandem with these changes. The point here is that technological, economic as well as political changes alter the way one 'sees' the world thereby helping shape his/her practices. For example, after the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, some proposed a new region, that of the 'Greater Middle East'.[14] This new region includes the former Soviet republics of Central Asia which is in itself indicative of the security conceptions and practices of its inventors that include securing the route to Central Asian oil resources (in which there is now much interest) while holding Islamism in check (which has become a persistent anxiety in the United States and Western Europe in the aftermath of 11 September 2001).

The significance of conceiving the relationship between regions and security as mutually constitutive becomes more explicit once one recognizes that the 'Middle East' has developed to its present condition partly due to the way it has been represented by the dominant security discourses. Throughout the 20th century representations of the 'Middle East' (in foreign policy- and opinion-makers' discourses as well as in popular culture)[15] have underwritten certain security practices that were deemed fit for the 'character' of the region. In other words, the current state of (in)security in the 'Middle East' has its roots in practices that have been informed by its representation. What shaped this particular dominant representation, in turn, was the conception of security in which it was rooted. It is in this sense that having a better grasp of what Simon Dalby calls the 'politics of the geographical specification of politics'[16] becomes crucial, for it enables one to begin thinking differently about the future of security in the 'Middle East' while remaining sensitive to security concerns and needs of myriad actors that propound contending perspectives.

Having traced the development of the 'Middle East' (as a concept and as a region) back to security policies of late 19th century Britain, the following sections will turn to four contending perspectives on regional security that developed during the Cold War years (the 'Middle East', 'Arab Middle East', 'Muslim Middle East' and 'Mediterranean Middle East') each one of which give primacy to different kinds of threats.[17] It will be argued that when re-thinking regional security in the 'Middle East', students of Critical Security Studies need to pay attention to regional people's conceptions of security; what they view as the referent; how they think security should be established in this part of the world.

The aim is to show how difficult it is to generalize about questions of security; how people's ideas about security differ from one another; how they changed in the past and might change in the future. Within the context of the 'Middle East' this amounts to amplifying the voices of those whose views have been left out of security analyses and pointing to possibilities for change that exist.

This is not meant to suggest that these alternatives should not be put under critical scrutiny. The role of students of Critical Security Studies should not be merely to represent those views that have so far been marginalized by the dominant approaches, but also to critically analyse them. To adopt a relativist perspective and argue that all approaches voice the concerns of their proponents and are therefore equally valid is not helpful (especially if one is interested in pointing to possible avenues for change). It is even less desirable in places like the 'Middle East' where contending conceptions of security often clash. A striking example of this can be found in Israel/Palestine. 'Peace is my security' is what a PeaceNow activist's banner read when celebrating the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.[18] But 'peace with security' has for long been the motto of those Israelis sceptical of the virtues of an Arab–Israeli peace agreement. Rather, the role of the student of Critical Security Studies is to adopt a 'critical distance',[19] to 'anchor'[20] him/herself by being self-conscious and open about other versions of 'reality' and by reflecting upon his/her own role as an intellectual and the effects of the research on its subject matter.[21] Within the Middle Eastern context this involves being sensitive towards conceptions of security adopted by the region's peoples, representing the ideas and experiences of those who have been marginalized by the dominant discourses *and* drawing up an alternative template for thinking about regional security that promotes emancipatory practices. This will be the focus of the final section of the article.

The 'Middle East'

What I call the 'Middle East' perspective is usually associated with the United States and its regional allies. It derives from a 'western' conception of security which could be summed up as the unhindered flow of oil at reasonable prices, the cessation of the Arab–Israeli conflict, the prevention of the emergence of any regional hegemon while holding Islamism in check, and the maintenance of 'friendly' regimes that are sensitive to these concerns. This was (and still is) a top-down conception of security that privileged the security of states and military stability.

It is top-down because threats to security have been defined largely from the perspective of external powers rather than regional states or peoples. In the eyes of British and US defence planners, communist infiltration and Soviet intervention constituted the greatest threat to security in the 'Middle East' during the Cold War. The way to enhance regional security, they argued, was for regional states to enter into alliances with the West. Two security umbrella schemes, the ill-born Middle

East Defence Organisation (1951) and the Baghdad Pact (1955), were designed for this purpose. Although there were regional states such as Iraq (until the 1958 coup), Iran (until the 1978–9 revolution) and Turkey that shared this perception of security to a certain extent, many Arab policy-makers begged to differ.[22]

Traces of this top-down thinking were prevalent in the US approach to security in the 'Middle East' during the 1990s. In following a policy of dual containment,[23] US policy-makers presented Iran and Iraq as the main threats to regional security largely due to their military capabilities and the revisionist character of their regimes that are not subservient to US interests. However, these top-down perspectives, while revealing certain aspects of regional insecurity, at the same time hinder others. For example the lives of women in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia are made insecure not only by the threat caused by their Gulf neighbours' military capabilities, but also because of the conservative character of their own regimes that restrict women's rights under the cloak of religious tradition.[24] For it is women who suffer disproportionately as a result of militarism and the channelling of valuable resources into defence budgets instead of education and health. Their concerns rarely make it into security analyses.

This top-down approach to regional security in the 'Middle East' was compounded by a conception of security that was directed outwards – that is threats to security were assumed to stem from outside the state whereas inside is viewed as a realm of peace. Although it could be argued – following R.B.J. Walker – that what makes it possible for 'inside' to remain peaceful is the presentation of 'outside' as a realm of danger,[25] the practices of Middle Eastern states indicate that this does not always work as prescribed in theory. For many regional policy-makers justify certain domestic security measures by way of presenting the international arena as anarchical and stressing the need to strengthen the state to cope with external threats. While doing this, however, they at the same time cause insecurity for some individuals and social groups at home – the very peoples whose security they purport to maintain. The practices of regional actors that do not match up to the theoretical prescriptions include the Baath regime in Iraq that infringed their own citizens' rights often for the purposes of state security. Those who dare to challenge their states' security practices may be marginalized at best, and accused of treachery and imprisoned at worst.

The military priority of security thinking in the Cold War manifested itself within the Middle Eastern context by regional as well as external actors' reliance on practices such as heavy defence outlays, concern with orders-of-battle, joint military exercises and defence pacts. For example, the British and US security practices during this period took the form of defending regional states against external intervention by way of helping them to strengthen their defences and acquiring military bases in the region as well as bolstering 'friendly' regimes' stronghold over their populace so that the 'Middle East' would become inviolable to Soviet infiltration and intervention.

The 'Middle East' perspective continues to be military-focused and stability-oriented in the post-Cold War era. US policy toward Iraq before and after the Gulf

War (1990–1) and the 1998–9 bombing campaign directed at obtaining Iraqi cooperation with the UN team inspecting the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction programme could be viewed as examples of this. What has changed in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks is that US policy-makers declared commitment to 'advancing freedom' in the Middle East as a way of 'confronting the threats to peace from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction'.[26] The 2003 'war on Iraq' and the US effort to change the Iraqi regime were explained with reference to this new policy priority. At the same time, US policy-makers sought to give momentum to Israeli–Palestinian peacemaking by presenting a new 'roadmap'. For the peace process (that began in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War) had come to a halt towards the end of the 1990s for reasons largely to do with the incongruities between the US perspective of regional security and those of regional states. Among the latter, the critique brought by the proponents of what I term the 'Arab' perspective is likely to be of particular significance for the attempts to jumpstart Arab–Israeli peacemaking.

The 'Arab Middle East'

The 'Arab' perspective derives from the concept 'Arab national security' that emphasizes the attainment of a set of pan-Arab security concerns. The concept 'Arab national security' was developed in the aftermath of the Second World War in reaction to Cold War approaches to regional security in the 'Middle East' that were viewed as a 'euphemism for secure spheres of influence for either Moscow or Washington'.[27] Arab nationalists regard the term 'Middle East' as a label designed at best to underplay the 'Arab' character of this part of the world and at worst to 'tear up' the 'Arab homeland' as a distinct unit.[28] Accordingly, they have viewed the reasoning behind the western usage of the term 'Middle East' to portray the landmass covered by this definition as an ethnic mosaic, thereby discrediting the rationale behind the calls for greater 'Arab unity'. The term 'Arab regional system', it has been argued, could serve better as a key for understanding the interactions among Arab states with their neighbours and with the international system. There are two main assumptions behind this argument. One is that the security concerns and interests of 'Arab' states could be better understood when viewed in relation to one another. Second, that these concerns are different from if not opposed to those of neighbouring 'non-Arab' states (Iran, Israel and Turkey). However, what is often left out of these analyses is the fact that the definition of 'Arab' is hugely contested among 'Arab' peoples themselves, and that the landmass covered by this alternative spatial conception is home to a considerable number of other peoples including Kurds and Turks.[29]

By looking at their referent(s) for security one could tease out two different approaches to 'Arab national security'. The one propounded by Baghat Korany treats Arab civil society as the referent for security.[30] Ali Eddin Hillal Dessouki and Jamil Mattar, on the other hand, focus on the society of 'Arab' states.[31] Both

approaches constitute significant departures from the neo-realist view of the 'Arab world' as a 'conglomeration of hard-shelled, billiard ball, sovereign states'[32] inter-acting under the conditions set by international anarchy. Furthermore, Dessouki and Mattar's stress on the societal dimension of security and Korany's emphasis on its non-military aspects (such as identity and welfare) echo the 1990s debates on broadening security.[33]

Korany presents the concept of 'Arab national security' as complementary to Cold War approaches that failed to deal with the societal dimension of security. He argues that in order to understand security in the 'Arab world', one needs to move away from a state-focused outlook and consider the security concerns voiced by myriad societal actors. These concerns differ depending on the socioeconomic background of the actors voicing them. In general those higher on the economic ladder push for democratization and respect for human rights, while those at the lower levels of the ladder are primarily concerned with achieving daily economic needs such as jobs, socioeconomic equality, health provision and in some cases daily food subsistence.[34]

As opposed to the emphasis Korany puts on civil society, Dessouki and Mattar treat the society of 'Arab' states as the referent for security. Their critique of Cold War approaches stems not so much from the way security was conceived and practised, but with its referent, i.e. the 'Middle East'. From this perspective, Iran, Israel and Turkey (that are included within most definitions of the 'Middle East') as well as extra-regional states (such as the United States) could be viewed as threats to 'Arab national security'.

The practices of 'Arab' states, on the other hand, indicate that while they do not adopt the 'Arab' civil society as their referent for security, they nevertheless find it difficult to act in total defiance of the concerns voiced by myriad non-governmental actors. Although the security practices of the 'Arab' policy-makers have always been statist, undertaken largely to enhance their own regime security under the mantle of state security, it is impossible to deny the fact that they have also been concerned, if only at the discursive level, with the well-being of 'Arab' peoples.[35] The place accorded to the Israel/Palestine issue on top of Arab national security agendas (declared repeatedly at the end of Arab League meetings since the late 1940s) when viewed against the background of the decrease in the number of concrete actions taken to find a solution to the plight of the Palestinian peoples is an indication of the delicate balancing act many Arab policy-makers have engaged in in the second half of the 20th century – an act that became even more delicate in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks when the US began to put pressure on conservative and radical Arab regimes alike. The point here is that the security concerns of Arab peoples have often been at odds with, and have constituted a constraint upon, the practices of Arab policy-makers that have prioritized the security of their regimes.[36] Consequently, the argument that 'Arab' states have always prioritized state security as reflected in the Charter of the League of Arab States, only reflects one dimension of this interplay between state security and societal security in the 'Arab world'.

The concept of Arab national security constitutes a development over Cold War approaches to security in a number of ways. First, it is generated by peoples in this part of the world and reflects (some, if not all of) their security concerns that did not make it to the agendas set by the 'Middle East' perspective. It also partially does away with the top-down perspective of the Cold War approaches – only partially because it substitutes the top-down perspective of the United States with the statist and top-down perspectives of the 'Arab' states that often act in defiance of the concerns of peoples and social groups. As noted above, only Korany's approach attempts to move beyond such statist and top-down approaches. Lastly, it emphasizes the non-military aspects of security, especially that of identity. As opposed to the stress the proponents of the 'Arab' perspective put on national identity, myriad Islamist actors emphasize its religious dimension.

The 'Muslim Middle East'

What I term the Islamist perspective is the most controversial among the four. Even those observers of the region who are fervent critics of the regional status quo have their reservations about an Islamist perspective that has been hijacked by the 'radicals' following the 11 September attacks against New York and Washington, DC. Before Osama Bin Laden and his version of 'Islamism' came to dominate the US security agenda, the anti-status quo discourses and violent practices of certain Islamist actors, notably the Islamic Republic of Iran, Sudan and organizations such as the Hizbullah and Hamas, were already viewed as constituting a challenge to the military stability the United States and its regional allies have been keen to maintain. Still, the proponents of the Islamist perspective have also included pro-status quo actors such as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Saudi-backed Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC). The divergent practices of these Islamist actors range from militant activism (such as the New York Trade Center bombing in 1993) to grassroots activities providing welfare services (such as the activities of FIS – the Islamic Salvation Front – in Algeria and Hamas in Israel/Palestine); from the use of Islamic motifs to enhance regime security (such as Saudi Arabia) to advocating political violence aimed at establishing an 'Islamic' state (as with the Hizbullah in Lebanon).

It is not only the security practices but also the referent object of the Islamist perspective – the 'Muslim world' – that is questionable. Defined as the sum of Muslim peoples around the world (the *Ummah*), the 'Muslim world' is a trans-state community that encompasses a significant portion of the globe. When Islamists in the 'Middle East' speak of the 'Muslim world', however, they refer to a Middle East-centred conception.

Security is defined by the proponents of this perspective in relation to two criteria: the lessening of 'un-Islamic' influences and the achievement of greater unity of Muslim peoples which would ultimately enable them to be 'virtuous and powerful'.[37] Arguably, there is more agreement among the proponents of the

Islamist perspective as to what they are against than what they are for. They often define 'un-Islamic' influences as the major threat to their security, but there is little agreement among these actors as to what constitutes 'un-Islamic' (or 'Islamic' for that matter). Some would consider 'western' influence over and intervention in the region as 'un-Islamic'. Some Islamists criticize the existing political and religious establishments (such as the Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia that allowed US troops to step on the 'holy lands') as well as the forces of Arab nationalism as being 'un-Islamic'. Lastly, there are those who define 'structural violence' as 'un-Islamic' and call for its erosion.[38]

The actions and demands of these Islamist organizations serve as a reminder of how problematic is the task of defining security. From the perspective of the governments of the United States, Egypt and Israel, most Islamist organizations constitute threats to regional security due to their anti-status quo discourses and (at times) violent practices. Viewed through the lenses of some regional peoples, these organizations serve as agents of security by providing welfare services that the state fails to provide. On the other hand, from the perspective of some women, these Islamist actors constitute a significant threat. For it is women who get caught in the middle when Islamist actors – be it Iran, Saudi Arabia or FIS – play up their 'Islamic' credentials.[39] This could be taken as an illustration of the general point that the very same actors that could be considered as engaging in emancipatory practices (when viewed from a Critical Security Studies perspective) at the same time create insecurity for some others.

In sum, although the Islamist perspective makes a contribution by criticizing top-down and statist approaches to security, it still suffers from a conception of security that is directed outwards in that threats to Muslims are assumed to stem from outside the 'Muslim Middle East' whereas what goes on inside is rendered almost unproblematic. Moreover, the internal politics of Islamist movements and organizations themselves remain top-down especially concerning women's issues. One important contribution the Islamist perspective has made is the emphasis some of its proponents have put on the non-military dimensions of security, such as religious identity and the little-pronounced but significant re-definition of *jihad* (holy war) as a struggle against 'structural violence'. As Chaiwat Satha-Anand notes, there exist in the Islamic tradition 'fertile resources of nonviolent thought' should Islamist actors choose to tap them.[40] The point here is that although it is possible to view the Islamist perspective as the most uncompromising among the four, should its proponents choose to re-think some key precepts of Islam, a concept such as *jihad* that is often viewed as an obstacle to peaceful coexistence today could become the common ground for tomorrow's debates between the Islamists and other actors (notably non-governmental actors at the local and global levels) on issues such as the structural causes of economic security, human rights, identity, human dignity and equality – that is, the nexus of security and emancipation.

The 'Mediterranean Middle East'

The Mediterranean perspective began to take shape from the 1970s onwards, largely in line with the development of and changing security conceptions and practices of the European Union. The EU's close interest in Middle Eastern affairs was provoked by the OPEC oil embargo and the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Since then, EU policies toward the 'Middle East' have been shaped by three major concerns: energy security, regional stability (understood as the maintenance of domestic stability in the countries in the geographically close North Africa) and the cessation of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

In the 1980s, changes in the societies of EU member states as a result of the growth of the Middle Eastern diaspora in Western Europe led EU policy-makers to re-think their priorities, and come to consider stability in the 'Middle East' (especially North Africa) as an integral part of their own security. Accordingly, EU policy-makers have sought to create cooperative schemes with the Mediterranean-rim countries of the 'Middle East' to encourage and support economic development and growth. It was hoped these steps would serve to reduce refugee flows from the 'Middle East' into Europe, and prevent regional conflicts being exported into Europe.

Over the years these schemes have taken various forms: the Euro–Arab Dialogue, the EU's 'Overall Mediterranean Policy', agreements with sub-regional organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the 'Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean' (CSCM) proposal and the ongoing 'Euro–Mediterranean Partnership' process.[41] Although other actors such as the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), Egyptian policy-makers and intellectuals have also encouraged and supported some of these schemes, the EU has been the prime actor in constructing the Mediterranean as a region.[42]

The EU's conceptualization of the Mediterranean does not (so far) include non-Mediterranean Middle Eastern states. This is largely because the EU's delineation of the Mediterranean region reflects its own societal security concerns that have less to do with the Gulf than the geographically closer Southern Mediterranean. Furthermore, in line with its conviction that the threat and use of force would not solve those problems that are non-military in character, the EU has so far emphasized democratization and economic development as the means to establish security in the Mediterranean region. On the issue of Gulf security, however, many EU policy-makers still follow the US lead and do not rule out the threat and use of force as an instrument of policy (as the Gulf War demonstrated). Although the EU remains divided over this issue, many member states subscribe to US conceptions (and practices) of security in the Gulf, which prioritize military stability and predictability over democratization and development. The debates within the EU regarding the 2003 war on Iraq could be viewed as signalling a deepening of divisions within the EU, and between the EU and the US.

The main strength of the Mediterranean perspective stems from the fact that it

is a relatively neutral conception; it does not a priori exclude some states or have colonial baggage. Moreover it remains the only scheme that managed to bring Syria, Israel and a wide spectrum of non-state actors together under one umbrella. Although the CSCM proposal (1990) failed to start a Helsinki-type process in the Mediterranean, European actors at the sub-state level have been active in conducting people-to-people diplomacy.

In sum, the Mediterranean region largely serves the security interests of the EU and does not have many enthusiastic supporters in the region. However, although it has very few backers in the 'Middle East', it does not have many enemies either; and this may eventually turn out to be its greatest strength especially if the EU policy to take civil societal actors on its side bears fruit in the long run.

Which region for what future?

The four approaches outlined here serve as reminders of the fact that basic needs such as subsistence, health and education, and issues such as religious and cultural identity, democratization and human rights may rate higher on individuals' and social groups' security agendas than regime security and military stability that have dominated the security agendas of the United States and its regional allies. Although US policy-makers' view – that military instability in the 'Middle East' threatens global (economic) security – remains valid, it merely captures one dimension of regional insecurity. The security concerns voiced by various actors from within the region attest well to this. Furthermore, conceiving security in the 'Middle East' solely in terms of military stability helps gloss over other structurally based (economic, political, societal) security concerns. Dealing with the military security agenda is always necessary, but a military-focused and determined security agenda (coupled with zero-sum conceptions and practices of security) has so far led to a diversion of valuable resources into arms purchases. The ensuing militarization of the region not only made it difficult to meet the traditional challenges, but also undermined the regional states' capacity to provide welfare to their citizens thereby exacerbating the non-military threats to security in the 'Middle East' as voiced by myriad non-state actors.

In the aftermath of the 11 September attacks US policy-makers have focused on 'terrorism' as a major threat to security in the Middle East and elsewhere. Yet, US policy so far has confronted the symptoms rather than the causes in that it has focused on military threats (to the neglect of socioeconomic ones) and relied on military tools (as with the war on Iraq) in addressing those threats. This is not to underestimate the threat posed by weapons of mass destruction or terrorism to global and regional security. Rather, the point is that these top-down perspectives, while revealing certain aspects of regional insecurity, at the same time hinder others.

From a Critical Security Studies perspective, the choice is not between adopting a top-down or a bottom-up approach to security. Students of Critical

Security Studies need to re-think security in the 'Middle East' from both top-down and bottom-up[43] with an eye on the practical implications of their own thinking on the subject of research (the theory/practice relationship). Although the securitization of such a wide range of issues may not be considered desirable by some (for fear of 'securitizing' issues and thereby rendering them intractable),[44] from another perspective, keeping the security agenda open is a must if one is serious about moving beyond state-centric conceptions and practices of security.[45] After all, the issues discussed above are all security concerns for some.

Having considered these four competing approaches to conceiving regional security and constructing it in their own image, it could be argued that it is highly unlikely that their proponents will come to an agreement on one common perspective. If they cannot agree on the definition of the region, one may ask, how could they ever agree on common security policies? This is where the argument comes full circle, for conceiving the relationship between the representations of regions and the conceptions and practices of security as mutually constitutive enables one to make the theoretical move and argue that an alternative conception of security could give rise to a new perspective of regional security that would be acceptable to all – a perspective that aims at moving towards stable security maintained not because of the threat and use of force, but due to mutual satisfaction with the existing situation; that is security practised together with the others, not at their expense.[46]

This, however, is not the only way to think about the future of security in this part of the world.[47] For instance, those who view the future of world politics as one of increasing globalization argue that globalizing forces foster economic efficiency and encourage the solution of problems through international cooperation thereby helping promote 'societal convergence built around common recognition of the benefits of markets and liberal democracy'.[48] It was based on assumptions such as these that a series of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) economic summit meetings were set up as part of the Middle East Peace Process with the intention of creating a 'Middle East Common Market'.[49] Building upon a similar logic, Shimon Peres emphasized the crucial role market economies could play in the process of building peace in 'the New Middle East'.[50] A major obstacle facing policies based on such expectations, however, is not only limited to the relatively weak participation of many Middle Eastern countries in global production and finance. There is also a bias shared by some regional actors towards the forces of globalization that is shaped by historical and cultural dynamics. With memories of the colonial era still fresh in their minds, some (notably Islamist actors) feel that 'they must be vigilant and protect themselves against outside forces that have historically dominated the region'.[51]

Such views sceptical of the globalization process feed into Samuel Huntington's broader thesis that the future of world politics would be characterized by cooperation within and conflict between civilizations, and that although states would remain to be the major actors, their practices would increasingly be shaped by their civilizational identity. If indeed people do 'rally to those with

similar ancestry, religion, language and values, and institutions and distance them-selves from those with different ones', as Huntington thinks they would, then one should expect to see a clash between 'Islamic' and 'western' civilizations.[52] For Huntington's thesis is received very favourably in the 'Middle East' especially within certain Islamist circles who maintain that the 'western' and 'Islamic' civilizations cannot peacefully coexist.[53] The worldview from which the Islamist perspective derives befits Huntington's arguments to the extent that one could imagine the 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Taking Huntington's thesis further is Robert Kaplan who has argued that the kind of cultural and civilizational clash identified by Huntington could be further accelerated by increasing environmental degradation and the privatization of political violence thereby pushing the world towards fragmentation and even to the brink of anarchy.[54] Although the scarcity of natural resources and especially water and the (at times) violent activism of Islamist militants do seem to sub-stantiate Kaplan's thesis, he falls short of accounting for the role human agency plays in exacerbating these problems. Accordingly, he also fails to see how human agency may intervene to reverse these trends. Indeed one can detect a sense of fatalism in both Huntington's and Kaplan's approaches in that – to quote Mary Kaldor – they 'are only able to predict a new variant of the past or else the descent into chaos'.[55]

An interest in the role human agency could play in enhancing regional security could be found in the recently revamped 'Security Communities' approach.[56] Indeed one way to avoid the problem of incommensurability of these four perspectives on regional security would be to come up with an alternative perspective, that of a security community. It could be called the 'Southwest Asia and North Africa (Security) Community' – a relatively 'neutral' label that encompasses all states within the 'Middle East' (in)security complex.[57] This, however, should not be taken to mean that the other perspectives should be pushed aside. There is no reason why the Arab League, OIC, MENA Common Market, CSCM and a Helsinki Citizens Assembly-type organization should not co-exist (as is the case in Western Europe). After all, each would address different aspects of insecurity in the 'Middle East'. However, in order for these alternative per-spectives to peacefully co-exist, a broader framework of non-violent conflict culture needs to be created within which myriad actors could put their perspectives into practice without depriving the others of their own security. Non-regional actors such as the United States, Russia or the European Union could all participate in the creation (or become a part) of such a framework that currently exists in the form of security communities in some other parts of the world.

One major problem involved in adopting the security communities approach is that its conception of security could be considered too narrow. When first exploring the idea in the 1950s, Karl Deutsch and his colleagues' main concern was the cessation of inter-state violence. Although they thought up a wide range of (non-military) practices to achieve this aim, their ultimate concern remained the elimination of violence as a tool in addressing inter-state conflicts. On the other

hand, Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett's recent work on security communities, despite its in-depth analysis of the social construction of communities, nevertheless treats 'security' almost as an unproblematic concept.[58] The argument here is that defining security merely as the absence of inter-state violence and the creation of dependable expectations of peaceful change may not enable one to consider the structural roots of insecurity (i.e. structural violence). Being sensitive towards the structural causes of insecurity becomes even more relevant in parts of the world such as the 'Middle East' that are in the peripheries of the world economic system. Hence the need for students of Critical Security Studies to turn their attention to further developing the security communities approach.

A common conception of security needs ultimately to be agreed among the regional actors themselves. In the 'Middle East' some steps have already been taken towards raising regional actors' awareness regarding the dynamics of the security dilemma and the need for cooperative security practices such as the adoption of confidence-building measures (CBM) and non-offensive defence (NOD) postures. This, in turn, raises the question about the suitability of CBM and NOD in non-European settings. The Arms Control and Regional Security Working Group (formed as a part of the multilateral track of the Peace Process) considered such issues in its meetings.[59] So far the issue of weapons of mass destruction has prevented any major breakthrough in negotiations. Still, a promising development took place when Jordan, in the early 1990s, decided to break out of the cycle of arms and debt and opted for unilateral arms reductions. Jordanian policy-makers also proposed an 'arms-for-debt swap' according to which states that agree to become part of a region-wide arms control process would qualify for a reduction of their debts.[60] Considering the state of many Middle Eastern economies, this could be the long-sought incentive needed to get regional policy-makers to commit to arms control provided that external actors (i.e. arms suppliers) also recognize their responsibility and agree to cooperate.

Although it is tempting always to be pessimistic (note the first sentence of this section) about the potential for the creation of a security community in this of all regions amid escalating violence in Israel/Palestine and against the background of the US air strikes campaign against Afghanistan, and the US-led war on Iraq, when one considers the alternatives (such as the ones discussed above) this clearly is the only approach that has the potential to address the security concerns of myriad actors at multiple levels.[61] After decades of statist, military-focused and zero-sum thinking and practices that privileged the security of some while marginalizing others, the time has come for all those interested in building security in the 'Middle East' to decide whether they want to be agents of world-views that produce more of the same, or of alternative futures that try to address the multiple dimensions of regional insecurity.

Notes

1   While admitting that the 'Middle East' is a problematic concept, it will still be employed here, for – following Kären Wigen and Martin Lewis – it is assumed that problems of language are inescapable in a project involving the deconstruction of existing representations of world politics. As Wigen and Lewis put it, 'in order to continue talking about the world, we must have the cake of metageography while deconstructing it too'. See Kären E. Wigen and Martin W. Lewis, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.17.

2   Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 3rd edn (New York: Longman, 2000), p.163.

3   Jonathan Freedland, 'We Can't do it by Bombing', *Guardian Unlimited,* 19 October 2001, http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4280542,00.html (31 October 2001).

4   Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd edn (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991); Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17, 1991, pp.313–26; J. Ann Tickner, 'Re-visioning Security', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith (eds), *International Relations Theory Today* (Oxford: Polity, 1995), pp.175–97; Keith Krause and Michael Williams (eds), *Critical Security Studies: Concepts and Cases* (London: UCL Press, 1998).

5   See, for example, Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict and the International System* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1995), pp.8–12. The 'two worlds' approach also supports this view. See James M. Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, 'A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era', *International Organization*, 46(2), 1992, pp.467–91. For a critique, see Pinar Bilgin and Adam David Morton, 'Historicising Representations of "Failed States": Beyond the Cold War Annexation of the Social Sciences?', *Third World Quarterly*, 23(1), 2002, pp.55–80.

6   David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (eds), *Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State Press, 1997).

7   On the relationship between security and one's view of the world, see Ken Booth, 'Security and Self: Reflections of a Fallen Realist', in Krause and Williams (eds), *Critical Security Studies*, p.332.

8   For an overview, see P.J. Taylor, 'A Theory and Practice of Regions: The Case of Europes', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 9, 1991, pp.183–95.

9   Wigen and Lewis, *The Myth of Continents*, p.xiii.

10 An earlier reference to the 'Middle East' could be found in an article published by yet another military officer General Sir Thomas Edward Gordon of the British Army. It is not known whether General Gordon himself coined the term or merely adopted it. What seems to be beyond doubt is that the 'Middle East' was invented when thinking about and organizing action to secure the route to India. See, Pinar Bilgin, 'Inventing Middle Easts? The Making of Regions Through Security Discourses', in Bjørn Ulav Utvik and Knut S. Vikør (eds), *The Middle East in a Globalised World* (Bergen: Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 2000), pp.10–37.

11 Alfred Thayer Mahan, 'Persian Gulf and International Relations', *The National Review*, September 1902, pp.27–45.

12 Roderic H. Davison, 'Where is the Middle East?' *Foreign Affairs,* 38, 1960, p.669.

13 Davison, 'Where is the Middle East?'

14 Robert D. Blackwill and Michael Stürmer (eds), *Allies Divided: Transatlantic Policies for the Greater Middle East* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1997); Zalmay Khalilzad, 'Challenges in the Greater Middle East', in David C. Gompert and F. Stephen Larrabee (eds), *America and Europe: A Partnership for a New Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.191–217.

15 Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*, rev. edn (London: Vintage, 1991).

16 Simon Dalby, 'Critical Geopolitics: Discourse, Difference and Dissent', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 9, 1991, p.274.

17 These four perspectives are ideal types and were adapted from Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Future Visions of the Arab Middle East', *Security Dialogue*, 27(4), 1996, pp.425–36.

18 Simona Sharoni, 'Gender and the Israeli–Palestinian Accord: Feminist Approaches to International Politics,' in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p.116.

19   Edward W. Said, 'American Intellectuals and Middle East Politics,' in Bruce Robins (ed.), *Intellectuals: Aesthetics, Politics and Academics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), pp.146–8.

20   Ken Booth, 'Three Tyrannies', in Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler (eds), *Human Rights in a Globalised World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.43.

21   For a discussion, see Pinar Bilgin, 'Security Studies: Theory/Practice', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, XII(2), 1999, pp.31–42; Jef Huysmans, 'Defining Social Constructivism in Security Studies: The Normative Dilemma of Writing Security', *Alternatives,* 27, 2002, pp.41–62.

22   Majid Khadduri, 'The Problem of Regional Security in the Middle East', *Middle East Journal*, 11, Winter 1957, pp.11–22.

23   Anthony Lake, 'Confronting Backlash States', *Foreign Affairs*, 73(2), March–April 1994, pp.45–55.

24   Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. into English by Mary Jo Lakeland (London: Virago, 1993), pp.1–10.

25   R.B.J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

26   'President Bush Outlines Progress in Operation Iraqi Freedom', 16 April 2003, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/04/iraq/20030416-9.html (28 July 2003).

27   Abdel Monem Said Aly Abdel Aal, 'The Superpowers and Regional Security in the Middle East', in Mohammed Ayoob (ed.), *Regional Security in the Third World: Case Studies from Southeast Asia and the Middle East* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p.198.

28   Abdel Monem Said Aly, 'The Shattered Consensus – Arab Perceptions of Security', *The International Spectator,* XXXI(4), October–December 1996, pp.26–7.

29   One could add the Berbers, Copts and Jews to the list depending on one's definition of 'Arab'. For a discussion, see Bassam Tibi, 'From Pan-Arabism to the Community of Sovereign States: Redefining the Arab and Arabism in the Aftermath of the Second Gulf War', in Michael C. Hudson (ed.), *The Middle East Dilemma: The Politics and Economics of Arab Integration* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp.92–106.

30   Baghat Korany, 'National Security in the Arab World: the Persistence of Dualism', in Dan Tschirgi (ed.), *The Arab World Today* (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp.161–78.

31   See Said Aly, 'The Shattered Consensus', for a summary of their views.

32   Korany, 'National Security in the Arab World', p.173.

33   See, for example, Buzan, *People, States and Fear*; Booth, 'Security and Emancipation'.

34   Saad Eddin Ibrahim, 'Arab Elites and Societies After the Gulf Crisis', in Tschirgi (ed.), *The Arab World Today*, pp.77–89.

35   For example, King Hussein's attempt to break with Iraq and join the 'Peace Camp' in 1995 was short-lived (until 1997) largely due to public pressure that reacted against stepping outside the boundaries drawn by the so-called 'Arab consensus'. See Marc Lynch, 'Abandoning Iraq: Jordan's Alliances and the Politics of State Identity', *Security Studies* 8(2–3), 1998–9, pp.347–88.

36   Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

37   Ibrahim, 'Future Visions', p.432.

38   Chaiwat Satha-Anand, 'The Nonviolent Crescent: Eight Theses on Muslim Nonviolent Action', in Ralph E. Crow, Philip Grant and Saad E. Ibrahim (eds), *Arab Nonviolent Political Struggle in the Middle East* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p.28. On 'structural violence', see Johan Galtung, 'Violence, Peace and Peace Research', *Journal of Peace Research,* 6(3), 1969, pp.167–92.

39   Eleanor Abdella Doumato, 'Women and the Stability of Saudi Arabia', *Middle East Report*, July–August 1991, pp.34–7.

40   Satha-Anand, 'The Nonviolent Crescent', 28.

41   George Joffé (ed.), *Perspectives on Development: The Euro–Mediterranean Partnership* (London: Frank Cass, 1999).

42   On IPRA, see Elise Boulding (ed.), *Building Peace in the Middle East: Challenges for States and Civil Society* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), pp.7–66; on Egypt's policies, see Mohammed El-Sayed Selim, 'Mediterraneanism: A New Dimension in Egypt's Foreign Policy', *Kurasat Istratijiya* [Strategic Papers], 4(27), 1995, http://www.acpss.org/ekuras/ek27/ek27a.html (2 July 1999).

43 Ken Booth, 'Security Within Global Transformation?', in Ken Booth (ed.), *Statecraft and Security: The Cold War and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.349.

44 Ole Wæver, 'Securitization and Desecuritization', in Ronnie Lipschutz (ed.), *On Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp.46–86.

45 Pinar Bilgin, Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones, 'Security Studies: The Next Stage?', *Nação e Defesa*, 84, 1998, pp.131–57.

46 This, however, is not to suggest that security is an endpoint. It is rather a process.

47 See Pinar Bilgin, 'Alternative Futures for the Middle East', *Futures: The Journal of Forecasting, Planning and Policy,* 33, 2001, pp.423–36, for a discussion of alternative future scenarios.

48 Andrew Hurrell and Ngaire Woods, 'Globalisation and Inequality', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies,* 24(3), 1995, p.449.

49 The first summit in Casablanca was attended by the representatives of many regional as well as extra-regional countries (including Israel and the PLO) but was boycotted by Syria, the Lebanon, Iran and Sudan.

50 Shimon Peres with Arye Naor, *The New Middle East* (Dorset: Element, 1993).

51 Kemal Dervis and Nemat Shafik, 'The Middle East and North Africa: A Tale of Two Futures', *Middle East Journal,* 52(4), 1998, p.508.

52 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone, 1998), p.126.

53 Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Order* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1998).

54 Robert D. Kaplan, 'The Coming Anarchy,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, February 1994, pp.44–76.

55 Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Globalized Era* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), p.141.

56 Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957); Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds), *Security Communities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

57 On security complexes, see Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, pp.186–229.

58 Adler and Barnett acknowledge – albeit in passing – the increasing prominence of non-military dimensions of security such as 'economic, environmental and social welfare concerns' in state practices. See Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, 'Security Communities in Theoretical Perspective', in Adler and Barnett (eds), *Security Communities*, p.4.

59 Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan, *Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for the Middle East* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997), pp.73–96, 103–7.

60 Yahya M. Sadowski, *Scuds or Butter? The Political Economy of Arms Control in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institute, 1993).

61 Pinar Bilgin, 'Beyond Statism in Security Studies? Human Agency and Security in the Middle East', *The Review of International Affairs*, 2(1), Autumn 2002, pp.100–18.