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## **Remapping the geopolitics of globalization in the Middle East**

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This essay argues that both the Iraq war and the broader post-9/11 American efforts to transform the Middle East were policies that followed from by the view--dominant in most public and scholarly understandings of the Middle East--that the peoples and states of the Middle East have been isolated from the processes of globalization and/or culturally inclined to resist its effects. I refer to such a view of the region as the geopolitical imaginary of "Arab exceptionalism." In the wake of 9/11, this understanding of the region led many media commentators, policy makers, and international relations scholars to conceive of the rise of security threats emanating from the Middle East as a product of the failure of the peoples and states of the region to embrace globalization rather than as a product of geopolitical conflict. These discourses shaped by Arab exceptionalism framed public understandings of the Bush Doctrine and facilitated the Bush administration's efforts to invade Iraq as part of a broader effort to transform the political and economic landscape of the Middle East.

The rest of paper seeks to invert our understanding of the notion of Arab exceptionalism and reveal how geopolitics and US strategy has shaped the political economy of the Middle East. The region's status as a territorial exemption from globalization, I suggest, is not simply a

reflection of the “closed” nature of domestic institutions and political cultures but a product of the geopolitical fragmentation of the region and the nature of the region’s position within the global geopolitical order. Moreover, I suggest that US policy since 1945 has helped shaped these conditions. I do not argue that the US has sought keep the region from developing its economic potential. Instead, I show how geopolitical conflicts and the nature of US interests in the region in the post World War II era have prevented the US from realizing the integration of the Middle East into a US-dominated global economic order in the same way the regions of Europe and Asia have been. In other words, the condition of Arab exceptionalism is an effect of regional geopolitics and US efforts to transform the domestic political and economic systems of the region--by trade, aid, or force--will fail to integrate the region in the US-dominated global economic order will continue to fail unless they are resolved.

This argument hinges on the notion that the formation of “regions,” in which proximate states develop closer economic, political, and securities ties and networks, is critical to the process of global economic integration that characterizes globalization.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as witnessed in Europe and Asia, processes of regionalism have historically been facilitated by US strategic support. The US often supports such regionalisms because they allow the US to project non-territorial forms of power, that is to say ideological, economic, and cultural influence over domestic arrangements in these states that helps support long term American interests. But American efforts to develop such forms of non-territorial power across the Middle East through its project for economic and political reform in the region have failed. As a result, the US has to rely on intensifying its projection of territorial power.

In the early Cold War, American policy makers quickly identified the Middle East as a strategic region and sought to contain Soviet expansion and counter the appeal of communism in the region by prompting decolonization and economic modernization under the leadership of nationalist elites. Some American policy makers and private firms even sought to incorporate the region in to the postwar international economic order by assisting national development and regional economic integration. This effort, however, has since been hampered by regional geopolitical conflicts, divergent forms of political identification, and the nature of US strategic interests in the region. The US invasion of Iraq can be understood as an effort to transcend these

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<sup>1</sup> See Peter Katzenstein, *A World of Regions: Asia and Europe in the American Imperium* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

challenges as part of a broader strategy to forge a regional order and integrate the region into globalization by seeking to impose its own vision for what it redefined as the “Greater Middle East.” Rather than support the development of an Arab or Middle Eastern regionalism by resolving regional geopolitical conflicts or at least containing and deterring regional security threats, US policy has only increased geopolitical fragmentation and regional insecurity.

I conclude by suggesting that the reform of the political economies of the Middle East and their integration into a (US-dominated) global economic order will first require the resolution of geopolitical conflicts that have polarized the region and the development of a new American geopolitical imaginary for the region that replaces Arab exceptionalism by a more pluralist vision of how the heterogeneous Middle East might be integrated into the global political economy.

### **The Middle East: Disconnected from globalization?**

The formulation of the Bush administration’s policies for transforming the Middle East, as well as the building of popular support for them in the United States, cannot be understood without noting the prevailing view that the region was a territorial exception from the process of globalization. In the 1990s, when debates about globalization dominated academic and policy journals, the Middle East was often excluded from narratives about post-Cold War trends towards economic liberalization, global market integration, and democratization. As Fred Halliday observes, when globalization is viewed as a process of “integration and homogenization...the Middle East appears in some ways as to be relatively outside the set of processes that accelerated in the 1990s and that characterize globalization in its three main aspects: economic, political, and socio-economic.”<sup>2</sup> It is not uncommon to find references to “the region’s status as eternally out of step with history and immune to the trends affecting other parts of the world.”<sup>3</sup> When the Middle East was mentioned in the globalization literature, it was usually to note, by contrast, the region’s failure to follow these “global” trends.

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<sup>2</sup> Fred Halliday, "The Middle East and the politics of differential integration," in *Globalization and the Middle East: Islam, Economy, and Politics*, ed. Toby Dodge and Richard Higgot (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002), 37. Note that Halliday goes on to suggest that globalization in the Middle East should be instead understood as a process of ‘differential integration.’

<sup>3</sup> Paul Aarts, "The Middle East: a region without regionalism or the end of exceptionalism?," *Third World Quarterly* 20, 5 (1999): 911.

In this context, many scholars of the contemporary Middle East, often marginalized from the ongoing globalization debates, focused on compiling explanations for why the region was being “left behind” by globalization. These scholars showed how access to exceptional oil resources, labor remittances, and strategic aid created so-called “rentier states” able to forgo economic liberalization and globally competitive production.<sup>4</sup> Using approaches drawn from comparative political economy and historical sociology, these scholars sought to argue that the nature of Middle Eastern states was a product of accidents of geology, legacies of colonialism, the structure of strategic alliances, and contingent on the outcome of domestic and regional political struggles. Nevertheless, the impression that these states represented a regional cluster of outlier cases, which even many scholars of the region viewed as lacking prospects for transformation, suggested to many observers outside of the Middle East that Arab exceptionalism was a product of the distinct history, culture, and/or religion of these societies. Such a view of the Arab world has been eloquently espoused by Fouad Ajami in a series of books and through his ubiquitous media commentary and well-penned opinion essays.<sup>5</sup>

Consistent with Ajami’s portrayal of the region, many popular and academic observers came to emphasize the cultural basis of what they viewed as the region’s resistance to the integrative forces of globalization. Some, like historian Bernard Lewis, suggested this rejection of globalization was a product of the Islamic world’s historic failure to adapt to the economic and political practices of Western modernity.<sup>6</sup> Lewis, a close advisor to the Vice President was one of the most influential Middle East experts whose ideas shaped the Bush Doctrine.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it was Lewis’ portrayal of Arab rejection of Western modernity that led Samuel

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<sup>4</sup> Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in *The Rentier State*, ed. H. Beblawi and G. Luciani (London: Croom Helm, 1987), Giacomo Luciani, "Resources, Revenues, and Authoritarianism in the Arab World: Beyond the Rentier State?," in *Political Liberalization and Democratization in the Arab World: Volume 1, Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Rex Brynen, Bahgat Korany, and Paul Nobel (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), Lisa Anderson, "Prospects for Liberalism in North Africa: Identities and Interests in Pre-Industrial Welfare States," in *Islam, Democracy, and the State in North Africa*, ed. John P. Entelis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *The Price of Wealth: Economies and Institutions in the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), Clement M. Henry and Robert Springborg, *Globalization and the Politics of Development in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001)..

<sup>5</sup> Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), Fouad Ajami, *Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage." *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990): 47-60, "What Went Wrong?" *The Atlantic Monthly* (January 2002).

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Cheney, "Vice President's Remarks at the World Affairs Council of Philadelphia Luncheon Honoring Professor Bernard Lewis." Office of the Vice President, 2006. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/05/20060501-3.html>.

Huntington to oppose the view of globalization as a process leading towards increased global interdependence and the expansion of universal values and processes with his vision of a “clash of civilizations” in which the differences between “the West” and the Islamic world are understood as based on essential cultural differences.<sup>8</sup>

In an widely popularized formulation that drew on both political economy and political culture approaches, philosopher Benjamin Barber portrays globalization (termed in his version “McWorld”) as a Western-led process of homogenization that displaces and dislocates local practices and cultures.<sup>9</sup> In discussing the Middle East, Barber notes that the region has well developed ideological resources—drawing on Islamic sources—for mobilizing localist, anti-modernist forces in reaction to globalization processes (which he refers to as “jihad”). In his book popularizing similar ideas, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman suggests that while free-market capitalism had been transforming the globe, the people of the Middle East were still caught up in fights over territorially rooted symbols while resisting globalization under the battle cry of “I don’t want to be global. I want to be local,” they were “ready to go to war to protect their culture from the global.”<sup>10</sup>

While these various approaches emphasize different causes and possibilities for change they all view the Middle East as disconnected or left behind by globalization and other post-Cold War trends towards economic liberalization, global market integration, and democratization.

### **After 9/11: The collapse of distance in IR theory**

In the wake of September 11, 2001, the Middle East emerged as the focus of spatialized debates about the meaning and future of globalization in which the concept of Arab exceptionalism shaped popular images and policy options. For example, in an early post 9/11 essay *Newsweek* columnist Fareed Zakaria argued that the Arab world was not “ready to confront the age of globalization” nor “adapt to the new global economy.”<sup>11</sup> These perspectives help lead the administration and the general American public to view the Middle East as a region of

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Huntington, “The Clash of Civilization?,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, 3 (Summer 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin R. Barber, *Jihad Vs. McWorld: How globalism and tribalism are reshaping the world* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1999), 280.

<sup>11</sup> Fareed Zakaria, “Failed Ideas,” *Newsweek*, October 15, 2001.

dysfunctional states, economies, and societies with little awareness or appreciation of the geopolitical factors that may account for such conditions.<sup>12</sup>

Many media commentators, policy makers, and international relations scholars quickly came to argue that the attacks of September 11 were due primarily to the failure of the states of the Middle East to globalize and expand the economic opportunities and political liberties for their peoples. Prior to 9/11, countries like Iran and Iraq were defined as “rogue states” subject to strategic containment, political isolation, and economic sanctions. With the 9/11 attacks, however, many scholars and analysts in the United States hastily suggested that the territorial distance isolating the dangerous Middle East from the American homeland had been collapsed by the terrorist attacks. The mobile, stateless terrorist networks of *al Qaeda* seemed to represent the unleashing of a newly discovered dangerous consequence of the expansion of global transportation and communications. For example, in the wake of 9/11 Robert Keohane observed that “geographic space, which has been seen as a natural *barrier* and a locus of human barriers, now must be seen as a *carrier* as well... The barrier conception of geographic space... was finally shown to be thoroughly obsolete on September 11.”<sup>13</sup>

National security analyst and former Pentagon strategist Thomas P.M. Barnett went further and suggested that American grand strategy should be defined by the notion that in the post-cold war world “disconnectedness defines danger.”<sup>14</sup> He graphically defines what he calls this “horizontal” way of thinking by mapping out the locations of major post Cold War military operations. These zones of operations fall almost entirely within the region of what he calls the “non-integrating gap.” This vast region, he suggests, is disconnected from the global flows of people, capital, and security that sustain mutually assured dependence across “the core.” The resulting territorial division of the globe is what Barnett described as “The Pentagon’s New Map” defining American security challenges in the 21st century. Rather than read this ordering of the planet as a legacy of structural underdevelopment, as world systems theorists do, Barnett writes:

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<sup>12</sup> At the time Zakaria himself was taking part in a strategy session with Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense and a critical figure behind the invasion of Iraq. While Zakaria’s name did not appear on the resulting report, according to Bob Woodward the report “which supported the invasion of Iraq, caused Mr. Bush to focus on the ‘malignancy’ of the Middle East situation.” See Julie Bosman, “Secret Iraq Meeting Included Journalists,” *New York Times*, October 9, and Correction October 21 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Robert O. Keohane, *Power and Governance in a Partially Globalized World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 275, 6..

<sup>14</sup> See Thomas P.M. Barnett, “The Pentagon’s New Map,” *Esquire*, March, 2003, Thomas P.M. Barnett, *The Pentagon’s New Map* (New York: Berkley Books, 2004).

September 11 told me that globalization's uneven spread around the planet delineated more than just a frontier separating the connected from the disconnected—it marks the front lines in a struggle of historic proportions. The combatants in this conflict harbor very different dreams about the future.<sup>15</sup>

Barnett views globalization as a process in which the local dissolves into the emerging global mosaic, but worries that the Middle East is resisting such integration.<sup>16</sup> Due to its vast oil resources as well as its religious and cultural proclivities, Barnett argues, the Middle East continues to be the region “most disconnected from the global economy by many measures and it's getting worse with time.... Simply put, the Middle East exports oil and terrorism and virtually nothing else of significance to the global economy.”<sup>17</sup> In his view, its states are run by elites who benefit from authoritarian control over their closed economies and insulated societies that tend to “harbor very different dreams about the future.” In particular, he notes that “Saddam Hussein's outlaw regime was dangerously disconnected from the globalizing world...He was the Demon of Disconnectedness.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Defining an American response**

Soon after 9/11 the putative failure of the Middle East to come to terms with the challenges of globalization became a vital and pressing concern for American foreign policy. The influential human rights scholar Michael Ignatieff succinctly articulated the new attitude found across the political spectrum when he wrote, “Terror has collapsed distance, and with this collapse has come a sharpened American focus on the necessity of bringing order to the frontier zones.”<sup>19</sup> In this context scholars and policy makers from, the internationalist left to the neoconservative far right, argued that the US must seek to transform the Middle East to rid it of the conditions that

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<sup>15</sup> Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map*, 48.

<sup>16</sup> While Barnett suggests that the mosaic must be adaptable and inclusive—for example by accommodating the principles of Islamic finance—this process requires embracing the “emerging rule set” which Americas, he claims, are so “unconsciously comfortable with” since they “so intimately reflect what we have become—a multicultural free market economy whose minimal rule set allow for maximum freedom...globalization empowers the individual at the expense of the collective, and that very American transformation of culture is quite scary for traditional societies.” See *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 217, 18.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 286. For a critical reading of Barnett, see Sue Roberts, Anna Secord, and Matthew Sparke, “Neoliberal Geopolitics,” *Antipode* 35, 5 (2003).

<sup>19</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “The Burden,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 5, 2003. 50.

fostered international terrorism. In early 2003, one of the most influential voices across the American media and inside White House policy circles, wrote in *Foreign Affairs*:

For a while, the failures of were confined to its own terrain, but migration and transnational terror altered all that. The fire that began in the Arab world spread to other shores, with the United States itself the principal target of an aggrieved people who no longer believed that justice could be secured in one's own land, from one's own rulers. It was September 11 and its shattering surprise, in turn, that tipped the balance on Iraq away from containment and toward regime change and "rollback."<sup>20</sup>

Following Ajami's narrative, in the run up to the invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration drew upon the post 9/11 logic for promoting economic and political reform in the region, rooted in Arab exceptionalism, with an exaggeration of the "gathering threat" posed on Iraq by evoking images of deterritorialized dangers, such as international terrorism to argue the case for regime change in Iraq. In December 2002, just as president George W. Bush was beginning to mobilize efforts towards enacting regime change in Iraq, Secretary of State Colin Powell announced the "Middle East Partnership Initiative" (MEPI) to promote political, economic, and educational development in the Middle East. In a speech promoting the program, Powell noted that:

The spread of democracy and free markets, fueled by the wonders of the technological revolution, has created a dynamo that can generate prosperity and human well-being on an unprecedented scale. But this revolution has left much of the Middle East behind.<sup>21</sup>

The MEPI was the first major American policy initiative to explicitly seek to redress the "job gap," "freedom gap," and "knowledge gap" between the Arab world and global trends. Powell was clear to note that these "gaps" were not a (self-serving) American view of the region but regional deficits defined by the UN-sponsored *Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR)* drafted by leading Arab intellectuals and scholars calling for wide-ranging reforms.<sup>22</sup> In the wake of the US invasion of Iraq, the Bush administration further defined several programs to promote the integration of the Middle East into the global economy. In a speech the week after declaring

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<sup>20</sup> Fouad Ajami, "Iraq and the Arabs' Future," *Foreign Affairs* January/February (2003).

<sup>21</sup> Colin L. Powell, "The U.S.-Middle East Partnership Initiative: Building Hope for the Years Ahead, Speech at the The Heritage Foundation," December 12, 2002. Available from <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2002/15920.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2002), UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society* (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2003).

the “end of major combat operations” in Iraq, President Bush argued that “the Arab world...is largely missing out on the economic progress of our time” and proposed “the establishment of a US-Middle East free trade area within a decade, to bring the Middle East into an expanding circle of opportunity.”<sup>23</sup> Most forcefully, in November 2003, as American troops occupied Afghanistan and Iraq, President Bush boldly announced that “the United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom” for transforming the political and economic landscape of the Middle East. While the US had long sought to promote reform in the region, mostly to help ensure the stability of allied regimes, President Bush now defined the lack of reform as a security threat to the United States:

As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export [as experienced on September 11, 2001].<sup>24</sup>

The Bush administration and its supporters argued that the “forward strategy of freedom” was a new turn in US policy because it signaled the US would no longer excuse or accommodate the lack of “freedom” in the Middle East while stressing that it sought to achieve the same results that the US efforts to promote freedom in Europe and Asia did:

This strategy requires the same persistence and energy and idealism we have shown before. And it will yield the same results. As in Europe, as in Asia, as in every region of the world, the advance of freedom leads to peace.<sup>25</sup>

By bringing political and economic freedom to the Middle East through the projection of US power in the region--as the US did previously in Europe and Asia (with the defeat of totalitarian regimes during World War II and then with its triumph in the Cold War)--the US would be able to establish peace and diminish threats to US interests. Regime change in Iraq lay at the center of this strategy. As US trade representative Robert Zoellick wrote in the summer of 2003:

The reconstruction and reopening of Iraq presents an opportunity for change -- a chance for the people of the Arab world to ask why their region, once a nucleus of trade, has been largely excluded from the gains of this modern era of globalization.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> George W. Bush, "Remarks by the President in commencement address at the University of South Carolina," (May 9, 2003) The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2003. Available from [usinfo.state.gov](http://usinfo.state.gov).

<sup>24</sup> George W. Bush, "President Bush Discusses Freedom in Iraq and Middle East:Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy, United States Chamber of Commerce," (November 6, 2003) The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2003. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/11/20031106-2.html>.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Robert B. Zoellick, "A Return to the Cradle of Free Trade," *Washington Post*, June 23 2003.

A few months later, the Bush administration tried to invent its own new geographical moniker, the “Greater Middle East” to refer to the countries of the Arab world, plus Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, and Israel as a discrete region. A draft memo outlining the American proposal for a “Greater Middle East Partnership Initiative” (GMEPI) to be discussed at the 2004 G-8 summit explains that:

The Greater Middle East region poses a unique challenge and opportunity for the international community...So long as the region’s pool of politically and economically disenfranchised individuals grows, we will witness an increase in extremism, terrorism, international crimes and illegal migration .<sup>27</sup>

The memo supports its vision by a review of data drawn from the Arab Human Development Reports (AHDRs) starkly illustrating the various “gaps” between conditions in the Arab states and the rest of the world. The GMEPI announces the region is at a crossroads and must choose between continuing on the same path “adding every year to its population of underemployed, undereducated, and political disenfranchised youth” or, instead, taking the “alternative...route to reform.” To stem the tide of the threatening flows emanating from the Middle East, the GMEPI called for counter flows of expert advice and joint programs to help promote political, economic and education reform across the region. In its economic component, the GMEPI called for unleashing the region’s private sector potential by liberalizing financial services and expanding regional trade. The GMEPI specifically mentions as its model the experience of East Europe whose inclusion into the global economy was initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war. The “fall” of the Baathist regime in Iraq was viewed as providing an analogous impetus igniting a similar regional transition to free market democracy.

### **The eclipse of the “Greater Middle East”**

The drafters of the GMEPI sought credibility by framing the plan’s goal in terms of the concerns and mission of the critical assessment of the state of political and economic conditions in the Middle East made by the AHDRs.<sup>28</sup> Since the initial 2002 report, the AHDRs have been met by

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<sup>27</sup> Dar al Hayat, "U.S. working paper for G-8 sherpas: G-8 Greater Middle East Partnership," *al Hayat*, February 13 2003. Available from <http://english.daralhayat.com/Spec/02-2004/Article-20040213-ac40bdaf-c0a8-01ed-004e-5e7ac897d678/story.html>.

<sup>28</sup> UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2003*.

broad applause in the political, media, and academic centers of the United States and elsewhere, for being a sign that the Arabs had finally correctly diagnosed their crisis. One assessment of the 2002 report by a “pro-Israel” policy center declares that, “while many Arab intellectuals rail against globalization, the report accepts it as an inevitable consequence of modernity.”<sup>29</sup> At the time, Thomas Friedman wrote “if you want to understand the milieu that produced bin Ladenism, and will reproduce it if nothing changes, read this report.”<sup>30</sup>

American officials represented their policies as based on bilateral and multilateral “partnerships” with the peoples and states of the Middle East. They emphasized American interest in supporting “grass roots” NGO-organized reform projects, small and medium sized private sector firms, and citizens groups. By incorporating references to the AHDR and the stories of non-state Arab actors, American policies sought to suggest that the script for reform, like the concepts of freedom and prosperity, were as universal as globalization and it was time that the Arab world no longer remained an exception to it. And by suggesting its policies seek to advance universal human goals, the Bush administration argued that its vision for regional transformation represents a rejection of the notion of “Arab exceptionalism” that has supposedly dominated the “realist” policies of past administrations and currently restricts the imagination of the critics of the Bush vision for reform. But its understanding of “Arab exceptionalism,” as explained by David Brooks is “the belief that while most of the world is chugging toward a globally integrated future, the Arab world remains caught in its own medieval whirlpool of horror....They just have to be walled off so they don’t hurt us again.”<sup>31</sup> Brooks claims President George W. Bush stands *against* this view, believing that “the Arabs aren’t very different from anybody else, and *can be brought* into the family of democratic nations.”<sup>32</sup> While Brooks seems to reject a cultural determinist view of Arab exceptionalism he nevertheless suggests that it is America’s role to “bring” the Arabs, implying that they are incapable of bringing themselves. In short, the well understood (at least across the Middle East) limitation of American reform efforts is that they seek “to link the ambitions of some people in the Arab world to the objectives of the

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<sup>29</sup> Middle East Quarterly, "How the arabs compare: Arab Human developmenr Report 2002," (Fall) 2002. Available from [www.meforum.org/article/513](http://www.meforum.org/article/513).

<sup>30</sup> Thomas L. Friedman, "Arabs at the crossroads," *New York Times*, July 3 2002.

<sup>31</sup> David Brooks, "It’s Not Isolationism, but It’s Not Attractive," *Ibid.*, March 5, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, , emphasis added.

United States, not the objectives of the United States to the ambitions of people in the Arab world.”<sup>33</sup>

The purpose of the GMEPI memo was to outline for the G-8 advanced industrialized states a script for US-led reform in the Middle East, but it was derailed when it was leaked to the pan-Arab daily newspaper *al Hayat*. The publication of the memo caused a firestorm of criticism from not only critics of US policy but also the political leaders of American allies in the Middle East and Europe as well as the reform-minded Arab intelligentsia such the drafters of the AHDRs themselves. Marwan Muasher, the reform-minded foreign minister of Jordan—one of America’s closest allies in the region—publicly criticized the GMEPI arguing that “reform is important and needed in the Arab world...but for it to work we need ownership of the process, not a one-for-all blue-print from Washington...our objective is for this document never to see the light.”<sup>34</sup> Nader Fergany, a principle author of the AHDRs, was also critical commenting that it is the American administration’s “arrogant attitude in respect to the rest of the world, which causes it to behave as if it can decide the fate of states and peoples.”<sup>35</sup>

Like the Bush administration's justification of the Iraq war, American proposals for political and economic reform in the Middle East explicitly state that they promote American (or in some cases “Western”) security interests by suppressing the conditions that lead to “violence ready for export.” These proposals fail to address the security concerns of Arab states and the insecurity concerns of Arab societies.<sup>36</sup> The misalignment between various Arab security concerns and those of the Bush administration only became starker as Bush sought to define American grand strategy in terms of the “global war on terror.”<sup>37</sup> While most American allies in the region recognize the threat terrorist groups pose to their own regimes, the US invasion of Iraq has only exacerbated the domestic and regional security concerns of these regimes and their

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<sup>33</sup> Beirut-based *Al Safir* by editor Joseph Samahah as cited in David Isenberg, "Pennywise commitment to Arab democracy," Asian Times Online, Jan 9 2003. Available from [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/EA09Ak01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/EA09Ak01.html). See also Jeremy M. Sharp, "The Middle East Partnership Initiative: An Overview," (CRS Report for Congress #RS21457, July 23, 2003), 6..

<sup>34</sup> As cited in Steven R. Weisman, "U.S. Muffles Sweeping Call to Democracy in Mideast," *New York Times*, March 12 2004, A13..

<sup>35</sup> As cited in International Crisis Group, "The Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative: Imperiled at Birth," *Middle East Briefing* June 7 (2004): 6.

<sup>36</sup> On societal discourses of insecurity see Steve Niva, "Contested Sovereignties and Postcolonial Insecurities in the Middle East,," in *Cultures of Insecurity*, ed. Jutta Weldes *et al* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).. See also Ole Wæver, "Societal Security: The Concept," in *Identity, Migration and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, ed. Ole Wæver, *et al.* (London: Pinter, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> George W. Bush, "President Discusses War on Terror at National Endowment for Democracy," October 6 2005. Available from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/10/print/20051006-3.html>.

societies. A survey of Arab public opinion in 2003 predictably reported that “the bottom has fallen out” of support for the United States in the Arab and Islamic world.<sup>38</sup>

### **Remapping the geopolitics of globalization**

When faced with the charge from Arab as well as European critics that American reform efforts fail to adequately address security issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, American officials stressed that “we cannot allow reform be held hostage to the peace process. We believe we must pursue both *separately*.”<sup>39</sup> The failure to address such geopolitical issues in the process of promoting political and economic reform represents a rejection of the approach adopted by the US in its efforts to transform Europe and Asia since 1945. These experiences, however, were specifically noted as antecedents and models for the Bush administration’s policies in the Middle East. When the GMEPI was being developed “some policy makers envisioned a Helsinki process for the region,” but as Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers report “The Helsinki model started taking the administration in a direction it did not want to go, that is, toward a discussion about security issues.”<sup>40</sup> At the heart of the “Helsinki Process” (of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe) was the formation of agreements between NATO countries and the Warsaw Pact countries in which Western countries accepted the political division of Europe (thus accommodating Soviet security concerns) and in exchange the Soviet Union agreed to a component monitoring human rights.

More broadly, the Bush administration approach to the Middle East also differs from American efforts to forge US-dominated orders in Europe and East Asia by its failure to support Arab or Middle Eastern regionalism as a vehicle for advancing American regional interests and security. While concepts such as the “Greater Middle East” were invoked to frame US reform efforts, the rejection of consideration of geopolitical conflicts assured that such a regionalism would be unable to form. The critical role of region formation in the advancement of US interests in Europe and Asia is the focus of Katzenstein’s *A World of Regions* which presents a complex argument for understanding global politics in terms of “a world of regions, embedded

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<sup>38</sup> *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: Norton, 2004), 375.

<sup>39</sup> As cited in Paul Richter, “Bush to Pitch a New Mideast Reform Initiative to Region,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3 2004, emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup> Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, “The Greater Middle East Initiative: Off to a False Start,” (Carnegie Endowment, Policy Brief, 2004), 2.

deeply in an American imperium.”<sup>41</sup> Katzenstein’s eclectic approach shows how for the regions of Europe and Asia the processes that define their regional identity, boundaries, and institutional constitution operate simultaneously with the process of globalization and the expansion of non-territorial forms of American power. He terms Europe and Asia “porous” regions because while states are defined by their own regional institutions, identities, and societal arrangements based on national interests, their economies simultaneously are being integrated in the US-dominated global economy (in contrast for forms of closed regionalism). Moreover, he shows how these regions are vertically linked to, as well as shaped by, the United States and its policies. A critical insight of the book is to recognize “the importance of a state or small groups of states offering steady support for American purpose and power while also playing an important role in the region’s affairs.”<sup>42</sup> While each region defines its own internal structures and identity, American power is critical to the formation of such regions because “When U.S. governments see vital security and economic interests at stake, the United States supports the creation of regional powers, as it did in Germany and Japan.”<sup>43</sup> The text focuses on the cases of Europe and Asia which have developed as regions with core states, Germany and Japan, that have both been regional US allies as well as served as a model and center for the development of these regions’ own characteristics and cultures.<sup>44</sup>

In extending the implications of his argument to the Middle East, Katzenstein suggests an alternative reading of “Arab exceptionalism”:

U.S. strategic interest in the Middle East... has not replicated Europe’s or Asia’s porous regionalism. In the Middle East, *territorial conflicts have overwhelmed all other issues*.<sup>45</sup>

In the early Cold War American strategists viewed the Middle East as a vital strategic region where it was critical for the US to win hearts and minds and act to defuse regional conflicts. Such concerns even led President Eisenhower to oppose the efforts of its European allies Britain and France to topple the regime of Gamal Abdel Nasir in 1956 in the wake of Egypt’s

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<sup>41</sup> Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>44</sup> Katzenstein, also explains how the processes of ‘Americanization’ that defines these ties between the US and the regions works as a two way street, as ‘American’ popular culture, technology development, and security are co-shaped. See *Ibid.*, 198-207.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 208, emphasis added.

nationalization of the Suez Canal. In this same period, guided by modernization theory American policy was also influenced by an interest in promoting socioeconomic development across the region with the expectation that the rise of a new middle class would bring political stability and foster societies with an interest more closely aligned with those of the United States. American efforts to forge a regional Middle East security alliance and support nationalist modernizers, however, were derailed by regional conflicts and the rise of nationalist movements which viewed the US presence as a threat to their security and challenge to their national interests. American strategy in the Middle East soon shifted towards bilateral ties driven by *realpolitik* balancing and containment which has only perpetuated regional fragmentation and helped support the persistence of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. In contrast to US policy in towards Europe and Asia, the American project to forge porous regionalism in the Middle East was abandoned. While Middle East regimes that served American regional interests were directly supported by American economic and strategic aid, others have built ever more repressive forms of authoritarian rule in the face of the real and perceived threats to their regime's security from domestic challenges and external rivals.

The historical construction of American interests—seeking to maintain the steady flow of oil resources, prevent rival powers from control over these resources, limit Soviet influence in the region (during the Cold War), and protect Israeli security—led to regional alliances that prevented the cultivation of a regional supporter state to fulfill the function that Germany and Japan played in their respective regions. American regional allies Israel, Saudi Arabia, and pre-revolutionary Iran have been unsuitable candidates to play the role as the regional power that could help shape distinctive regional institutions, identities, and societal arrangements.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, US policy towards each of the states has only helped sustain their incompatibility.

Saudi Arabia's unique domestic political and cultural system are not only incompatible with American values, but the regime has often needed to distance itself publicly from the US in order to expand its regional influence. At the same time, the US has developed a close strategic and financial relationship with the Kingdom based on its vast oil resources which have enabled the US to act as the guarantor of a stable supply of (cheap) oil critical to the industrialization of the advanced industrial economies and their integration within the postwar global economic

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 238-43.

order. As Goldberg and Vitals suggest, the Saudi peninsula should be viewed not as a territorial exception to globalization but in fact the “crucible of globalization.”<sup>47</sup>

Iran is another major oil exporter. American modernization efforts such as the “White Revolution” sought to transform Iran into a stable, developed American ally. Even if such projects did not result in social dislocation and cultural alienation, (leading to the mobilization of Khomeini’s attacks on the Shah’s regime and the US presence in Iran) Iran remained isolated from much of the Arab world as even pro-US Arab regimes sought to exclude Iran from influence over Arab regional politics.

In some ways, Israel came to be viewed as America’s closest ally and the regional state that Americans most closely identify with. After a period of ambivalence in the 1950s, since the 1960s American’s ever closer strategic alliance with Israel (supported by vast amounts of financial aid) has further fragmented the region and limited the possibilities for a Middle East regionalism to only states that had forged peace treaties with it. The rise of the Oslo peace process and the Israel-Jordanian peace treaty in the mid 1990s gave rise to visions of a so-called “New Middle East” woven together through regional economic integration.<sup>48</sup> The New Middle East vision had Israel playing the role of US supporter state and regional model. The Oslo process, however, failed to construct an Israeli-Palestinian security community in which Israeli and Palestinian authorities would need to work together to insure the security of both. Regionally, the vision failed because the existing balance of power in the New Middle East was viewed by many Arabs not as a structure for cooperation on an equal basis but as leading to Israeli regional hegemony.<sup>49</sup> As a result, in Jordan and Egypt—the Arab states with peace treaties with Israel—have seen the mobilization of “anti-normalization” forces. These powerful social movements have remained a critical challenge to these regimes often leading them to close down spaces of political dissent and reverse trends towards democratization.

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<sup>47</sup> Ellis Goldberg and Robert Vitalis, "The Arabian Peninsula: Crucible of Globalization," *EUI Working Paper* (2002).

<sup>48</sup> See Shimon Peres and Arye Naor, *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993).. On Egyptian debates about replacing the Arabist state system with one based around ‘Middle Easternism,’ see Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 229-36.

<sup>49</sup> For an alternative reading of the ‘New Middle East’ vision by a Egyptian playwright that emphasizes not the dissolving of difference but how Israeli/Palestinian/Egyptian identities are interwoven through overlapping histories and diaspora communities, see Ali Salem, *A Drive to Israel: An Egyptian Meets His Neighbor*, trans. Robert J. Silverman (Tel Aviv, Israel: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University; English translation of essays published in 1994 in *Al-Akhbar Al-Youm* (Cairo), 2003).

In the wake of the decline of the New Middle East, US policy in the Middle East more boldly backed Israeli security interests while seeking to promote Jordan as its “model” for Arab states. Before leaving office the Clinton administration signed a bilateral free trade agreement with Jordan viewing it as a model for promoting Middle East prosperity and the integration of the region into the global economy. Jordan, however, has proven too fragile and dependent to serve as a regional model. Jordan’s economy has been sustained in large part by US aid (totaling in some years nearly \$1 billion) and private contractors using its territory as a base for their work in Iraq. Moreover, as Moore and Schrank has shown, its free trade zones are mostly exploited by Asian firms looking for access to the US market while the economic activity in these zones “make almost no contribution to growth, employment or long-term human development.”<sup>50</sup> In political terms, surrounded by violent conflicts in Israel/Palestine and Iraq, which both bleed into Jordan as well as shape the political attitudes of Jordanians (most of which are of Palestinian descent while many have family, business, or religious ties to Iraq’s Sunni Arabs), the Jordanian regime has only back-slided on its previous commitments to political liberalization. Moreover, Jordan is too small and its regime too externally dependent to act as a force in shaping regional political and economic patterns. Its stability is too fragile and often the regime must balance *against* societal identities and political views, as exhibited in the “Jordan First” campaign that seeks to re-align societal identities with the regime’s priorities rather than with regional concerns.

### **Reinterpreting the geopolitical logic of the Iraq war**

By the time George W. Bush took office the Oslo peace process was dead and the New Middle East vision forgotten. More critically, Iran was expanding its regional influence and the post Gulf War containment regime for Iraq was eroding more every day as Jordan and Turkey became more willing to let Iraq cheat on UN sanctions and other US allies in the Gulf considered normalizing relations with Iraq. In addition, in the wake of the 9/11 attacks US-Saudi relations were faced with their most serious crisis since the 1973 oil boycott. The Iraq war is better thought of as the endgame of the “dual containment,” the American strategy for securing its

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<sup>50</sup> Pete W. Moore and Andrew Schrank, "Commerce and Conflict: U.S. effort to counter terrorism with trade may backfire," *Middle East Policy* 10, 1 (Fall 2003):116.

vital interests in the Gulf, rather than a capitalist driven fist-led effort to impose neoliberalism on a broken economy. It was expected to serve a vehicle for re-establishing the American strategic position in the Middle East and integrating the region into the US-dominated global order. As Katzenstein suggests:

The intractable Middle East and the search for an activist response to the attacks of 9/11 have moved U.S. foreign policy in a radically new direction...One important reason for the [Iraq] war is...very much in line with the central argument of this book. A democratic and capitalist regional supporter might redefine the politics of the entire region. From this perspective it is not far-fetched to look to the revival of a democratic, secular Iraq as a magnet for reorienting the politics of the entire Middle East.<sup>51</sup>

Michael Mann summarizes Katzenstein's claim in his review of the book: "The Iraq war resulted from the grand strategy of the American imperium: to find one loyal, influential ally for each region."<sup>52</sup> While Katzenstein does not fully spell it out, a democratic multi-ethnic Iraq led but not dominated by Shia-based parties could, in theory, serve as a regional Arab power that could maintain cordial relations with Iran while not posing a regional threat to Israel. While the Bush administration's expectations that a post-war Iraq would generate pressures across the Middle East for democratic liberalization were overblown, such a state, supported by the effective use of its oil revenue, could have served as a regional economic powerhouse sustaining transnational capital and labor flows.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, since its invention in the 1920s, one of the main deterrents to political stability and economic development in Iraq has been the artificial state's built-in insecurities due to its ethnic composition and regional position. A federal, democratic political system and an American security umbrella *might* have been a way to finally address the issues that led to both expansionist wars under Saddam and internal repression.

Katzenstein's model suggests a "logic" for both the Iraq war and the Bush project for promoting economic and political reform across the Middle East. The depiction of the geopolitical logic for a "new Iraq" to play such a regional role only highlights the flawed and

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<sup>51</sup> Katzenstein, *A World of Regions*, 242.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Mann, "Review: A World of Regions," *New Political Economy* 11, 2 (June 2006):309.

<sup>53</sup> The Arab Cooperation Council (ACC) formed in February 1989 by Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, and North Yemen sought to promote such regional flows. In the wake of the Iran-Iraq war, Iraqi reconstruction was expected sustain labor flows and business and trade opportunities for the other ACC members. See Curtis R. Ryan, "Jordan and the Rise and Fall of the Arab Cooperation Council," *Middle East Journal* 52, 3 (Summer 1998). The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, driven by regime insecurity in the face of massive debt and limited oil incomes, shattered the ACC and the hope it offered for regional economic cooperation. Egypt stood firmly against Iraq, while Jordan sought to find an impossible middle position.

misguided strategy of the Bush administration.” Moreover, viewed in this light one can suggest that with American efforts to promote the GMEPI and other reform programs without the successful cultivation of a regional supporter state, *the United States has attempted to substitute itself for a regional supporter state*. American reform efforts, especially the more ambitious ones developed in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, failed to allow an intermediary state in the region to help define and build distinct regional institutions, identities, and societal arrangements. Such a state would have also served as a means to co-shape the process of “Americanization” and deflate concerns about American cultural and economic influence. As a result, the US has effectively sought to impose its own script for reform and to define its own vision for Middle East regionalism. While American efforts were critical to establishing the foundations of the European Union, by helping to rebuild their economies and extending a strategic security umbrella across Western Europe, American officials generally allowed European states to write their own script (within the bounds of the American imperium). As a result, the US effort in the Middle East to project seemingly non-territorial forms of power while not accommodating the territorial power of regional states, has been viewed by these states as a threat to their territorial power and sovereignty.

Moreover, not only has the Iraq war, its troubling aftermath, and the regional reaction to US policies further distanced regional states and societies from American interests, it has heightened regional insecurities and frayed political ties, international finance and investment, educational exchange, and tourism flows between the US and the Middle East. The impact of these strains was evident in the controversy that broke out in March 2006 over the Dubai Ports World deal to take over the management contract of several American port terminals. Even the Bush administration, noting that Dubai (as a member of the United Arab Emirates) is an ally in the “war on terrorism,” was unsuccessful in efforts to support the Dubai Ports World deal. While some defenders of the Ports deal pointed to the “xenophobia” and anti-Arab racism of opponents, most sought to portray Dubai as “a compelling example of an Arab city embracing modernity.”<sup>54</sup> The terms of the public debate in the US about the Dubai Ports World deal were defined by the particular American post 9/11 understanding of the relationship between the Middle East and globalization. The Bush administration was caught between defining the region as a territorial

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<sup>54</sup> William Wallis, "An American style emirate? Dubai sees a future ally, entrêpot and playground," *Financial Times* (March 8 2006).

exception to globalization that produced a source of deterritorialized threats (and thus justified the invasion of Iraq), and a vision of successful American-led transformations of the region that would decrease terrorist threats to the US. It seemed at times (as the project to transform Iraq was failing) that President Bush wanted to suggest that Dubai, supported by an American security umbrella across the Gulf, was functioning as a regional supporter state and provided a model for regional development. While Dubai's model of development might hold lessons for economic reform in other Middle East economies, its small size, limited diplomatic weight, and "unique" quality as what some call a "neoliberal dreamland" limit its ability to play a central role in defining Middle East regionalism.<sup>55</sup>

### **Explaining the lack of Middle East regionalism**

As part of their goal of promoting the integration of the Middle East into the global economy, American reform efforts sought to encourage regional trade and the formation of a free trade zone across the Middle East. Policy planners, however, failed to appreciate the importance, and precedence, for such forms of integration to be developed within the framework the formation of a regional Middle East political, cultural, and economic space with its own institutions, identities, and domestic arrangements that can be *embedded within* an American imperium. If the drafters of the GMEPI had read the AHDR report more closely (rather than simply appropriating elements for their own purposes) they might have noticed that the 2002 AHDR concludes that the Arab countries will only be able to meet the challenges of the global economic environment through increased regional cooperation and joint action at both the state and societal levels. For example, one contributor argues that:

At the external level, the Arab countries have no choice, if they wish to avoid the deleterious effects of globalization but to establish their own regional economic space in an autonomous and viable manner and to position themselves as credible partners at the international level.<sup>56</sup>

The AHDRs generally support the notion of an open or porous regionalism compatible with American imperium. While political as well as economic unity has long been the goal of pan-Arabism, many past efforts have sought to develop closed forms of regionalism, such as under

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<sup>55</sup> Mike Davis, "Fear and Money in Dubai," *New Left Review* 41 (Sept-Oct 2006).

<sup>56</sup> UNDP, *Arab Human Development Report 2002*, 103.

Nasser's authoritarian regime that governed the United Arab Republic unity between Egypt and Syria in the late 1950s. At the time, some Arab nationalists even naively believed "that once unity was achieved, the socioeconomic problems attending imperialism" (as well as the Palestinian issue) "would also be eliminated."<sup>57</sup>

The potential, but also the failure of such efforts (and their various causes) have been extensively catalogued elsewhere. Almost every ideologically driven unity project eventually failed due to the forces of realpolitik omni-balancing, in which rival calls for Arab unity were used as a means for political elites to challenge (domestic and regional) rivals and consolidate their own power domestically.<sup>58</sup> Most Arab efforts to build regionalism through power projection, from those of Nasser's pan-Arabism or Iraq's claims over Kuwait, were challenged by the balancing action of regional states and outside powers. At the same time, some scholars have suggested that Arab regionalism might best be formed through functional integration. "Capital rich, labor poor" economies have long imported labor from "capital poor, labor rich" economies that had capital sent back in the form of labor remittances, aid, and some investment. Moves towards the development of regional institutions to manage these flows and further regional economic integration, however, have been hampered by geopolitical conflicts and the politicization of such flows. Moreover, bureaucratic obstacles established by authoritarian regimes and limited market opportunities that deterred firms from developing the sort of transnational business strategies and production networks that are needed to develop more robust regional economic integration. For examples, high volumes of investment and trade flows between Iran and Arab states is filtered through Dubai's rather than directly between national economies. As a result, the leading trading partners of most Arab economies are located outside of the Middle East and North Africa.

If we accept that one cause of Arab exceptionalism and the lack of global integration is the failure of the Middle East to develop its own form of porous regionalism, we can then suggest that one reason for the failure to realize regionalism is that the Middle East lacks a dominant power to act as a regional hegemon or leader to organize the regional system and help establish forms of regional "club goods" (such as market access and security) within a loose

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<sup>57</sup> Betty S. Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 133.

<sup>58</sup> Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

alliance framework. Such a power (or powers) would be needed to offer adequate aid, security, and prestige to co-opt or, alternatively, to force recalcitrant states to bandwagon with rather than balance against the regional alliance. The deeply penetrated Middle East regional system has never allowed for a dominant regional power to emerge to organize the system. Rather than developing as a regional economic and security community in the face of an external threat, the states of the region have generally sought alliances from outside the region to help balance against domestic and regional threats. In many ways and for similar reasons the regional fragmentation of the Middle East resembles the domestic fragmentation of Lebanon. Moreover, as Ian Lustick has argued, the lack of a regional leader state can be explained in part by the historical resistance of outside powers to allow such a regional hegemonic power to form. The Middle East as a region, he argues, came late to the phase of state building in which such “great powers” were formed. By the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Middle East states were in formation and seeking to expand their territorial reach, existing great powers such as Britain, France, and most recently the US had the military capacity and strategic interest to halt or deter such efforts.

In the post World War II era, the United States has explicitly defined one of its strategic interests as the prevention of the emergence of such an entity in the oil-rich Middle East. Without a regional supporter state, the US protected its interests in the Middle East through various alliances and the periodic use of military force, which is maintained offshore and “over the horizon.” In the wake of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, however, the US has expanded its military presence on the ground in the Gulf. As a result, as Ambassador Richard Murphy, explains:

In the Gulf, the United States has ironically broken with its former dictum [that] we would oppose domination of the Gulf region by any single power. We have become that power.<sup>59</sup>

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and other interventionist policies towards the region in the region since carry forward this logic by acting as a regional hegemon seeking to give birth to, in the words of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, a (new) new Middle East. By mid 2007 it was clear that Bush administration’s effort to reshape (rather than accommodate) the geopolitics of the region had failed. With the existing geopolitical map, American efforts to order the region itself and define the region’s institutions, identities, and international arrangements have been

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<sup>59</sup> As cited in Robert Vitalis, "Black Gold, White Crude: An Essay on American Exceptionalism, Hierarchy, and Hegemony in the Gulf," *Diplomatic History* 26(2) (Spring 2002).

and will remain unsustainable. They, in effect, represent efforts to construct “empire” through the projection of territorial power rather than “imperium” penetrated by non-territorial forms of American power in which a form of porous regionalism is constructed with the help of a regional supporter state. The distinction is crucial. While the US might be able to maintain an “empire” in some places, some of the time, it cannot expect to impose its own regional script on the Middle East without facing challengers that will resist rather than accommodate efforts to construct such an order.<sup>60</sup> The failure of the Iraq war to radically transform the geopolitical map of the Middle East has left American policy makers with what seems to be a stark choice between military escalation, on the one hand, and some form of strategic disengagement and retreat to offshore balancing, on the other hand.

### **Alternative paths to globalization?**

The geopolitical fragmentation of the Middle East and the lack of a regional core state helps, to some degree, to explain the lack of “porous regionalism” in the Middle East and the failure of recent American reform initiatives. Without the construction of a regional space not divided by geopolitical conflicts, the Middle East will likely remain deeply penetrated by outside forces and never assimilated into the American imperium. American-led efforts to promote reform and partnership directly (that is without the help of an intermediary such as a regional supporter state or group of states) will likely only continue to fragment and polarize regional geopolitics as well as domestic politics within each state. The most direct path toward the kind of reform American policymakers wish to see in the Middle East would be a concerted effort to resolve regional conflicts and limit the geopolitical fragmentation of the region. Such a path, however, is unlikely given (as Katzenstein argues) the existing configuration of American interests in the region.

Are there other paths or configurations of “porous regionalism”? While geopolitical fragmentation will likely prevent the states of the region from building a regional order, it is possible to suggest that steps along an alternative path towards “porous regionalism” could be built through the development of regional connections between economies and societies across

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<sup>60</sup> As previous efforts, such as Point IV programs to promote import-substitution industrialization in the early 1950s and the modernization in Iran through a “White Revolution” in the 1960s, American scripts for reform are likely to be challenged by nationalist forces leading not in integration but efforts to build more autarkic, authoritarian political economies.

the geopolitical fault lines of the Middle East and North Africa. In contrast to the general trend of the 1970s, a larger share of the recent expansion of oil incomes in the Arab Gulf states has been invested regionally fostering development not only in Dubai but also in Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia. While the Gulf remains one of the most polarized regions with sharply militarized fault lines, trade and investment continue to flow across the Gulf between locations such as Iran and Dubai. Even as most states maintain controls over their domestic media, Arab firms and populations have been quick to embrace new communication and media technologies that have created spaces for political dissent and helped create a transnational public sphere for communication, debate and identity formation.<sup>61</sup> In the years before the US invasion of Iraq, the states of Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia had begun facilitating regional tourist and pilgrim traffic.

The volume and density of such transnational flows and ties across the Middle East might not match those elsewhere, but this fact does not mean that actors such as firms, state officials, and NGOs are not shifting their forms of behavior while promoting institutional changes to accommodate these developing patterns.<sup>62</sup> These regional trends, however, are not likely to sustain the formation of a regional order while the region remains geopolitically fragmented. They might, though, begin the formation of a heterogenous regional order of overlapping proto-subregionalisms each with ties to the US, Europe, and Asia. The result will likely be a fragile, pluralist order that helps sustain forms of globalization that are not likely to become very deep or robust.

At the same time, American policymakers would be better served by viewing the expanding transnational flows and closer interactions between peoples, economies, and cultures across the globe as resulting not in the formations of a single globalized space ordered by the American imperium but a series of heterogeneous cultural, economic, and political spaces. Such processes not embedded in the American imperium, however, are likely to be fragile and unstable as they lack the support of the American-led order (as Lebanon's cosmopolitan elite

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<sup>61</sup> Mai Yamani, "Challenged by example: globalization and the new Arab awakening," in *Globalization and the Middle East: Islam, Economy, and Politics*, ed. Toby Dodge and Richard Higgot (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2002), Marc Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> On "globalization" as a mode of operation, see Thomas J. Biersteker, "Globalization and the Modes of Operation of Major Institutional Actors," *Oxford Development Studies* 26, 1 (February 1998).

discovered in the summer of 2006) and are marginalized from the two-way dynamics of Americanization as Katzenstein sees it (and as Dubai Ports World discovered).

Across the Middle East, people, states, private firms, and various organizations have developed complex reactions and coping strategies seeking to gain control and authority over how transnational flows and “global” processes impact them within their own territories. Like elsewhere, the process of becoming increasingly enmeshed into the networks of the international economy has led to conflicts between those who fear that integration will lead to social dislocation and political dependence and those who take advantage of the new opportunities and urge their societies and economies to reform themselves to better adapt to the changing global environment. In short, states and societies generally resist aspects of globalization when they have little influence over the networks that drive them especially when they are viewed as posing challenges to the territorial foundations of their security and identity. In each case, some actors will support aspects of globalization over which they have influence and benefit from while resisting other forms over which they fear they have little influence. While many Middle East states have promoted economic liberalization and integration of their national economies (or at least specific sectors) into global markets, these efforts were conditioned by how these efforts challenged or strengthened the interests and autonomy of various state and societal actors.

Rather than seeking to measure and explain the pace of adaptation in reference to an assumed global standard, we need to explore how states and societies have understood and sought to resolve these conflicts. In particular, many states across the region have faced up to this challenge by seeking means to enhance regime survival by integrating their territories into these flows. They often pursue these goals by seeking to incorporate their territories into transnational networks over which they can regulate or exert influence. This logic explains the proliferation of free trade zones, tourism industries, and real estate markets as these are areas in which the state’s control over territorial resources allows it to benefit from and control the related transnational flows and economic transformations. The resulting nature of political, economic, and cultural patterns across the region has been less a product of a generalized resistance to globalization or states failing to promote economic liberalization, than the result of specific struggles between state, societal, and international forces over authority over transnational flows and national territory.

The path towards reform and the globalization of the Middle East does not require the following of a “universal” or external script or the adoption of a modern or Western identity. Instead, it requires promotion of increased mobility and connectivity within societies across the region that will allow them to integrate into, rather than be defined by, existing transnational networks. In the end, for the Middle East to become integrated into globalization would require the “Middle Easternization” of processes of globalization as well as the expansion of capacities of mobility across all elements and division of society. These trends are nascent, but they are part of the development of what can be viewed as a form of globalization driven by alternative agents and scripts. These forms will not simply dissolve into a single global mosaic, nor will they stand apart or in opposition to forms of globalization organized within the American imperium. While the US can surely play a role as a promoter of globalization, such efforts would be enhanced if they are not limited to “American” (putatively universal) scripts of globalization. Europe and Asia have embraced globalization only because they have been able to reinvent as they help co-shape the process and meaning of “Americanization.” The Middle East lacks the geopolitical power to do so as it lacks a robust form of open regionalism. Ongoing struggles over and between rival regional models will be critical to the shaping of regional responses to the Bush doctrine. Failure to engage them will likely hamper US-led efforts for regional economic and political reform. At the same time, this perspective also helps highlight various ongoing processes which are forging new forms of regional and global cross border interconnectedness and integration which do not map directly with that of American-led enlargement and may help define more pluralist forms of globalization across the Middle East.