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About the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS)

Established in 2005, the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) at Georgetown University in Qatar is a premier research institute devoted to the academic study of regional and international issues through dialogue and exchange of ideas; research and scholarship; and engagement with national and international scholars, opinion makers, practitioners, and activists. Guided by the principles of academic excellence, forward vision, and community engagement, the CIRS mission revolves around five principal goals:

• To provide a forum for scholarship and research on international and regional affairs
• To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas
• To foster thoughtful dialogue among students, scholars, and practitioners of international affairs
• To facilitate the free flow of ideas and knowledge through publishing the products of its research, sponsoring conferences and seminars, and holding workshops designed to explore the complexities of the twenty-first century
• To engage in outreach activities with a wide range of local, regional, and international partners.

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Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that supports Qatar on its journey from a carbon economy to a knowledge economy. It does this by unlocking human potential for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by HH the Father Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. QF carries out its mission via three strategic pillars: education, science and research, and community development. For more information, visit www.qf.org.qa.

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Georgetown University in Qatar
Introduction: Communities in the Playing Field of Pluralism
Firat Oruc, Georgetown University in Qatar

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**INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITIES IN THE PLAYING FIELD OF PLURALISM**

*Firat Oruc, Georgetown University in Qatar*

How can we approach the concepts of pluralism and community in the Middle East without treating them as either self-evident facts or normative values that each society must reflect? The Middle East is viewed either as a region that is entrapped in the abyss of fundamentalism and authoritarianism and dreadfully lacking in the recognition of pluralism in religion, culture, law, and politics, or as a bygone mosaic of communities that coexisted peacefully for centuries. But the policy circles have failed to appreciate that rather than a mere pragmatic approach to accommodate difference among and across different groups, pluralism is a multidimensional site of negotiation and contestation. While overlapping with related notions of identity politics, multiculturalism, diversity, and minority rights, the concept of pluralism refers specifically to the inherent coexistence of multiple community formations (religious, ethnic, legal, civic, and so on) in a given social site. A site is a location of construction, occurrence, activity, and interaction. As the binding metaphor of this volume, “sites” designate a range of heterogeneous domains and platforms of collective action and engagement. Sites of pluralism, therefore, encompass all the material areas where individuals and groups perform, claim, regulate, and contest power relations within politics and communities. Equally important, rather than assuming diversity, tolerance, and dialogue as a mere given, pluralism calls for an engaged commitment to recognize and understand others across perceived or claimed lines of difference.

1. **BETWEEN FAITH AND STATE: CONTEMPORARY CONFLICTS OVER DIVERSITY**

*Kathleen A. Cavanagh, National University of Ireland*

Essentialist thinking about religious tensions and inequalities in the Middle East often attributes divisions to culture and atavisms within Arab societies that, in turn, are inextricably linked to the nature of Islam. Placing religion at the heart of extremism and violence in the region has generated ever more pressure to develop secular political practices. The idea that religion sits uneasily with the requirements of good governance—with secularism and democracy as the defining features of modern statehood and modern politics—remains. This chapter examines the politics of law that are mapped out within the various trends of analysis within both Islamic and international law.

2. **FORMAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS AS ARENAS OF INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION: COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES FROM LEBANON AND SYRIA**

*Annika Rabo, Stockholm University*

At a broad level, CIRS examined the historic evolution of the diversity and pluralistic mosaic of the Middle East, and how this is influencing current political, economic, and social dynamics across the region. Some of the studies in this volume focus on the sociopolitical understandings of pluralism within the Middle East, and how notions and narratives of the term “minority” are themselves conceptually problematic, and in fact frequently contested. Other studies reexamine the role of the state in reference to promoting or challenging national diversity, through the implementation of homogenizing national narratives, as well as through the development of institutional structures of the state that govern the economy, political space, education, and other social sectors. The following are abstracts of chapters that appear in *Sites of Pluralism: Community Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford University Press/Hurst, 2019).

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**SITES OF PLURALISM: COMMUNITY POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

**SUMMARY OF RESEARCH INITIATIVE**

Scholars and policymakers have been focusing their attention on the possible causes for the escalation of both inter-state and intra-state conflict in the Middle East. This region bears the legacy of multiple imperial excursions and has traditionally demonstrated ethnolinguistic richness, religious diversity, and a depth of cultural intermingling. Three of the world’s major monotheistic religious traditions originated within the borders of the modern Middle East, allowing for the historic development of common foundations and exchange between them, but periodically also leading to friction and competition. The region has historically hosted multiple populations with distinctive ethnic and linguistic identities, preserved in previous eras under the loosely structured administrative bodies of different empires that were, as a result of their sprawling geography, multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural. Beginning in the twentieth century, a degree of cultural and religious autonomy continued for the numerous subnational communities that were absorbed within the folds of the new national borders. Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, while Middle Eastern states’ efforts at fostering homogenous national identities often yielded politically salient results, at times they also inadvertently magnified existing cleavages and agitated communal tensions. These tensions were particularly intensified at times of changing geopolitical realities, or increasing scarcity and competition over resources—political, economic, and otherwise.

At the current juncture, much of the study of pluralism and diversity in the Middle East revolves around examining identity as a source, rather than a consequence, of failing national projects. Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Yemen are currently in the grip of intense civil conflict that is tearing apart the social and cultural fabric that historically held these nations and societies together. With increasing sectarianism spreading across much of the Middle East, the collapsing of state structures and evaporation of national borders, and open conflict and warfare engulfing whole swathes of the region’s geography, questions of the resilience of ethnicity and religion are becoming increasingly relevant. Within some policy circles, the argument holds that it is the fundamental incompatibility between different ethnolinguistic and religious communities that is at the heart of the issue, and that it is these atavistic cleavages that are impeding any form of political resolution and social cohesion. International organizations and policy makers have been calling on states to protect and assist the region’s “minority” groups, which are viewed as being at grave threat from transnational terrorist organizations with homogenizing ideological agendas that seek to eliminate any form of religious or cultural pluralism.

At a broad level, CIRS examined the historic evolution of the diversity and pluralistic mosaic of the Middle East, and how this is influencing current political, economic, and social dynamics across the region. Some of the studies in this volume focus on the sociopolitical understandings of pluralism within the Middle East, and how notions and narratives of the term “minority” are themselves conceptually problematic, and in fact frequently contested. Other studies reexamine the role of the state in reference to promoting or challenging national diversity, through the implementation of homogenizing national narratives, as well as through the development of institutional structures of the state that govern the economy, political space, education, and other social sectors. The following are abstracts of chapters that appear in *Sites of Pluralism: Community Politics in the Middle East* (Oxford University Press/Hurst, 2019).
This chapter argues that, ever since coming to power some 165 years ago, the Qatari ruling family has consistently employed a social conservative approach to consolidate its own position, in the process maintaining Qatar’s pre-existing social hierarchy. One of the main ways in which the state has sought to achieve this goal has been to narrow the definition of what constitutes a “Qatari.” As the chapter discusses, the ruling family has promoted Arab tribal social values, culture, traditions, and customs in order to perpetuate a system based on inclusion and exclusion, thereby securing its position and that of Arab tribal social actors at the apex of the Qatari state. As part of this process, the state has also used juridical means—its constitution, the legal system, and family policies related to marriage and nationality—to cement an ideology and narrative that maintains the existing social order.

Although there has been a substantial amount of research into Iranians’ role as a major sectarian player in the international politics of the Middle East, there is hardly any literature on the politics of the Shi’i–Sunni divide in modern Iran. Since the establishment of the Iranian Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran has been perceived as one of the forces behind the resurgence of Shi’i politics in the region, which has in turn inflamed sectarian tensions. Yet, very little attention has been given to the large Sunni population in Iran. This gap in the literature is partly due to the paucity of English-language information on the political and socioeconomic challenges faced by Iran’s ethnic Sunni minorities. Given obvious linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and geographic diversities, do Sunni Iranians constitute a religious minority? Can we class these diverse groups—many of whom are located in different parts of the country—as a cohesive minority only because they share Sunni Islam?

The urban world underwent a massive transformation at the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century: the transnationalization of capital, the internationalization of labor, a steady increase in global trading and communication, and fierce competition between multinational corporations has led nations to attempt to position themselves globally. No region has escaped these changes, and many countries in the Arab Middle East have been affected by them. This chapter shows how the construction of the Middle East as a concept has affected the evolution of its urbanism. It illustrates the fluidity of identity under both colonial and modern conditions, but also discusses how old ethnic conflicts and religious rivalries in the age of globalization continue different forms of exclusion that shape the contemporary Arab Middle Eastern city.

Armenian ethnic identity in the Middle East is formulated around language, religion, descent, and the concept of a diaspora–homeland relationship. The historical leadership of the Armenians, who have experienced diaspora and lack of self-rule for the better part of a millennium, has been concentrated in the Armenian Apostolic Church, a non-Chalcedonic Orthodox denomination. A synonymous relationship exists between Armenians and Christianity, which until recently remained largely uncontested in the Middle East and elsewhere. Historically, Armenians who converted to another religion were ostracized and no longer considered Armenian. However, in recent decades, the “rediscovery” of Armenian Muslims has raised a central question for Armenians in Armenia and in the diaspora: can a Muslim truly be Armenian? This is further complicated by another related but more sensitive question: can an Armenian also be a Turk?

As a terrorist organization with a homogenizing ideological agenda, the Islamic State (IS) seeks to destroy many forms of religious and cultural pluralism, thus fracturing the rich and colorful mosaic that has long constituted the Middle East. In other words, little attention has been paid to the intersection between the human suffering and the heritage destruction undertaken by IS. Here, human and heritage destruction are intertwined: the suffering inflicted on people is projected onto their sites of ritual and worship—just as the destruction of these sites is deliberately orchestrated to inflict symbolic suffering on specific communities and to shatter the ethnic and religious diversity of the region. This chapter, therefore, explores and documents the human/heritage “cultural cleansing” undertaken by IS against two fragile minorities.
Sport, Politics, and Society in the Middle East
(Oxford University Press/Hurst, 2019)

Edited by Danyel Reiche and Tamir Sorek

Introduction: From Sports in the Middle East to Middle Eastern Sports
Tamir Sorek, University of Florida, and Danyel Reiche, American University of Beirut

1. Mapping the ‘Sports Nahda’: Toward a History of Sports in the Modern Middle East
Murat C. Yıldız, Skidmore College

2. Football’s Role in How Societies Remember: The Symbolic Wars of Jordanian–Palestinian Football
Dag Tuastad, University of Oslo

3. Hapoel Tel Aviv and Israeli Liberal Secularism
Tamir Sorek, University of Florida

4. Qatari Female Footballers: Negotiating Gendered Expectations
Charlotte Lysa, University of Oslo

5. Sportswomen’s Use of Social Media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)
Nida Ahmad, University of Waikato

6. The World Cup and Freedom of Expression in Qatar
Craig L. LaMay, Northwestern University in Qatar

7. Turkish Sports: Lost in Politics?
Cem Tınaz, Istanbul Bilgi University

8. Developing a National Elite Sport Policy in an Arab Country: The Case of Lebanon
Nadim Nassif, Notre Dame University–Louisiana

9. Legacies of Mega-Sporting Events in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Lebanon
Danyel Reiche, American University of Beirut

10. The Business of Sports in the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States
Simon Chadwick, Centre for Sports Business at the University of Salford
Sports in the Middle East have become a major issue in global affairs: the FIFA World Cup 2022 in Qatar, the 2005 UEFA Champions League Final in Istanbul, the European basketball championship EuroBasket in 2017 in Israel, and other major sporting events, have put an international spotlight on the region. Media around the world are discussing in particular the question of whether the most prestigious sporting events should be staged in a predominantly authoritarian, socially conservative, and politically contentious part of the world. The influence of sports in the Middle East extends beyond the region: for instance, professional sports clubs around the world have signed sponsorship deals with Middle Eastern airlines, and stadium naming rights have also been signed with those companies.

The growing visibility of Middle Eastern sports has only recently attracted the attention of scholars. Although some sporadic academic studies appeared as early as the 1980s, we can identify the beginning of a “wave” of scholarship in the mid-1990s, which intensified since the early 2000s. These studies were mostly sociohistorical, sociological, and anthropological, and tended to focus on the particular dynamics of certain countries, including Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Yemen, Israel/Palestine, and Jordan. While recent scholarship continues similar patterns, and extends to cover new countries, we can identify the addition of two new trends since 2010. The first is related to the power shift in the region: for instance, professional sports clubs around the world have signed sponsorship deals with Middle Eastern airlines, and stadium naming rights have also been signed with those companies.

These struggles are also related to the various roles sports can play in societal change in the Middle East. While a major goal of policies aimed at promoting sports in the Middle East is international recognition, to what extent can it also contribute to changes within the region? The Middle East is not a homogeneous group of countries: there is political stability in some countries, while others are facing civil wars. Most Middle Eastern countries are Muslim-majority countries, but some also have large Christian populations and other religious minority groups. This volume integrates different academic disciplines from the humanities and social sciences, including business, cultural studies, communication, history, journalism, sociology, sports management, and political science. The book offers original, indepth, theoretically grounded, and richly empirical content. The following are abstracts of chapters that appear in “Sport, Politics, and Society in the Middle East” (Oxford University Press/Hurst, 2019).

INTRODUCTION: FROM SPORTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST TO MIDDLE EASTERN SPORTS
Tanit Sorek, University of Florida, and Danyel Reiche, American University of Beirut

What most Middle Eastern countries have in common is their colonial legacy and complicated present-day relations with the West. In addition, most of them share a low ranking on indexes tracking gender equality, as well as on those tracking democracy and press freedom. Can mega-sporting events awarded to Middle Eastern countries contribute to societal reform, and can they positively affect, for example, freedom of expression? While such a scenario is possible, this volume rejects the romantic and deterministic idea that sport always contributes to societal improvement. Nonetheless, it does highlight specific case studies where this is indeed the case, for instance the empowerment of women in particular circumstances and under particular conditions. As this book shows, the state assumes different roles in various Middle Eastern sports sectors. In wealthy Middle Eastern countries, and in emerging market countries, the state plays a central role in the sports sector. A challenge discussed in the volume is how the private sector must grow to assist governments in meeting the ambitious visions and targets for sports. For states with weak governments, such as Lebanon, the challenge is different: to fight corruption around mega-sporting events, especially regarding the allocation of sports budgets. They also need to develop a more strategic approach that gives some guidance to stakeholders in order to meet targets such as increased sports participation and elite sport success.

1. MAPPING THE ‘SPORTS NAHDA’: TOWARD A HISTORY OF SPORTS IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST
Murat C. Yıldız, Skidmore College

This chapter explores the intersections of sports as a form of leisure and education. Drawing from a diverse array of primary and secondary sources, it explores the discursive and material transformations that indelibly shaped the emergence, vernacularization, and spread of sports during the late nineteenth century until the interwar period in the Middle East. More specifically, it examines how people, from Istanbul to Jerusalem, Cairo to Beirut, and Baghdad to Tehran, performed gymnastics in schools, played team sports for athletic clubs, cheered for their favorite team in the stands, and read and/or listened to people read aloud descriptions of the latest matches and the importance of regular exercise in periodicals.

2. FOOTBALL’S ROLE IN HOW SOCIETIES REMEMBER: THE SYMBOLIC WARS OF JORDANIAN–PALESTINIAN FOOTBALL
Dag Tuastad, University of Oslo

This chapter demonstrates how the football arena constitutes a dominant stage for battles over national social memories. The role of football and the sports arena in how societies remember is an understudied field in the social science of sport. The chapter analyzes how football matches contribute to preserve social memories of ethnic communities. The Palestinians have historically lacked the formal national institutions to preserve their national past and they lack the formal apparatus for the preservation of their national past, one that constitutes them as a national group. This has made informal forms of collective memory exceptionally important in forming Palestinian identity in Jordan.
3. **Hapoel Tel Aviv and Israeli Liberal Secularism**

Tamir Sorek, University of Florida

The cheering repertoire of Hapoel Tel Aviv’s fans in football and basketball includes a puzzling paradox. On the one hand, “anti-racism” is part of the collective self-image of the fans, frequently expressing an explicit inclusive orientation toward the Arab citizens of Israel. On the other hand, in accordance with pressure from international organizations, to pursue sports careers and to showcase these internationally in a way that is culturally acceptable for very few Qatari women. In order to play football, female footballers in Doha negotiate cultural barriers, and many have created a “safe space” where their activity can be seen as less problematic. This chapter focuses on how the women themselves are navigating these obstacles, creating an arena to pursue their passion in a culturally appropriate way. In this chapter, football is used as a tool to negotiate gender and faith according to their community. Digital platforms allow some women from the Arab uprisings, and its impact is far from slowing down. The discussion on how women from the MENA zone, and the Saudi leadership is undergoing dramatic change, raising tensions in the wider region—what would the competition mean for Qatar’s media environment?

4. **Qatari Female Footballers: Negotiating Gendered Expectations**

Charlotte Lysa, University of Oslo

Female Qatari footballers are stuck between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they are subject to a conservative culture, upheld by society and families, in which it is largely unacceptable for a woman to play football. On the other, they are being encouraged by government policies, in accordance with pressure from international organizations, to pursue sports careers and to showcase these internationally in a way that is culturally acceptable for very few Qatari women. In order to play football, female footballers in Doha negotiate cultural barriers, and many have created a “safe space” where their activity can be seen as less problematic. This chapter focuses on how the women themselves are navigating these obstacles, creating an arena to pursue their passion in a culturally appropriate way. In this chapter, football is used as a tool to examine how the women themselves maneuver the system, thus both accepting and transgressing established norms in the society to which they belong.

5. **Sportswomen’s Use of Social Media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)**

Nida Ahmad, University of Waikato

Social media has played a significant role in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), especially during the Arab uprisings, and its impact is far from slowing down. The discussion on how women from the MENA region use social media tends to be centered on political activism, fashion, and business uses, and how they negotiate gender and faith according to their community. Digital platforms allow some women from the region to negotiate social, cultural, and/or religious norms, and to share their experiences through images and text. Discussion around how women from the region are negotiating social media platforms for everyday purposes, particularly in relation to their sport and physical activities, is lacking. Due to increased use of social media by women in the region, this chapter addresses the following question: what role does social media play in constructing and representing female athletes’ sporting lives? And what are the sociocultural implications of these representations?

6. **The World Cup and Freedom of Expression in Qatar**

Craig L. LaMay, Northwestern University in Qatar

Much has been written about sporting mega-events and human rights in the countries that host them, but very little on how these events affect rights of expression and publication. The subject of this paper is the effect, if any, that sporting mega-events, and especially the 2022 FIFA World Cup, will have on Qatar’s environment for free expression and journalistic independence. Qatar, an Arab Gulf state and a member of the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), is both deeply traditional and aggressively modern, and has made sport a centerpiece of its long-term development strategy. Assuming Qatar succeeds in hosting the 2022 World Cup—the continuing Saudi-led blockade means that the games would be played in a conflict zone, and the Saudi leadership is undergoing dramatic change, raising tensions in the wider region—what would the competition mean for Qatar’s media environment?

7. **Turkish Sports: Lost in Politics?**

Cem Tinaz, Istanbul Bilgi University

This chapter provides an overview of Turkey’s sports policy during the years 2002–2018 under the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) party. Policies include bidding for the Olympic Games; hosting high-profile international sporting events; offering monetary awards for professional athletic achievements; naturalization of foreign athletes; and the construction of football stadiums and other sports facilities. Motives behind the policies range from gaining international prestige to promoting internationally successful elite athletes and increasing sports participation among different age groups. The chapter identifies pathways for the state to achieve success in elite sports and to increase sports participation; it discusses the state’s reasons for hosting international sport events; and, finally, it examines problems and deficiencies in national sport. In order to understand the current mismanagement in Turkish sports, it also discusses the state’s motives for hosting international sport events. This study argues that a substantial amount of money has been allocated to these events, which could be used for different areas of sports development.

8. **Developing a National Elite Sport Policy in an Arab Country: The Case of Lebanon**

Nadim Nassif, Notre Dame University–Louaize

Winning in international sport competitions goes beyond the collection of trophies. It is a matter of national pride, a contest to show the superiority of one country over others. Lebanon can be considered an underachiever in this quest. Since 1948, Lebanon has only won four medals. This paper does not explore whether achieving results in international tournaments is beneficial for a country’s sustainable development and social well-being; rather, it focuses on the factors that might, in theory, lead to success. It discusses the macro- and micro-level factors contributing to success, and analyzes why they are not present in Lebanon. The chapter identifies a state-supported national sports program as a key factor in any country’s success in elite sport—one that is driven by a political ideology striving towards international recognition through triumph in elite sport.
9. **Legacies of Mega-Sporting Events in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Lebanon**  
Danyel Reiche, American University of Beirut

Governments all over the world justify spending public money on mega-sporting events by claiming a multitude of benefits for the host community. A common argument is that mega-sporting events would give tremendous exposure to host countries and increase their influence in global politics. Apart from improving a country’s international prestige, mega-sporting events are considered to be a valuable tool for fostering national pride and unity, and, particularly relevant for the for development of emerging countries. This chapter discusses the extent to which these anticipated benefits apply to Lebanon. Internationally known for its 1975–1990 civil war, did hosting mega-sporting events positively impact the tiny Mediterranean nation-state? After the Lebanese civil war, the multi-religious country hosted four mega-sporting events: two multi-sport events—the Pan-Arab Games in 1997 and the Francophone Games in 2009—and two continental championships in football and basketball—the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Asian Cup in 2000 and the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) Asia Cup in 2017. The events illustrate the different identities of Lebanon as an Arab, Asian, and Francophone country. This research is relevant because the academic literature on mega-sporting events neglects the role of small, developing countries as hosts.

10. **The Business of Sports in the Gulf Cooperation Council Member States**  
Simon Chadwick, Centre for Sports Business at the University of Salford

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic shift eastwards (towards Asia) in sport’s global powerbase. The states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have been a driving force in promoting the economic, industrial, and commercial development of sport—regionally, internationally, and globally. Indeed, there is ample evidence of this, ranging from the acquisition of sports assets such as football clubs (English Premier League club Manchester City by Abu Dhabi’s Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan) and the staging of sports mega-events (Bahrain and Abu Dhabi’s staging of the Formula 1 Grand Prix), through to the creation of extensive sponsorship portfolios (Emirates Airlines’ multiple deals with top European football clubs such as Real Madrid and AC Milan) and government-level commitments being made to the industrial development of sport (Qatar’s 2030 National Vision and the country’s accompanying sports strategy). The business of sport has become important for individual GCC countries, for the GCC collectively, and for the world of sport in general. It is contributing to national planning, especially as GCC countries look towards diversifying their economies beyond a dependence upon oil and gas. Yet the role of sport is extending beyond this to embrace goals such as job creation, establishing competitive advantage, enhancing the national image, improving international relations, fostering social cohesion, and promoting health and active lifestyles. Such is the breadth, pace, and intensity of growth and change in GCC sport that a closer examination of its industrial and business features is therefore warranted.
The "Resource Curse" in the Persian Gulf

(Routledge 2020)

Edited by Mehran Kamrava

1. Oil and Institutional Stasis in the Persian Gulf
   Mehran Kamrava, CIRS – Georgetown University in Qatar

2. Imperial Origins of the Oil Curse
   Desha Girod, Georgetown University, and Meir R. Walters, U.S. Department of State

3. Rentierism’s Siblings: On the Linkages between Rents, Neopatrimonialism, and Entrepreneurial State Capitalism in the Persian Gulf Monarchies
   Matthew Gray, Waseda University in Tokyo

4. Reformers and the Rentier State: Re-Evaluating the Co-Optation Mechanism in Rentier State Theory
   Jessie Moritz, Australian National University

5. Cursed No More? The Resource Curse, Gender, and Labor Nationalization Policies in the GCC
   Gail J. Buttorff, University of Kansas, Nawra Al Lawati, Sultan Qaboos University, and Bozena C. Welborne, Smith College

6. The Impact of Oil Rents on Military Spending in the GCC Region: Does Corruption Matter?
   Mohammad Reza Farzanegan, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany
The debate on whether resource abundance in general, and resource dependence in particular, is a curse or a blessing is an old one. Paradoxically, despite a proliferation of studies on rentierism in the last two decades or so, the specific notion of a “resource curse” has seldom been studied systematically in relation to the Persian Gulf. The chapters in this volume address this gap, looking specifically at the historical causes and genesis of the phenomenon and its consequences in a variety of areas, including human development, infrastructural growth, clientelism, state-building and institutional evolution, and societal and gender relations.

On their own, natural resource endowments are a blessing and not a curse. What turns this blessing into a curse is the ways in which it is managed, or, more accurately, mismeansled. For some time, policymakers have known the nature of the remedies for dealing with the resource curse: minimizing the risks of Dutch Disease; instituting policies that enhance growth in short to medium terms; promoting good governance and reducing corruption; preparing for the depletion of oil resource income; and regularly assessing the appropriate policy mix. Long-term savings plans, in the form of investments by sovereign wealth funds, can also help alleviate some of the pitfalls of dependence on and depletion of natural resources. Of these policy options, the GCC states have already made good use of their sovereign wealth funds, and with varying degrees of conviction and success, they have slowly begun to diversify their economies. But on most other scores, including also economic diversification, the political will and the capacity to make difficult decisions seem to be conspicuously absent.

Oil has seriously impacted the institutional development of the state in the Arabian Peninsula. More specifically, the sudden and unprecedented acquisition of massive oil revenues resulted in the freezing of the state’s formal and informal institutions, at the point at which petrodollars were injected into the state’s coffers. From then on, state leaders were able to deploy the state’s wealth to dictate the pace and direction of institutional change. Over time, any institutional change has been directed towards enhancing regime security, and the pace of change has been calculated and deliberately slow. Any political opening has been dictated by the logic of state power maximization (in relation to society). At the same time, partly to ensure its popular legitimacy and partly through the vision of its leaders, the state has deployed its massive wealth both to foster rapid economic and infrastructural development and to enhance the living standards of its citizens. In other words, whereas oil may have stunted institutional development — i.e., an institution’s curse — it has been an economic blessing.

1. Oil and Institutional Stasis in the Persian Gulf
Mehran Kamrava, CIRS – Georgetown University in Qatar

Oil has seriously impacted the institutional development of the state in the Arabian Peninsula. More specifically, the sudden and unprecedented acquisition of massive oil revenues resulted in the freezing of the state’s formal and informal institutions, at the point at which petrodollars were injected into the state’s coffers. From then on, state leaders were able to deploy the state’s wealth to dictate the pace and direction of institutional change. Over time, any institutional change has been directed towards enhancing regime security, and the pace of change has been calculated and deliberately slow. Any political opening has been dictated by the logic of state power maximization (in relation to society). At the same time, partly to ensure its popular legitimacy and partly through the vision of its leaders, the state has deployed its massive wealth both to foster rapid economic and infrastructural development and to enhance the living standards of its citizens. In other words, whereas oil may have stunted institutional development — i.e., an institution’s curse — it has been an economic blessing.

2. Imperial Origins of the Oil Curse
Desha Girod, Georgetown University, and Meir R. Walters, U.S. Department of State

The literature maintains that oil creates a curse on development in countries with weak national institutions at oil discovery, but offers little guidance on the specific institutions that help leaders avoid the curse. We trace rent distribution in Kuwait and Oman, apparent outliers that experienced development despite their weak national institutions at oil discovery. Unlike other examples of the oil curse, Kuwait and Oman contained a strong informal institution that compelled rulers to spend oil revenues on human development: a balance of power between leaders and their domestic rivals. Because informal balances of power are also present in countries with strong formal institutions that avoid the oil curse, this study suggests that the presence or absence of informal balances of power may help account for whether oil is a blessing or a curse.

3. Rentierism’s Siblings: On the Linkages between Rents, Neopatrimonialism, and Entrepreneurial State Capitalism in the Persian Gulf Monarchies
Matthew Gray, Waseda University in Tokyo

This paper examines rentier state theory (RST), and specifically “rentierism” as a more refined and nuanced variant of RST, arguing that while rentierism provides considerable utility in explaining the state–society relationships of the contemporary Arab states of the Persian Gulf, it is insufficient as a stand-alone explanation, and needs to be considered as a political dynamic of the state–society relationship, rather than as a structural explanation for the state itself, as early RST more ambitiously sought to do. Rentierism therefore needs to be utilized in combination with two other explanatory frameworks, neopatrimonialism and state capitalism. In effect, these are rentierism’s theoretical “siblings”: they sharpen a rentier analysis by providing greater nuance about how elite networks, business-governent relations, and personalized politics operate and interact in the allocative settings of the Gulf, as well as illustrating both the scope and the limits of rentierism as an explanatory framework.
4. **Reformers and the Rentier State: Re-Evaluating the Co-Optation Mechanism in Rentier State Theory**
   Jessie Moritz, Australian National University

The oil and gas-rich states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have long been treated as exceptional, where distributions of rent-based wealth to society assumedly preclude political dissent. Yet, by examining informal and formal opposition in Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman since 2011, this study disputes the effectiveness of this “co-optation mechanism” at the sub-national level. Drawing from 135 semi-structured interviews conducted with citizens of these states, it uncovers evidence of challenges to state authority even among nationals who should theoretically be co-opted. In examining the limits of rent-based co-optation, the article highlights two key political dynamics that have demonstrated a capacity to overpower rent-based incentives to remain politically inactive: ideology and repression. Societies, then, were far from quiescent, and this research examines the networks and dynamics that have allowed citizens to challenge state authority.

5. **Cursed No More? The Resource Curse, Gender, and Labor Nationalization Policies in the GCC**
   Gail J. Buttorff, University of Kansas, Nawra Al Lawati, Sultan Qaboos University, and Bozena C. Welborne, Smith College

Recent scholarship posits that the resource curse has gendered as well as economic effects on oil-rich economies, like those in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), entrenching paternalistic relationships that disadvantage women’s entry into the labor force. Upon closer examination, however, it appears that oil may not be the most compelling argument to explain Arab women’s low presence in the workforce—especially since women’s labor force participation within the oil rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states is generally higher than the regional average. We contend that this is, in part, a byproduct of the countries’ labor nationalization policies. Our analysis suggests that oil-driven development can in fact boost female labor force participation, revealing that rentierism as experienced in the GCC can actually have positive externalities for women.

6. **The Impact of Oil Rents on Military Spending in the GCC Region: Does Corruption Matter?**
   Mohammad Reza Farzanegan, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Germany

This study shows how the level of corruption matters in the way oil rents affect a state’s military spending. Using panel data covering the 1984–2014 period for the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), we find that the effect of oil rents on military budgets depends on the extent of political corruption. Oil rents are negatively associated with military spending of the GCC countries. However this, in turn, is moderated by higher levels of corruption. For comparison, we examine this association in non-GCC countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, finding a positive effect of higher oil rents on military spending; this effect is larger in corrupt polities within non-GCC countries. The intermediary role of corruption in the military-oil nexus is robust, controlling for a set of variables that may affect military spending.
Introduction: Middle Powers in the Middle East
Adham Saouli, University of St. Andrews

1. Middling or Meddling? Origins and Constraints of External Influence in the Middle East
Adham Saouli, University of St. Andrews

2. Middle Power Theory at the Regional Level: An Analytical Framework for the Middle East
May Darwich, University of Birmingham

3. Middle Eastern Middle Powers: The Roles of Norms in Mediation and Conflict Prevention
Marco Pinfari, American University in Cairo

4. “A Giant Afraid of its Shadow”: Algeria, the Reluctant Middle Power
Yahia H. Zoubir, KEDGE Business School

5. Egypt’s Middle Power Aspirations Under el-Sisi
Nael M. Shama, Political Researcher

6. Iran: Aspirations and Constraints
Amin Saikal, Australian National University

7. The Kingdom and the Glory? Saudi Arabia as a Middle Power in the Contemporary Middle East
Simon Mabon, Lancaster University

8. Small-State Aspirations to Middlepowerhood: The Cases of Qatar and the UAE
Robert Mason, American University in Cairo

9. The UAE: A Small State with Regional Middle Power Aspirations
Islam Hassan, Durham University
Unfulfilled Aspirations: Middle Power Politics in the Middle East

Summary of Research Initiative

The main conceptual, theoretical, and empirical implications of this volume are wide ranging. It contributes to the literature on middle powers and middlepowerhood, with a particular focus on the Middle East region. The volume is the first of its kind to interrogate, both conceptually and theoretically, the notion of middlepowerhood at the regional level, while also examining it empirically in several Middle Eastern contexts. The contributions extend the geographical focus of previous studies on middlepowerhood, which concentrated on traditional and emerging middle powers. They also open the way for examination of other regions, such as Africa, Central Asia or Latin America. Such widening of the scope of the study of middlepowerhood to the Middle East region, which is one of the most strategic and internationally-penetrated regions of the world, has required conceptual and theoretical adaptations. Conceptually, the contributions relocate the analysis of middle powers to the regional level, and offer a set of criteria by which to identify middle power behavior. The empirical sections of the volume offer a wide scope to assess the quest for and limitations to middlepowerhood in various case studies.

At a theoretical level, the nature of the Middle East states-system was taken into consideration to understand and explain the potential for, and constraints upon, middle power politics in the region. This states-system has offered various aspiring regional middle powers the scope to realize their goals by the direct or indirect meddling in domestic affairs of other states. This volume has identified the domestic factors that may induce or constrain a state’s abilities to pursue middlepowerhood. By focusing on regimes’ survival and the quest to promote their regional status, the analysis of middle powers in the Middle East challenges the common assumption that they pursue virtuous, normative foreign policy.

Theoretically, the analyses presented here adopt a three-level approach to investigating, understanding, and explaining middlepowerhood. For example, to account for the rise and influence of small states, domestic regime considerations, weakening of traditional regional powers, and international protection were all taken into account as crucial factors to explain the aspirations to middlepowerhood of small states. Such analyses have also required the bridging of realist and constructivist approaches to international politics, focusing on both material and ideational factors to account for the behaviors of regional middle powers. Empirically, the volume presents rich and comparative analyses of various cases with varying capabilities, domestic contexts, world visions, and international alliances. One of the main implications of these empirical analyses is that the choice of whether or not to pursue middlepowerhood is determined by a regime’s perception of its domestic and regional interests and role. In essence, the choice reflects the vulnerabilities of various regimes and states in the region.

The quest by small, rich states such as Qatar or the UAE, to play leading roles emanates from their need to protect their wealth from more powerful regional actors, and to be acknowledged as influential states. Iran and Egypt reflect the quest of traditional powers to be considered the “natural” regional (and international) middle powers, despite the constraints they face in trying to realize their national aspirations. Finally, Saudi Arabia and Algeria have, until now, been reluctant to expose their regional (and international) middle powers, despite the constraints they face in trying to realize their influential states. Iran and Egypt reflect the quest of traditional powers to be considered the “natural” middle powers. Empirically, why do some regional actors aspire to be middle powers, while others refrain from doing so? What induces or constrains the behavior of middle powers?

1. Middling or Meddling? Origins and Constraints of External Influence in the Middle East

Adham Saouli, University of St. Andrews

In this chapter, I identify and examine the elements that induce or hinder middle power behavior in the Middle East. The behavior of regional middle powers generates useful challenges to, and avenues for, developing conceptual and theoretical understandings of middle power behavior generally. The concept of “middle power” has demarcated states that are neither great nor weak in their size, economic capability, and military power. However, an examination of Middle East rivalries questions this definition and reveals that regional influence can be exerted by actors that vary in capabilities. Although some actors possess middle power attributes, they refrain from transforming potential into real power. While it is important to consider the constitutive elements of a state, it is more useful to focus on its foreign policy behavior to account for its ability to pursue middle power politics.

2. Middle Power Theory at the Regional Level: An Analytical Framework for the Middle East

May Darwich, University of Birmingham

This chapter discusses the core assumptions of middle power theory, and proposes a way in which it may be used to compare and assess the behavior of a certain category of secondary states within regional hierarchies. Despite the conceptual weaknesses inherent in middle power theory, the chapter sets out to examine why and how this theoretical lens is appropriate for examining the behavior of regional actors in the Middle East. This chapter engages with international relations theories to disentangle the main assumptions in the middle power research program from its Western origins, and proposes several ways to allow the travel of this concept to non-Western regions. Furthermore, it proposes an analytical framework that bridges Middle East international relations and the concept of middle powers by combining ideational and material elements to examine the behavior of this particular category of states.
3. **MIDDLE EASTERN MIDDLE POWERS: THE ROLES OF NORMS IN MEDIATION AND CONFLICT PREVENTION**

Marco Pinatini, American University in Cairo

This chapter analyzes a selection of mediation and conflict-prevention initiatives promoted by Middle Eastern middle powers since the 1980s. It begins by noting that behavioral approaches to middle power status consider systematic engagement in mediation and conflict prevention as one of the key traits of “middlepowermanship,” and reflects on how the literature on middle power mediation and norm-based international behavior can be applied specifically to the Middle East. It then turns to the analysis of three case studies of norm-based mediation or conflict resolution initiatives promoted by three Middle Eastern middle powers—Algeria, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt—since the 1980s. These cases include instances of norm-driven positioning of mediators comparable to the international behavior of established middle powers like Sweden; of pragmatic but repeated use of norms as part of the content of mediation initiatives; and of norm-influenced foreign policy initiatives aimed at conflict prevention.

4. **"A GIANT AFRAID OF ITS SHADOW": ALGERIA, THE RELUCTANT MIDDLE POWER**

Yahia H. Zoubir, KEDGE Business School

This chapter examines Algeria’s foreign policy from the perspective of the concept of “middlepowermanship.” As a middle power, Algeria has adopted many roles to protect its national interests and the preservation of its regime. The main argument in this study is that Algeria was destined to be a middle power, but for reasons that will be elucidated, policymakers have refrained from advancing the state as a middle power with the potential of being a regional hegemon in the Maghreb-Sahel region. Thus, the objective is to highlight the lingering difficulty in adequately classifying Algeria’s foreign policy and to understand why such a major country is unwilling to play a regional and international role concomitant with its military and economic capacities. Because of its human capital, the size of its territory, its skilled armed forces, the wealth of its natural resources, and its experienced diplomacy, Algeria will remain an important middle power and continue to play major regional and international roles.

5. **EGYPT’S MIDDLE POWER ASPIRATIONS UNDER EL-SISI**

Nael M. Shama, Political Researcher

At a general level of analysis, a middle power could be identified using three approaches: its possession of material capabilities, the way it acts, and the way its policymakers perceive its foreign policy identity. The first, often called the “position” approach, sketches at length relevant quantifiable factors, such as geographic location, size, population, gross domestic product (GDP), and defense spending. Yet, a state’s ownership of material capabilities does not in itself indicate that it wants to embrace an assertive and active foreign policy. Therefore, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a shift took place, to the “behavioral” approach, which examines the foreign policy behavior of states to identify and understand middle powers. The third approach, the “identity” approach, considers how policymakers think about the foreign policy identity of their states. This approach presents a straightforward method of identification that has a reasonable power of prediction. This chapter presents a number of arguments about Egypt’s middle power aspirations under el-Sisi.

6. **IRAN: ASPIRATIONS AND CONSTRAINTS**

Amin Saikal, Australian National University

The Islamic Republic of Iran is described by some pundits as a “middle power,” or alternatively as a key actor or influential regional player, without whose cooperation not many Gulf and, for that matter, Middle Eastern problems can be satisfactorily addressed. In all cases, the inference is that the republic has achieved a level of power and resource capability to be able to impact geopolitical developments within its region and beyond, in support of what it regards as its national interests. The country’s economic and hard and soft power, along with its size, geographical position, culture, and riches drawn from oil and gas are taken into account in this respect. This study examines how Iran is able to affect events, positively or negatively, in its neighborhood, and to deal with major powers from a bargaining position at bilateral and multilateral levels.


Simon Mahon, Lancaster University

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has faced a number of serious challenges to its geopolitical position in the Persian Gulf regional security complex. The onset of the Arab uprisings dramatically altered regional security calculations, presenting challenges to maintaining the regional order, while also providing an opportunity to reduce Iranian influence in the region. At the same time, smaller Gulf states such as Qatar, emboldened by huge financial might, have begun to play a more active foreign policy role across the Middle East, particularly in Syria and Yemen. Such challenges provide a rich scope from which to analyze Saudi Arabia’s role within the Middle East, along with the extent to which we can refer to the kingdom as a middle power. Given this ambition, this chapter seeks to achieve two things: 1) reflect upon the extent to which Saudi Arabia can be considered a middle power, and 2) explore the changing capacity of the kingdom’s power in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

8. **SMALL-STATE ASPIRATIONS TO MIDDLEPOWERHOOD: THE CASES OF QATAR AND THE UAE**

Robert Mason, American University in Cairo

This chapter outlines the features of small states and their diplomacy, and assesses the power capabilities and potential of Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to reach middlepowerhood. The driving research question identifies the conditions under which small states, such as Qatar and the UAE, with some features of middle power status, such as economic resources and an aspiration and willingness to project power beyond their borders, can elevate themselves to full middlepowerhood and beyond. This chapter argues that small states can break the mold of their classification, but that the tipping point to middlepowerhood for Qatar came and went during the Morsi presidency in Egypt. Further, as a result of the backlash against its interventionist foreign policy, Qatar could yet become an outlying state on the fringes of the GCC. The UAE is found to be approaching a “tipping point” to middlepowerhood due to a combination of factors that are generally enhancing its influence in international affairs.
9. **The UAE: A Small State with Regional Middle Power Aspirations**  
Islam Hassan, Durham University

Despite being a small state, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) aspires to become a regional middle power, not only to mitigate its status insecurities in the regional and international system, but also to gain domestic, regional, and international legitimacy that brands the country as a subject rather than an object of regional affairs. Arguing that the UAE is a small state aspiring for a regional middle power status, the chapter begins with a conceptual discussion on the different categories of power. It then locates the UAE in the international power hierarchy, highlighting the country's power aspirations. The study explores the domestic-level triggers for the UAE’s pursuit of a regional middle power status, including the Emirati leadership’s aim to consolidate the ruling bargain domestically, the narrative of UAE as being a global good citizen, and the 2004 transition in leadership. Finally, the chapter explores three regional-level triggers to the UAE’s pursuit of a regional middle power status, particularly the post-Arab uprisings regional reconfiguration of power, the UAE’s status race with Qatar, and the frailty of the Gulf Cooperation Council.