

1. Introduction

Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East

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Much of the political history of the Middle East has been told with reference to political identities. Certainly from World War II to the 1970s, debates among students of Middle East politics focused on the rise and decline of the pan-Arab movement, on the early weakness of states in the region, or on the lack of fit between the boundaries imposed by colonial powers and existing identities.¹ Recent debates have examined the Islamic trend in Middle East politics and the extent to which it challenges the domestic legitimacy and political stability of these states. Since the Gulf War of 1991, the revival of the Kurdish national movement and the decline in

¹ On the impact of colonialism and the creation of weak states for understanding the primacy of Arab nationalism and regional dynamics, see Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Gabriel Ben-Dor, *State and Conflict in the Middle East* (New York: Praeger Press, 1983); and Paul Noble, "The Arab System: Opportunities, Constraints, and Pressures," in *The Foreign Policies of the Arab States*, ed. B. Korany and A. Hillal Dessouki (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984): 41-78. On the changing alliance patterns among Arab states, see Y. Evron and Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, "Coalitions in the Arab World," *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations* 1 (winter 1975): 71-108; Alan Taylor, *The Arab Balance of Power System* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982); Roger Owen, *State, Power, and Politics in the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 90-92; P. J. Vatikiotis, *Conflict in the Middle East* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971): 18-22, 92, and *Arab and Regional Politics in the Middle East* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984); and Elie Kedourie, "The Chatham House Version," in his *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle-Eastern Studies* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970). On the decline of Arab identities, see Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 4 (1992): 99-119; Ghassan Salame, "Inter-Arab Politics: The Return to Geography," in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. W. Quandt (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Press, 1988): 319-56; George Corm, *Fragmentation of the Middle East: The Last Thirty Years* (London: Hutchinson Books, 1983); Fouad Ajami, "The End of Pan-Arabism," *Foreign Affairs* 57 (winter 1977/78): 355-73; Mohammed Sid-Ahmed, "The Arab League and the Arab State," *Al-Abram Weekly*, April 6-12, 1995, 8; and Salame, "'Strong' and 'Weak' States: A Qualified Return to the *Muqaddimah*," in *The Arab State*, ed. G. Luciani (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990): 29-64.

the sovereign authority of the Iraqi state over some of its territory have resurrected questions about Iraq's political identity. A key question in the much-anticipated regime transitions that have begun to occur with the exit of long-serving Arab leaders is whether their departures will unleash a clash among rival ethnic, sectarian, and religious groups. Nearly all discussions in the aftermath of September 11th, and in regard to the United States's strategy to fight terrorism, highlight whether Middle Eastern states will be able to align with the United States because of their Islamic character. The boundaries of group loyalty and membership have demonstrated considerable fluctuation during the past century and will continue to do so. No student of Middle Eastern international politics can begin to understand the region without taking into account the ebb and flow of identity politics.

Although scholars of the region cannot escape the salience of identity, a powerful trend in contemporary international relations theory has proceeded as if identity mattered little for our understanding. Post-World War II international relations theorizing became increasingly systemic. Moving away from classical realist models of international politics that recognized some variations in national interest because of variations in national cultures, international relations theory drifted toward largely unvarying systemic properties to deduce what were sometimes assumed to be uniform national interests.² Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* christened this development and launched a thousand studies that refined his theoretical model. Such refinements, however, rarely broached the possibility that state interests might vary because of variation in national politics and culture. Such considerations were the stuff of domestic politics, which threatened the sin of reductionism. It was never Waltz's intention to develop a theory of foreign policy; he was clearly aware that states could have domestic motives in the conduct of foreign policy. But many scholars of foreign policy employed his work as if all state interests can be derived from the relative position of the state in international politics.

The important point here is that scholars made assumptions about state interests and motivations rather than treating them as objects of investigation. Although they did not in principle exclude domestic sources of interests,³ in practice many assumed that international politics holds a monopoly on the state's interests. Whether Waltzian systemic theory demands a materialist definition of the international system and allows no variation in state interests is a matter of debate,⁴ but little doubt

² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

³ Stephen Krasner's *Defending the National Interest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) defined the national interest inductively and reflecting the view of central policy makers, without assuming that these views originate in international politics.

⁴ For recent contributions to this debate, see Randall Schweller, "Neorealism's Status-Quo Bias: What Security Dilemma?" in *Realism: Restatements and Renewal*, ed. B. Frankel (Portland: Frank Cass, 1996): 90-112; Shibley Telhami, "An Essay on Neorealism and Foreign Policy," presented at the American Political Science Association, Atlanta, Georgia, September 4, 1999;

exists that during the last two decades many scholars working in the systemic tradition assumed that the homogeneity of state interests was a logical starting point.

Scholars of international politics were quick to adopt and to develop these systemic models for the Middle East. Stephen Walt's *Theory of Alliances* modified Waltz's model to suggest that the "balance of threat" provided a better predictor of the origins and shifts in alignment patterns.⁵ He daringly tested that model in a place that was thought to be dripping with identity politics, namely the Arab Middle East. Specifically, he argued against the prevailing wisdom that inter-Arab politics was roiled by identity and religious politics and in favor of the view that inter-Arab politics was just like any other interstate politics because the properties of the system were the same as anywhere else. Arab leaders might saturate their policies in the language of Arabism and Islam, but realists and neorealists had long recognized that self-interested state leaders would use local legitimation principles to justify foreign policies driven by power politics. Similarly modifying neorealist tenets, Shibley Telhami argued that the road to Camp David was driven by a shift in the regional and international balance of power, a shift that caused participants to recalculate which policies would best enable them to pursue their long-standing security interests.⁶ Like Walt, Telhami took issue with regional scholars who argued that ideological politics explains the policies of Israel, the United States, and Egypt. Good old-fashioned power politics was, he suggested, the most powerful explanation for this rupture in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some of the most contrarian and interesting contributions to the scholarship on the international relations of the Middle East set out to debunk the conventional wisdom.

Other factors also influenced this move toward systemic and rationalist theorizing. The tendency among scholars of Middle Eastern politics to focus on identity-based movements led to the field's self-exclusion from broader theoretical debates. Because the content of these identity-based movements was particular to the region, the region appeared to be unique. Systemic-oriented scholars, by contrast, could build an analytic bridge between the Middle East and theory-building. In addition, rationalist precepts provided a haven from the sometimes latent orientalism and ethnocentrism that characterized scholarship on the region. Rational-choice theories presumed that Arab leaders were like their counterparts elsewhere, and that their base interests and instincts were driven by the familiar, fundamental goals of power, security, and survival. The view that Middle Eastern populations were somehow irrational and were driven

Colin Elman, "Horses for Courses: Why Not Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?" *Security Studies* 6 (autumn 1996): 7-53; and Kenneth Waltz, "Reply to Elman," *Security Studies* 6, no. 1 (1997).

⁵ Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁶ Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

into the streets in acts of self-destruction was now replaced by the view that social mobilization could be effected by long-standing grievances and collective-action problems familiar to students of protest politics. Although this move toward rationalism had the effect of denying any explanatory significance to culture, religion, and identity politics, it was welcome in a field that frequently made unwarranted, reified, and non-falsifiable claims regarding Arab or Middle Eastern culture.

This systemic and rationalist perspective has many virtues that we admire and explains many important events in the Middle East, but it cannot account for much of the *foreign policies* of states in the region.⁷ Our aim in this volume is to explore the role of identity politics in foreign policy. The challenge, as we see it, is not to presume that because the specific content of identity-based claims are particular to the region, therefore their forms and effects are particular. Indeed, an impressive spate of research over the last several years has built models regarding the relationship between identity politics and regional politics that are potentially transferable across regions. Much of this work has derived from constructivist international relations theory (though some realist theory also aspires to identify the cultural and national roots of foreign policy).⁸ Constructivism posits that social (and international) structures are alloyed with normative and material elements, that social structures constitute actors' identities and interests, and that the practices of actors embedded in that social structure not only reproduce the structure but also sometimes transform it. This broad ontology, generally borrowed from sociological theories, has been applied to international and regional politics to address an impressive range of empirical phenomena.⁹

⁷ An additional body of literature begins with domestic rather than systemic politics to understand how Arab politics is shaped by states whose lack of legitimacy forces them to use Arabism as an ideological prop. See Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics*; F. Gregory Gause III, "Sovereignty, Statecraft, and Stability in the Middle East," *Journal of International Affairs* 45 (winter 1992): 441-67; Paul Noble, Rex Brynen, and Bahgat, "Conclusion: The Changing Regional Security Environment," in *The Many Faces of National Security in the Arab World*, ed. Korany, Noble, and Brynen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993): 275-302; and Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997); and Ali Hillal Dessouki and Korany, "The Global System and Arab Foreign Policies," in *The Foreign Policies of Arab States*, ed. Korany and Dessouki (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

⁸ See, for instance, Samuel Huntington's "American Creed" and its role in American foreign policy.

⁹ For theoretical statements, see Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Own Making* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Emanuel Adler, "The Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 3, no. 3 (September 1998): 291-318. For empirical statements, see Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Rodney Bruce Hall, "Moral Authority as

Various scholars have developed theories derived from constructivism to explain Middle Eastern politics over the decades. Arabism constituted Arab states with Arab national interests, which enabled constructivists to explore the impact of identity and to challenge realist propositions that interests are homogeneous in all contexts because they derive from unwavering anarchy. Constructivists took aim at various considerations: the social construction of Arab national interests; the emergence of sovereignty as the organizing principle of interstate politics; the effect of Arab and sovereignty norms on interactions among survival-seeking Arab leaders; and the shift in interests of Arab states caused by transformations in national identities. One important conclusion is that a shared identity can be tied to conflict or cooperation.¹⁰ If, as some realists now claim, the region has become more realist, then we have to explain these emergent properties rather than assume their existence.¹¹

In many respects, the editors of this volume represent these two theoretical camps. Telhami has developed systemic theories of international relations to explain important developments in Middle Eastern politics; Barnett has developed constructivist-inspired models to explain central features of inter-Arab politics. Although still lauding systemic theorizing, over the past several years Telhami has incorporated issues of transnational legitimacy and identity-based claims to add perspective to important features of inter-Arab dynamics.¹² Barnett's early study of the sociological character and organization of the region has been recently amended to include the relationship between identity politics and power in regional politics.¹³ We do not want to give the appearance of a happy convergence between neorealist and constructivist approaches. After all, important differences exist between systemic and sociological models of international politics, including the definitional properties of a social structure. We also are skeptical of additive models that presume that systemic and ideational variables

a Power Resource," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (autumn 1997): 591-622; Mlada Bukovansky, "American Identity and Neutral Rights from Independence to the War of 1812," *International Organization* 51, no. 2 (spring 1997): 209-44; and Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁰ See Michael Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Marc Lynch, *State Interests and Public Spheres: The International Politics of Jordan's Identity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Multilateralism in the Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹¹ See Malik Mufti, *Sovereign Creations: Pan-Arabism and Political Order in Syria and Iraq* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), and F. Gregory Gause III, "Sovereignty, Statecraft, and Stability in the Middle East."

¹² Telhami, "Power, Legitimacy, and Peace-making in Arab Coalitions" in *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East*, ed. Leonard Binder (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999).

¹³ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*.

can be combined to account for more variance in international dynamics. Still, this healthy debate between constructivist and systemic theories has led to a shifting of positions and to greater clarification and appreciation of each approach's strengths and weaknesses.

This book furthers our understanding of how the formation and transformation of national and state identities affect the foreign policy of Middle Eastern states. Specifically, we hope to make several theoretical and substantive contributions. The first is to advance our theoretical understanding of the relationship between identity and foreign policy. Over the last several years an impressive amount of research has examined the relationship between identity and foreign policy.¹⁴ But tremendous debate remains regarding the effects of identity and the methods used to evaluate those effects. Given the centrality and prominence of identity in the Middle East, such debate deserves clarification. Scholars of the Middle East have produced a trove of good descriptive studies of how identity politics affects regional politics. But these studies, like many others based on a systematic approach to identity politics, would benefit from sharper concepts, greater awareness of how identity can affect foreign-policy outcomes, and more analytical comparisons of hypotheses. The payoff would be greater clarity regarding theoretical alternatives.

We see two important theoretical contributions. The first is a greater understanding of which identity emerges and why. Communities and societies can be understood as engaging in a continuous debate over their collective identity.¹⁵ As Edward Said observes, "We need to regard society as the locale in which a continuous contest between adherents of different ideas about what constitutes the national identity is taking place."¹⁶ Debates over national identity highlight the menu of choices regarding that identity, which includes not only alternative categories (Arabism vs. Islam) but also different interpretations of a particular identity (conservative vs. radical Arabism). Further, the interpretations themselves sometimes contain alternative categories (Zionist-religious vs. Zionist-secular Israeli). International relations scholars have not been quick to examine these debates, probably because they have spent much time simply attempting to convince the field that national identity warrants attention. But different categories are possible at any moment, and one of our concerns is how a particular formulation becomes momentarily fixed. One of our goals is to think systematically about the regional, international, and domestic forces that advance one identity over another.

¹⁴ Katzenstein, ed., *Culture of National Security*.

¹⁵ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991): 204; and Samuel Kim and Lowell Dittmer, "Whither China's Quest for National Identity?" in *China's Quest for National Identity*, eds. Dittmer and Kim (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 241.

¹⁶ "The Phony Islamic Threat," *The New York Times Magazine* (November 21,): 62.

Our second theoretical goal is to provide greater understanding of how identity affects foreign policy. Here the important point is that identity appears at different places in the causal chain. For some, identity appears most prominently as an ideological device to justify self-interested politics. This has been the null hypothesis in many studies of the Middle East—presuming, for instance, that Arabism is nothing more than an ideological prop in the hands of self-interested, power-seeking Arab leaders. Many contributions in this volume also recognize that governmental officials can be expected to grab onto any weapon that serves their immediate interests, and ideology is almost always unsheathed. For others, identity is part of the cultural terrain and thus conditions the possible and the actual. This dynamic is noted by Barnett and Lynch, who discuss how identity conditions what government leaders can entertain and is considered legitimate by their societies. For others, still, identity provides a direct link to a discrete foreign policy preference or outcome. Would Egypt have intervened in the Yemeni civil war in the 1960s had it not had a republican Arabist identity? Can we understand why Syria rejected a bilateral deal similar to the Egyptian-Israeli deal for more than twenty years without reference to Syria's political identity?¹⁷ Can Iran's role in Lebanon be understood without reference to Iran's Islamic identity? The relationship between foreign policy and identity need not always be so direct, however. Identity politics can raise the cost of some policy options for governments. One payoff for explicating identity's place in the overall story being advanced is an understanding of whether identity challenges or complements materialist theories.

Finally, this volume aspires to enhance our understanding of the Middle East in general and the countries covered in this volume, four Arab and two non-Arab: Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Iran, and Israel. We are well aware that identity politics has been on the research agenda of the Middle East for decades. But by being clearer about how we use the concept of identity, by giving greater consideration of the menu of choice, and by carefully considering how that choice leads to a particular foreign policy outcome, we can enhance our understanding of these countries and of regional politics. In all of our cases the question of state identity has been a central part of the political debate. In Syria, the rise of the Ba'ath and the advocacy of Arabism over nationalism or Islamism has led to the definition of state as an Arab republic without reference to the Islamic character, as many had insisted. In Jordan, the severing of ties with the West Bank in 1989 signaled a further detachment of the Palestinian component of the Jordanian identity. The meaning of Israel's Jewishness has been hotly contested in Israel's internal and external debates. Iraq's identity, always a part of the Arabist-statist debate, now has the amplified dimension of subnational debate. Iran,

¹⁷ For a discussion of this issue, see Shibley Telhami, "Why Israel and Syria Have Come to the Table Now," *The Washington Post* (Dec. 19, 1999).

which witnessed a genuine revolution in the ascendance of the Islamic regime, has been the subject of internal and external debates. And Egypt, which had led the pan-Arab movement in the 1950s and 1960s, was the first to abandon it in the 1970s, much to the shock of many Egyptians and Arabs.

In the remainder of this chapter we want to lay out our views regarding some basic issues that routinely follow discussions concerning the link between identity politics and foreign policy. Specifically, in the next section we sketch competing perspectives on identity formation and change; we then briefly survey the choices among identity politics in the Middle East; after that we discuss different concepts about how identity shapes foreign policy; we then offer an overview of how identity politics at the regional level has ebbed and flowed during the century. This overview discusses the relationship among shifts in material conditions, namely technology, national identity debates and their regional effects, and future possibilities given the region's ongoing information revolution.

Competing Perspectives on Identity Formation and Change

Part of our collective goal is to understand the emergence and construction of particular definitions of state or national identity. But before we outline a range of analytic alternatives, we want to discuss our take on some conceptual issues. Although many definitions of identity exist, most begin with the understanding of oneself in relationship to others.¹⁸ Identities, in short, are not only personal or psychological, but are also social, profoundly influenced by the actor's interaction with and relationship to others. Through interacting and participating in an institutional context, the actor ascribes to an identity. Similarly, national and state identities are formed in relationship to other nations and states; those corporate identities are tied to residents' relationships to those outside the boundaries of the community and the territory, respectively. State identity can be understood as the corporate and officially demarcated identity linked to the state apparatus; national identity can be defined as a group of people who aspire to or have a historical homeland, share a common myth and historical memories, have legal rights or duties for all members, and have markers to distinguish themselves from others. In this view, the nation and the state are analytically distinct. As Anthony Smith aptly notes,

The [state] refers exclusively to public institutions, differentiated from and autonomous of, other social institutions and exercising a monopoly of

¹⁸ See Dittmer and Kim (1993), Smith (1991), Bloom (1990), and Wendt (1994) for discussions of national and state identities that build on this definition.

coercion and extraction with a given territory. The nation, on the other hand, signifies a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland. This is not to deny some overlap between the two concepts, given their common reference to a historic territory and (in democratic states) their appeal to the sovereignty of the people. But, while modern states must legitimate themselves in national and popular terms as the states of particular nations, their content and focus are quite different.¹⁹

The distinction between state and national identity is designed not only to offer analytical nuance but also to provide greater historical and conceptual clarity. In the Middle East the state's identity can be quite distinct from national identities of the local population, generating the domestic insecurities apparent to even the most casual observer.

At one time the need to distinguish between state and national identity would have struck international relations scholars as unnecessary. The working assumption during much of the Cold War was that the state represented a rather homogeneous community within its borders that could be referred to as a nation. But the end of the Cold War and the unleashing of ethnic and identity-based civil wars led international relations scholars to revise their assumptions and to recognize that the state and the nation are not coterminous in much of the world. In fact, the lack of overlap between state and national identity can generate an inherently unstable and precarious situation, one that results in political, economic, and symbolic exercises by the state in order to shift subnational loyalties to the symbols of the state. These exercises often have resulted in clashes between rivals for power and in the spillover of conflict from the national to the international realm. These outcomes have attracted the attention of international scholars, who have begun to widen their theoretical aperture to examine subnational processes and their foreign policy international implications.

That state and national identity are not coterminous is no surprise to those working in the Middle East (or anyone who worked outside the West, for that matter). Indeed, a state-building project can be understood as a social engineering exercise intended to generate the very state-national conflation assumed by international relations theorists. The critical difference between Middle Eastern state-building projects and those in other parts of the Third World has been that Arab leaders have attempted to shrink the national imagery from its transnational status to the confines of the state, whereas other Third World leaders have attempted to fill up the state with a national identity derived from subnational particles. An important consequence of this dynamic for the Middle

¹⁹ Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991): 14-15.

East is that national and state-building projects have been played out on a regional—and not simply a domestic—stage.

Any discussion of national identity and state-building immediately raises the suspicion that we are simply introducing the concept of identity in place of the more familiar concept of ideology. Such suspicions can run particularly high in the context of Middle Eastern scholarship, where for decades the debates focused on Arab nationalist ideology and the tendency among many noted and diverse scholars, including Elie Kedourie, P. J. Vatikiotis, and Stephen Walt, to speak of an Arab ideology. We can differentiate between ideology and identity by asking about the roots and functions of both. The concept of ideology was introduced in Marxist scholarship to explain how relations of domination are reproduced with minimal resort to direct force.²⁰ According to this view, individuals had objective interests that typically derived from their position within a (material) social structure, and the ideology led them to act in ways that were inconsistent with those interests. This sort of claim is famously associated with the concept of false consciousness. Studies of ideology, therefore, typically noted that the ideas articulated by subordinate classes were not in their objective interests but instead worked to the advantage of the dominant class.²¹

International relations scholars and students of the Middle East have typically treated ideology in a similar way. The general tendency has been to assume that interests derive objectively from the international distribution of power. This realist approach posits that states promote certain ideas as in the interests of humanity or the “international community” that, in fact, are in the interests of the dominant classes. Great powers forward certain ideas, think of various “civilizing missions,” as justification for policies intended to further their own interests. To the extent that the subordinate states accept these ideas, the ideology propagates their subordination. When scholars like Ajami, Vatikiotis, and Kedourie refer to Arabism, for instance, they typically portray the ideology as an instrumental idea in the hands of self-interested leaders. Arabism depends on the prior material interests of Arab states—that is, governments—and its sole function is to further those interests and to make their continued domination acceptable to lesser powers.

Academic discussions about identity have become increasingly fashionable since the 1970s because of attempts to understand how individuals occupy social locations that are not reducible to material structures, how these locations generate action, and how they can be altered. In contrast with ideology studies that attempt to understand how language masks social reality and occludes *real* inter-

ests, many studies of identity begin with the function of language in constituting social subjects and their relations.²² Studies of identity, therefore, take pains to demonstrate how interests are not objectively derived but rather are socially constructed and dependent on historically bounded social roles occupied by knowledgeable actors.

Scholars of international relations and the Middle East who favor the concept of identity over ideology, therefore, begin with a very different view of social reality. These scholars, including those in this volume, are interested in understanding how a historically constructed concept of Arab identity, for instance, leads to certain interests and practices. Such study acknowledges that the social forces that shape identity and conceptions of group boundaries are susceptible to change at rare moments. Further, these forces can lead to different interpretations of the interests that define the nation or state, and changes in the underlying normative structures shape state action in particular ways. In general, students of ideology and identity typically begin with very different view of social reality and thus expect their concepts to do very different sorts of analytic work.

But how might we explain national and state identity formation? While scholars of international relations have not spent much time discussing the emergence of national identities, the field has been highly mined by scholars of comparative politics. As Steve Saideman notes in the concluding chapter, primordial views of nationalism have fallen out of favor and variants of constructivism are widely accepted. Although some politicians and political activists might offer a primordial view of identity to create firm boundaries between otherwise fluid categories, at best this simply represents their attempt to construct ideational boundaries using criteria that are deemed primordial and essential. The history of the region—and the history of all nationalism—reveals a debate over what constitutes national or state identity. The contributors to this volume attempt to uncover this social construction process and note that national identity is rarely hegemonic; in fact, at best it merely receives a reprieve from assaults from alternative definitions. We are interested, for example, in explaining why Egypt became the “United Arab Republic” in the 1950s and why it changed into the “Arab Republic of Egypt” in the 1970s. How do we understand the movement in Jordan away from a pan-Arab identity and toward a territorial-nationalist identity? Why did Arab nationalism trump a strong Syrian nationalist movement in the pre-1970s?

Since our primary interest is in the causal relationship between identity and foreign policy, we are not aiming to forward a theory of identity formation. In-

²⁰ Trevor Pervis and Alan Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology . . .,” *British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (September 1993): 474–75.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See Pervis and Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology . . .,” and Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 1–47.

stead, we hope that by addressing the sources of political identity, we identify possible causes of winning identities. Nor are we aspiring to identify a master cause for the emergence of a particular national identity. No single explanation can account for the emergence of a particular national identity. Saideman charts the three primary sources of political identity, so we need only summarize them here as power elite/instrumental forces, societal forces, and international forces.

Power elite and instrumental arguments have long been popular, contending that nationalism is manufactured and manipulated by politically savvy and power-hungry political elites. Variants of these arguments have been quite influential in Middle Eastern scholarship, particularly in explanations of the rise of Arabism and its association with urban notables and the State elite.²³ But even the most die-hard instrumentalists typically incorporate other factors in their analyses and recognize an existing cultural fabric that is available for manipulation. Astute politicians understand that not all identities are equally plausible or politically desirable and thus tailor their message so that it manipulates what already exists.

In contrast to instrumentalist arguments that typically rely on a top-down approach, societal explanations suggest bottom-up factors. Sometimes governmental leaders are caught off-guard by an undertow of nationalism. This has been evident in various places where Arab leaders were late to recognize Arabism's emerging presence, cultivated by social movements, political activists, intellectual undercurrents, and new ideas. This societal dimension also is evident where both state and societal groups agree on a national identity but differ over its meaning and expectations. This is famously demonstrated in several instances in the Arab Middle East, where the palace or government articulated one vision of Arab nationalism while the streets advocated an alternative. During the 1950s the young King Hussein thought himself to be protectively wrapped in the symbols of Arab nationalism, only to find that various societal groups demanded a more radical version, leaving him isolated at home. Upon coming to power in Egypt in 1970, Sadat attempted to bolster Egypt's Islamic identity for political reasons, only to discover that religious groups violently opposed his version of that identity.

Finally, international factors can shape national identity. Sometimes the international system is simply a catalyst for local discussions and debates. The ends of empires are typically associated with wide-ranging debates over the boundaries of the political community.²⁴ The collapse of the Ottoman Empire triggered a region-wide debate over what would fill the power vacuum. The end

²³ Kedourie, "Chatham House Version."

²⁴ Charles Tilly, "States and Nationalism in Europe, 1492-1992," *Theory and Society* 23 (1995): 131-46.

of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union similarly instigated a discussion over the boundaries of the region and its various components, including a Mediterranean community, a Middle Eastern community, an Arab community, and a pan-Turkic community. At other times the effects of the international system are more direct. For example, debate continues over whether nationalism in the Third World and the Middle East represents the export of a Western political form. Forms of colonialism and imperialism have triggered a domestic backlash and caused a growing demand for national self-determination. Contemporary globalization, particularly forms that are viewed as containing elements of Western culture, has precipitated a defense of local cultures that are supposedly threatened. This response is most closely associated with the emergence of certain strands of Islamism. "Great Power" intrusions have a history of forcing discussions concerning the boundaries of the political community. For instance, during the Cold War the attempt by the West to pressure Arab countries to subscribe to its containment policy fanned the flames of Arab nationalism, most famously in the case of the Baghdad Pact.

We conclude with two points. First, we are unlikely to find a monocausal explanation of state or national identity formation. And we are not aiming for one here. At best we are likely to find that certain explanations dominate in a particular region or for a particular period. This rather mundane conclusion is supported by the contributions here. Second, we are unlikely to find a single master variable operating in any one case. Although one variable is likely to account for a greater part of the story, additional factors usually influence the outcome. All of the contributors to this volume recognize the mixture of factors that affect development of a particular national identity at a particular time.

The Menu of Choices of "National Identities" in the Middle East

Even those who emphasize the power of rulers in shaping identities acknowledge that the menu of options is limited. One does not have to take a primordial view of identity to recognize that there are limited, historically contingent possibilities. Neither of us is likely to adopt a "North American" identity in the foreseeable future. Nor can we imagine the emergence in contemporary Israeli or Arab politics of a mass movement favoring a "Middle Eastern" identity. The contemporary possibilities in the Middle East are limited by history and have typically revolved around one of three influences: statism, Islam, and Arabism. In contrast to the histories of nationalism in many other parts of the world, in the Middle East some of the most viable alternatives have been transnational. This dynamic is best understood as a result of several factors—the emergence of a Germanic definition of nationalism (one that views language as an essential characteristic of nationalism), widening networks of association, and the

external effects of colonialism, imperialism, and Zionism. In Israeli politics identity largely has been limited to different strands of Zionism, though in this supposedly post-Zionist age religious and secular identities vie for contention.

Few subnational groups have successfully contended to define the national identity. One principal exception has been the Kurds in Iraq; other notable efforts include the contemplation of a small "Christian/Maronite" state in Lebanon and the Arab/non-Arab division (north/south) in the Sudan. We do not mean to suggest that subnational identities have not been important factors in the emergence of a particular national identity, however. In Syria and Iraq, for example, the advocacy of an Arab identity over an Islamic identity may suit Allawites, Christians, and Druze Syrians, who cannot hope to advance their own subnational identities for the state but who have quickly latched onto those transnational or national identities because they were viewed as more accepting and protective of their minority status. This highlights how the choice of a national identity is not only an expression of affective and emotional allegiances but also an instrumental feature of associational politics.

The practical possibilities for national-state identities are, perhaps, more limited. In contemporary Middle Eastern politics the state has gained the upper hand and is increasingly viewed as legitimate by its society. One consequence of the state's institutionalization and legitimation is that rival views of the national identity have attempted to fix a meaning of the identity that accommodates their own vision of the legitimate political community. A saga in Egyptian politics, nicely surveyed by Ibrahim Karawan, involves national identity and its inclusion of Islamic and Arab associations. Egypt's saga has become part of the drama of the region as a whole. In many other Arab states the contemporary debate has not focused on a state-national identity versus Arabism but on the meaning of state that has a territorial-national identity *and* an Arab identity. Even when Anwar Sadat changed Egypt's name from the United Arab Republic to the Arab Republic of Egypt, he kept the Arab identity in the name. Another telling example of this duality was the PLO's conception of self after the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. A Saudi student's letter to the editor of *Falastine Althawra*, the central organ of the PLO, requested an explanation for the choice of Cyprus as the center for Palestinian publications and asked: "Why did you not choose an Arab state as your center, as we all would have expected? . . . I had not expected that the PLO would be so ungrateful for all the aid provided to it by the Arabs . . . especially since the liberation of Palestine is the primary Arab concern." The editor's reply was telling. "The PLO is not ungrateful," the editor replied. "The deposits of one Arab state in the United States provide a sufficient budget for the liberation of Palestine in a year. Payment in blood cannot be compared with monetary payments. This revolution is indeed Arab, but Palestinian decisions shall remain independent regardless of the cost." Yet the same *Falastine Althawra*, in considering the debate on Qawmiyya (Arab nationalism)

vs. Wataniyya (statism) concluded in its leading article that the Palestinian considers himself "first Arab, second Arab and third Palestinian."²⁵

The discussion of a "menu of choice" might suggest that these identities are exclusive and therefore are incapable of being melded. But that clearly is not so, especially in the Middle East. As most students of nationalism and identity politics have observed, individuals, nations, and states can hold multiple identities; in fact, sometimes these identities can be integrated in a relatively harmonious way. For many Egyptians at various times being an Egyptian and an Arab nationalist was smoothly accomplished and did not unleash any identity conflicts. Sometimes this could lead to a national chauvinism—what is good for Egypt is good for the Arab world—but sometimes it could mean that the Arab national identity would help define what it meant to be an Egyptian. At other times it makes more sense to think of a hierarchy of identities, one that constitutes the core and others that are "activated" during certain social situations and do not undermine the pillar.

The history of the region, however, suggests that these identities sometimes conflict because certain environmental developments force actors to choose between demands imposed by one identity and those imposed by another. In this respect, states can have an "identity conflict,"²⁶ which is likely to emerge under two conditions. The first is whenever competing definitions of the collective identity call for contradictory behaviors, or roles. Thus, identity conflict might be seen to exist

when there are contradictory expectations that attach to some position in a social relationship. Such expectations may call for incompatible performances; they may require that one hold two norms or values which logically call for opposing behaviors; or they may demand that one [identity] necessitates the expenditure of time and energy such that it is difficult or impossible to carry out the obligations of another [identity].²⁷

Identity conflict can also exist whenever definitions of the "collective self are no longer acceptable under new historical conditions."²⁸ In other words, a crisis might emerge whenever the state's collective identity (or the debate over that identity) is at odds with the demands and defining characteristics of the broader

²⁵ See Shibley Telhami, "The Evolution of Palestinian Sovereignty," in *Problematic Sovereignty*, ed. Stephen Krasner (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

²⁶ Lowell Dittmer and Samuel Kim, "In Search of a Theory of National Identity," in *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993): 6–7.

²⁷ Sheldon Stryker, *Symbolic Interactionism: A Social Structural Perspective* (Reading, Mass.: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, 1980): 73.

²⁸ Dittmer and Kim, "In Search of a Theory of National Identity," 7.

community (which represents an additional source of the state's identity). This possibility has been noted by various scholars of the Middle East, who have characterized these moments of competing expectations and internal debate as "role conflicts."²⁹ Although a menu of choice might exist, the categories inherent in the choice might be blurred and interpolated in new ways, might be arranged hierarchically, and might occasionally conflict.

The Difference Identity Makes: How Identity Affects Foreign Policy

Ultimately, our aim is to discuss the link between identity and foreign policy. Therefore, the central question is: Does the introduction of identity inform us about the foreign policies of Middle Eastern states in ways that we otherwise would not understand them? Simply put, what difference does identity make? Is it possible that the debate concerning identity, important within the state, is not especially relevant for the foreign policies of states? Although we believe that identity must be added to the mix, we would be remiss if we did not discuss the rival hypothesis, that identity is parasitic on material structures, which has in fact been the null hypothesis.

Perhaps scholars have had difficulty evaluating, and even conceptualizing, the possibility that identity might shape foreign policy because of the strength of existing theoretical dispositions. The typical realist proposition is about the dominance of calculations of the "national interest" (or, more accurately put, focuses on calculations of regime survival) in the pursuit of foreign policy, over all other considerations, including ideological ones. The notion, for example, that Arab unity was the central factor driving Nasser's foreign policy or the foreign policies of Ba'athist Syria and Iraq in the 1960s has been eloquently refuted by Malcolm Kerr, who showed the central weight of self-interest. But to say that most foreign-policy issues force such trade-offs on politicians, or that a state's national interests are the same in nearly all cases where survival is at stake, would be highly inaccurate.³⁰ Even if one envisioned pan-Arabism as an instrument of policy for Nasser, we still have to ask why it was such a useful instrument. A convincing answer must refer to the prevalent societal norms that made this issue resonate.

Scholars also have tended to pose their research questions and to organize their research designs to answer the following question: Do identities or interests shape the state's foreign policy? Among the various problems conjured by this formulation, we see two as most central. The first is that sophisticated realists and neore-

²⁹ Michael Barnett, "Nationalism, Sovereignty, and Regional Order in Arab Politics," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (summer 1995); Korany, "Egypt," in *Echoes of the Intifada*, ed. R. Brynen (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991): 195-214.

³⁰ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

alists recognize that interests are not driven by brute material forces; therefore, their conception of interests often includes references to ideational factors. A second problem is that this formulation fails to recognize that identities can be a source of interests. Therefore, posing the question as interests vs. identities is misleading.³¹ Scholars of the region have recognized that identity can be an important source of the state's national interest. This phenomenon is most evident where an Arab state rarely refers to the state's interest but rather to the Arab national interest, which presumably comes from a transnational Arab nation and not from the territorially defined state. Only by noting how Arabism shapes the Egyptian national interest are we able to explain many significant foreign-policy events, including its intervention in Yemen in the 1960s or its unity with Syria. Conversely, a pan-Arabist Egypt could not have made bilateral peace with Israel. Marc Lynch argues that changes in the Jordanian national identity shaped the definition of the Jordanian national interest. The national identity is an important source of the state's interest.

Similar examples of the relationship between national identity and foreign-policy orientation are readily available. Consider the transformation of the Palestinian priority once the PLO was recognized as a national movement. As a movement aiming to bring Palestinian refugees justice and a return to Palestine, the PLO had interests that were mutually exclusive with Israel's interests: a Palestinian return would undermine Israel's Jewish majority and thus the state's Jewish identity. Becoming a national movement, however, transformed the PLO's aims, catapulting its goal of establishing a state over its original goal of reclaiming Palestine. One implication of this transformation was a decrease in the use of violence as an instrument of policy.³²

Still, any conclusion regarding the significance of viewing "identity" as a variable in foreign policy rests on whether such an approach enhances our understanding of outcomes. This book goes some distance in substantiating this claim. But we want to suggest a cautious approach to the identity-as-variable perspective. Saying that we are interested in understanding the difference that identity makes does not mean that we see identity as being fixed. This view begins with the notion that identity can be treated as a variable, can take on different values, and can be accurately measured on some scale. Then it attempts to establish an association between changes in the independent variable of identity and changes in the dependent variable—for instance, foreign-policy orientation. In this example, a typical hypothesis is that the more pan-Arab the Arab state, the more antipathy and conflict it will express toward Israel. This was, in fact, the sort of hypothesis that has been typically forwarded to test the claim that Arab nationalism affects

³¹ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, chapter 3.

³² Telhami, "The Evolution of Palestinian Sovereignty."

