RE-VISIONING SECURITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST
A CRITICAL SECURITY STUDIES PERSPECTIVE

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PINAR BILGIN

DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
UNIVERSITY OF WALES, ABERYSTWYTH
CEREDIGION, SY23 3DA
WALES, UNITED KINGDOM
hpb95@aber.ac.uk
+44 1970 623 111 x.4066
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The main assumption that underlies the argument of this paper is that security cannot be defined purely at the theoretical level. It has to be defined with reference to a subject (or subjects) situated in a particular time and place and in relation to practice. Concepts such as national security, international security and security policy are inter-subjectively constituted. Different peoples with different philosophical convictions would attach different meanings to them.¹ From a Critical Security Studies perspective security is emancipation.² Emancipation, in turn, may mean different things to peoples from different socio-political surroundings, and our security practices should be designed to accommodate this. Critical Security Studies favours broadening and deepening our conceptions of security to have better and fuller agendas that would cover all those issues that engender insecurity - all social, physical, political as well as military constraints which prevent people from carrying out what they would freely choose to do.³ The purpose is to achieve ‘stable security’ conceived as a process of emancipation.⁴ Stable security may be understood as security sought together with one’s adversary, not against them; and not via the threat of war but due to mutual satisfaction with the existing conditions. Security achieved at the expense of others or maintained through the threat and use of force cannot be stable. Like security, emancipation cannot be achieved at somebody else’s expense. As Ken Booth put it, ‘true emancipation is based on the belief that “I cannot be emancipated until you are” - whoever the I’.⁵

This is not to suggest that security is an endpoint; it is rather conceived as a process, ‘a condition of becoming.’\(^6\) Like peace, security cannot be treated as an endpoint not only because its definition differs from person to person (as is the case with many other concepts) but also because both are moving targets. All emancipations marginalise some others whose struggles would have to be taken up next; this, in turn, renders the process of emancipation somewhat boundless. Moreover, peoples adapt their definitions of security (and emancipation) as they go along. Indeed, it is this inter-subjectively constituted and therefore malleable character of security that makes it possible for peoples participating in peace processes to modify their conceptions and come to agree on common definitions.

The purpose of this paper is to re-vision security in the Middle East from a Critical Security Studies perspective. The Middle East constitutes an interesting case and a challenge. For one thing, addressing the problem of regional security Middle East against the backdrop of increasing regionalisation of security relations in other parts of the world is interesting in itself.\(^7\) For another thing, studying security in the Middle East enables the analyst to show how both the concepts ‘region’ and ‘security’ need to be problematised when re-visioning regional security. Indeed the Middle Eastern case presents a good opportunity to investigate the relationship between visions of ‘the region’ and conceptions of security.

The argument here is that all attempts to re-vision security in the Middle East need to pay attention to regional peoples’ multiple and contending conceptions of security, what they view as the referent object(s), how they think security should be established in this part of the world. This is in contrast to Cold War approaches to regional security which were top-down and military-focused, viewing regional events through the template of the conflict between the two blocs.\(^8\) One task of Critical Security Studies is to critically analyse these Cold War approaches to security and try and underline their inadequacies. This will be my focus in the first section of the paper when I look at Cold War approaches to regional security in the Middle East.

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\(^6\) Booth, ‘Three Tyrannies,’ 41.
Another task students of Critical Security Studies have taken upon themselves is to speak up for those whose views have been marginalised by the Cold War discourses. The intention is to point to possibilities for change immanent in world politics by showing how difficult it is to generalise about questions of security, how peoples' ideas about security differ from one another, how they have changed in the past and might change in the future. Within the Middle Eastern context this means amplifying the voices of those whose views have not been incorporated into regional security analyses and point to possibilities for change that exist. The second section of the paper is organised around three alternative approaches that have criticised Cold War approaches to security in the Middle East and proposed their own visions. These are the Arab, Islamist, and Mediterranean visions. It will be argued that these visions (including the Middle Eastern vision which is the focus of the first section) have their roots in contending conceptions of security.

This is not to suggest that these alternative approaches should not be put under critical scrutiny. The role of the students of Critical Security Studies should not be merely to represent those views that have so far been neglected by the mainstream approaches, but also to critically analyse them. Adopting a relativist perspective is not desirable; even less so in places such as the Middle East where contending definitions of security often clash. From a Critical Security Studies perspective, the role of the security analyst is to adopt a 'critical distance', to anchor oneself by being self-conscious and open about the other versions of 'reality' and by reflecting upon his/her own role as an intellectual and the effects of his/her own work on the subject of the research. Within the Middle Eastern context this requires being sensitive towards regional peoples’ own conceptions, representing the ideas and experiences of those who are marginalised by the mainstream discourses and drawing up a template for thinking about regional security that promotes emancipatory practices. It is not possible to meet all threats to security. Rather the task is to move towards the creation of a non-violent

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conflict culture within which peoples may live out their own visions without depriving others of their security. This theme will be further explored in the third section when the paper will turn to the future and focus on a Critical Security Studies template for thinking about security in this part of the world. First the Middle Eastern vision.

I. The Middle Eastern vision: a Cold War relic?

The Middle Eastern vision is usually associated with the United States and its regional allies. It derives from US conception of security which could be summed up as the unhindered flow of oil at reasonable prices, the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the prevention of the emergence of any regional hegemon, and the maintenance of ‘friendly’ regimes that are sensitive to US concerns. This was (and still is) a top-down, external oriented conception of security that privileged the security of states and military stability. Let us look at each of these characteristics in detail.

This was a top-down conception of security for the threats to ‘security in the Middle East’ were defined from the perspective of external actors rather than regional states or peoples. In the eyes of British and US defence planners communist infiltration and Soviet intervention constituted the greatest threat to security in the Middle East.14 The way regional states could enhance their security, they argued, was by entering into an alliance with the West. Two security umbrella schemes, the Middle East Defence Organisation (MEDO) and the Baghdad Pact were designed for this purpose. Although there were regional states such as Iraq (until the 1958 coup), Iran (until 1978) and Turkey that shared British and US perceptions to a certain extent, many Arab policymakers begged to differ.15

The traces of this top-down thinking are still prevalent today in US approach to security in the Middle East. In following a policy of dual containment the United States considers Iran and Iraq as the main threats largely due to their military capabilities (esp. weapons of mass destruction) and the revisionist character of their regimes that are not subservient to US interests.16 However these top-down perspectives, while revealing certain aspects of the insecurity problematique in the Middle East, at the same time help

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13 On the role of the intellectual in Critical Security Studies, see Wyn Jones, ‘Message in a Bottle’.
gloss over others. A case at hand is that of women in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait whose lives are made insecure not only because of the threat caused by their Gulf neighbours’ military capabilities, but also because of the conservative character of their own regimes which restricts women’s rights under the cloak of religion. Their concerns rarely make it into regional security analyses.

The prioritising of US security concerns when conceptualising regional security was compounded by an external oriented understanding of security. For most of the 20th century security in the Middle East was understood to mean its defence from any external power that threatened British and US interests in this part of the world. Indeed, the boundaries of the ‘Middle East’ were drawn in the minds of the makers of British and US strategy in line with the security interests of their respective countries.

It was not solely the external orientation in security thinking, however, that turned analysts’ attention away from domestic security concerns. This had also to do with the statist character of most of the thinking done on Middle Eastern security. Statism could be defined as considering the state as the prime subject of all loyalty and decision-making power. In return, the state is expected to provide security for its citizens. However, the practices of Middle Eastern states indicate that this does not always work out as the theory desires. Regional regimes such as the Baath regime in Iraq infringe upon their own citizens’ rights often for the purposes of state security. Those who dare to challenge their states’ security practices may be at best marginalised at worst accused of treachery. Leaving aside the critical issue of the infringement of basic political rights, there is also the problem of brain drain as a threat to security. The statist practices of some regimes are among the prime causes of brain drain from the region. Those regimes intolerant of criticism often drive their own brain-power away further impoverishing their already deprived health and education sectors thereby deepening the insecurity of their peoples. Moreover, statist security practices may also cause militarism to become engrained in the society thereby contributing to

17 Campbell, Defense of the Middle East.
institutionalised sexism and the disempowerment of women's efforts within peace movements.²¹

This brings us to the issue of military emphasis in Cold War approaches to regional security. The military focus of the Cold War approaches has manifested itself within the Middle Eastern context by regional as well as extra-regional actors' over-reliance on the military instrument in maintaining security. The British and US security practices during this period took the form of defending regional states against external intervention by way of helping them to strengthen their defences, acquiring military bases in the region, and bolstering these ‘friendly’ regimes’ stronghold over their populace so that the ‘Middle East’ would become inviolable to Soviet infiltration.

Although all regional states tended to rely on the threat and use of military force to enhance their security, Israel became a text-book case in adopting military-focused conceptions and practices. Over the years the Israeli strategy of self-help has involved developing a qualitative edge in military power, deterring attack with conventional and unconventional threats, and adopting an offensive military doctrine and force structure. What the makers of Israeli strategy hoped to achieve in the end was ‘cumulative deterrence’; after suffering a series of defeats and setbacks, they hoped, Arab policymakers would finally be persuaded to recognise and make peace with Israel.²² With the exception of the peace agreement with Egypt, Israel’s policies could be argued to have created more problems than they have solved by giving rise to a region-wide arms race that is proving to be a major obstacle for the ‘Arms Control and Regional Security’ (ACRS) process that was launched as a part of the Madrid talks.²³

ACRS is not the only part of the Madrid Peace Process that is plagued by Cold War conceptions and practices of security.²⁴ The bilateral track of the Madrid peace talks had already been taken over by the Oslo process (1993) but the multilateral tracks were stalled for reasons largely to do with the incongruities between the US vision of

²⁴ This is another reminder of the fact that some Cold War structures and mindsets still remain. See Cynthia Enloe, The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Booth, ‘Cold Wars of the Mind’ 29-55.
regional security and those of regional states. The US approach in the post-Gulf War period has been one of de-coupling the Iraqi case from that of the Arab-Israeli peace process and treating them as isolated issues. This, arguably, is in line with traditional US approach to security in the Middle East which has for long sought to address the Arab-Israeli conflict and other regional issues such as oil (energy security) as separate issues.\(^{25}\) Although many Arab states went along with the US policy well until 1997, they began to resent the top-down approach of the United States that whilst threatening Iraq with bombings, at the same time expected other Arab states to participate enthusiastically in the Middle East Peace Process pretending business as usual. The Middle East and North Africa summit held in Doha in 1997 failed largely because regional policy-makes refused to buy into the US argument that the future of Iraq could be treated in isolation from what happens to the rest of the Arab world. This is what we will turn to now -the critique brought by the proponents of the Arab vision.

II. Critiques and Alternatives

II.1. The Arab Vision

The Arab vision derives from the concept ‘Arab national security’ that emphasises the attainment of a set of pan-Arab security concerns. Both concepts, ‘Arab national security’ and the ‘Arab regional order’ have been submitted in the aftermath of the Second World War as a part of the challenge to the Cold War approach to security in the Middle East that is considered as a ‘euphemism for secure spheres of influence for either Moscow or Washington’.\(^{26}\) Arab nationalists consider the term ‘Middle East’ to be a label designed at best to underplay the ‘Arab’ character of this part of the world and at worst to ‘tear up’ the ‘Arab homeland as a distinct unit’.\(^{27}\) According to Ali Eddin Hillal Dessouki and Jamil Mattar, the reasoning behind Western usage of the term ‘Middle East’ is to portray the region as an ethnic mosaic thereby discrediting the calls for greater Arab unity. Their preferred term ‘Arab regional order’, they argue, could serve better as a key for the analysis of ‘interactions among Arab states with their neighbours,


and with the international system at large.' There are two main assumptions behind this argument. One is that the concerns and interests of Arab states could be better understood when viewed together. The second assumption is that these concerns are different from if not opposed to those of non-Arabs. Indeed, they view Iran, Turkey and Israel's policies as threatening Arab national security.

Put broadly, the concept of Arab national security could be understood as focusing on the issues and interests of Arabs as a community defined largely in opposition to non-Arabs. However, by looking at their referent(s) for security - i.e. whom they refer to when they talk about the ‘Arab nation’ - one could tease out two distinct approaches. On the one hand there is Baghat Korany who treats Arab civil society as the referent for security. And on the other hand are those such as Dessouki and Mattar who take the society of Arab states as their referent object. Let us look at these two approaches more closely.

Korany presents the concept ‘Arab national security’ as complementary to Cold War approaches to security in the Middle East that fail to deal with the societal dimension of security. Critical of the statism in mainstream security thinking, Korany argues that in order to understand security in the Arab world, one needs to move away from a statist outlook. Stressing that the Arab World is not merely a ‘conglomeration of hard-shelled, billiard-ball, sovereign states’ Korany emphasises the role of the Arab civil society and its security concerns. His argument is that ‘the analysis of security issues in the Arab world should not be limited only, or even primarily, to the raison d’état of the territorial state’ but pay due attention to the security of the trans-state community of ‘Arab civil society.

As opposed to the emphasis Korany puts on Arab civil society, Dessouki and Mattar treat the society of Arab states as the referent for Arab national security. In other words, Dessouki and Mattar’s critique of Cold War concepts and practices of security stems not so much from the way security is conceived and practised, but with its

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30 For a discussion on civil society in the Arab World, see Jillian Schwedler, ‘Civil Society and the Study of Middle East Politics,’ in Toward Civil Society in the Middle East? A Primer, Jillian Schwedler, ed. (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner, 1995) 1-30.
referent - the Middle East. For, the three non-Arab states, Iran, Israel and Turkey that are included within most definitions of the Middle East are considered as threatening Arab national security as conceived by the two authors.

Although it is debatable to what extent the Arab state system qualifies as a society, it is difficult to deny the fact that those cultural, linguistic, historical and religious factors that cross borders to tie Arab peoples make the relationship between Arab states different from any group of states whose citizens do not share such common characteristics. Michael Barnett terms this relationship between the Arab states as ‘dialogues’ to emphasise the linkages that make it harder for each individual state to ignore the views and concerns of the others. These dialogues, argues Barnett, are the main tools Arab policy-makers have in the governance of the Arab World. Arguably, it is the presence of these linkages that operate at the sub-, inter- and trans-state level that renders the Arab state system more than the sum of its parts.

Korany terms this interplay between the demands of state security (Amn Qutri) and societal security (Amn Qawmi) in the Arab world as a ‘dualism’. From the first establishment of the Arab state-system onwards, he argues, the prevalence of the former among policy-makers has been checked by the popularity of the latter amongst non-state actors such as intellectuals, grassroots movements and individuals. This could partly be explained by the endurance of interconnections in between Arab peoples and high degree of permeability of state borders in the Arab World. As Korany puts it, ‘state frontiers have been less important as barriers in the collective psychology than has the distinction between Arab and non-Arab.’ Moreover the practices of Arab states indicate that although far from adopting the Arab civil society as their referent for security, they nevertheless find it difficult to act in total defiance of its concerns. Though it would not be too wrong to argue that the security practices of Arab policy-makers have always been statist, undertaken largely to enhance their own regime security under the mantle of state security, it is impossible to deny that they have also been concerned, if only at the discursive level, with the well-being of all Arab actors. The argument that Arab states have always prioritised state-security and that this is reflected in the charter of the League of Arab States only reflects one dimension of the dualism as laid out by

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34 Korany, 'National Security in the Arab World,' 164.
35 Korany, 'National Security in the Arab World,' 167.
The other dimension that needs to be taken into account is the concerns of Arab peoples which have often been at odds with and constituted a constraint upon the statist conceptions and practices of Arab regimes.\textsuperscript{37}

The concept of Arab national security constitutes a development over Cold War approaches to regional security in a number of ways. First it is generated by peoples of this part of the world and reflects (at least some of) their security concerns. Its adoption also does away with the top-down perspective of the Cold War approaches. Secondly, it constitutes a (partial) corrective to the statism of mainstream approaches that do not take into account the societal dimension of security. Common to Korany, Dessouki, Mattar and Abdel Aal is the reasoning that regional security cannot be treated merely as the sum of the security of individual Arab states especially if those states identify with each other in the way Arab states do. Third, both approaches share an interest in its non-military dimension, especially the security of Arab national identity. Issues as diverse as food, economic and water security are also considered by some as Arab national security issues. It should however be noted that these issues are almost always viewed through statist lenses. For instance the issue of food security has almost always been approached from a statist perspective. While Saudi Arabia has spent large amounts of money (by paying its farmers six times the world market prices) to grow wheat in the desert and on the way caused further depletion of scarce non-renewable water resources,\textsuperscript{38} Egyptian farmers had to switch from the production of basic foodstuffs that could help feed the hungry (Egypt has experienced riots during the 1980s due to food shortages) to cotton production for export because the latter pays better.\textsuperscript{39}

To use another example, food security has been presented as an Arab national security issue in reference to both the condition of the people of Sudan who sell their labour to purchase food necessary for survival, and the Syrian regime which seeks self-sufficiency in foodstuffs worried that the ‘food weapon’ might be used against it in times of crisis.\textsuperscript{40}

The fact that the lack of co-operation between Arab states results in a waste of meagre resources thereby deepening Arab national insecurity does not seem to strike the policymakers of either of these countries.


\textsuperscript{38} Martha Wenger & Joe Stark, ‘The Food Gap in the Middle East,’ \textit{Middle East Report} (September-October 1990) 15.

\textsuperscript{39} Karen Pfeiffer, ‘Does Food Security Make a Difference? Algeria, Egypt and Turkey in Comparative Perspective,’ 127-144.

\textsuperscript{40} On Sudan, see Mark Duffield, ‘Absolute Distress: Structural Causes of Hunger in Sudan,’ \textit{Middle East Report} (September-October 1990) 4-5. On the food weapon, see Pfeiffer, ‘Does Food Security Make a Difference,’ 142. Also see Alan Richards, ‘The Global Financial Crisis and Economic Reform in the Middle East’, \textit{Middle East Policy} VI:3 (February 1999) 63-65.
Where statist approaches to Arab national security do not constitute a development over Cold War approaches is regarding their proneness to zero-sum thinking. On the contrary, Israel and Arab states have been prime examples of worst-case thinking and non-zero sum conceptions of security. Arab policy-makers viewed Israel as aggressive and expansionist, not respecting Arab states’ sovereignty and territorial integrity. They also assumed that Israel did not want peace with the Arab states fearing that a condition of peace would allow them to reallocate their resources into reform and development which would tilt the balance of power in the favour of its Arab counterparts. Faced with the ‘dual challenge’ of Israel’s qualitative military superiority and their own ‘strategic depth vulnerability’ the Arab states responded in military terms and sought strategic parity with Israel. Those lacking the necessary manpower or resources, such as Jordan, had to divert precious financial resources into defence.\footnote{41}

It is Korany who moves beyond statist concerns when he voices the security conceptions and practices of Arab civil society that has put other issues high up on the security agenda. Those higher on the economic ladder in the Arab World push for democritisation and respect for human rights, whilst those at the lower levels of the socio-economic ladder direct their practices towards achieving daily economic needs such as jobs, socio-economic equality, health provision, and in some cases daily food subsistence.\footnote{42}

Korany’s conceptualisation Arab national security also has the potential to move beyond the status quo. A clear manifestation of the differences between the pro- and anti-status quo approaches to regional security was observed during the Gulf Crisis. From the perspective of those who viewed regional security in stability oriented terms, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait constituted a threat, for Iraqi actions were in clear breach of the codes of the society of Arab states with its stress on the respect for the principles of sovereignty and non-intervention. This is why policy-makers of Egypt and Syria, long-term advocates of Arab nationalism, did not hesitate to join the coalition formed to undo the Iraqi actions. Peoples on the streets of the Arab World, on the other hand, protested against those Arab states that had chosen to join the coalition, not so much because they condoned Iraqi actions, but because these constituted, in their eyes,\footnote{41 Toukan, ‘Arab National Security Issues: Perceptions and Policies,’ 33-53. \footnote{42 Saad Eddin Ibrahim, ‘Arab Elites and Societies After the Gulf Crisis,’ in The Arab World Today, op.cit. in note 31, 77-89.}
a deserved blow to the status quo (with all its domestic, political socio-economic and international dimensions)...which Kuwait was seen to symbolise." For those who were made insecure by the existing order of things a breach of its rules may not necessarily generate insecurity. Some proponents of the Islamist vision also share this conviction. This is what the paper will turn to now.

**II.2. The Islamist Vision**

The Islamist vision is the most controversial among the three alternatives. This partly stems from the anti-status quo discourses and violent practices of some of its major proponents such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Sudan, and Islamist organisations such as the Hizbullah in Lebanon and FIS (Front Islamique de Salut) in Algeria. And partly it stems from the fact that its referent, the Muslim world is a vague entity. Defined as the sum of Muslim peoples around the world, the Muslim World is a trans-state community that encompasses a significant portion of the globe. When the ‘Islamists’ in the Middle East speak of the Muslim World, however, they refer to a Middle East-centred conception. There are two main problems with this conception. First, two of the states with the largest Muslim populations, Indonesia and Bangladesh are geographically remote from the Middle East. Second, there are more Muslims in Central Asia, China, India and Africa, than there are in the Middle East. Not only are these Muslims geographically remote, but they have different concerns and aspirations than those of their Middle Eastern counterparts. As Nikki Keddie put it, if the ‘Middle East is unsatisfactory as an entity, the Muslim world is scarcely more so.” On the other hand, Mecca and Medina, two places considered as holy by all Muslims are located in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, since the inception of Islam, the Middle East has been the home of the Islamic civilisation which gives Muslims in this part of the world a certain degree of credibility when they speak on behalf of the Muslim world. Moreover, although the Islamist vision has a globalist discourse purporting to address the security of all Muslims, this often becomes locally oriented in the Islamist actors’ practices. Be it the Islamic Republic of Iran or the Hizbullah, the aims of Islamist actors are more often than not oriented to domestic concerns.

Another reason why the Islamist vision is considered to be controversial as an alternative spatial conception stems from the difficulties faced in trying to pin down what

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it may mean as a vision for security given the seemingly contradictory aims of its proponents that include both pro- and anti-status quo actors (Saudi Arabia vs. Iran), revolutionary and anti-revolutionary elements (the Hizbullah vs. the Organisation of Islamic Conference). The divergent practices of these actors range from militant activism (e.g. the New York World Trade Centre bombing of 1993) to grass-roots activities providing services such as health and education to peoples (e.g. FIS in Algeria, HAMAS in the Occupied Territories); from the use of Islamic motifs to enhance regime security (e.g. Saudi Arabia) to advocating violence aimed at establishing an Islamic state (e.g. the Hizbullah in Lebanon).

However common it may be lump together all Islamist peoples and movements under the banner Islamic fundamentalist or confuse ‘Islam’ with the undesirable activities of some Muslims,\(^45\) differences within Muslims in general and Islamists in particular do not allow for any generalisation. For instance, not all Islamists who work towards greater co-operation and collaboration between Muslims buy into a view of the world that is divided between dar-us-salaam (the realm of peace) and dar-ul-harb (the realm of war). Moreover, very few among those who do buy into this view believe in the necessity of fighting all non-Muslims to achieve ‘peace’. The activities some Islamist organisations have engaged in include causing unrest in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, undertaking suicide bombings in Lebanon and Israel, assassinating numerous state officials, journalists, intellectuals and killing tourists. On the other hand, there is also the case of some Islamist movements and organisations that do not merely criticise the state for its failures in meeting socio-economic needs of the society, but also offer an alternative social infrastructure thereby providing security to peoples who have otherwise been neglected by their state for political or infrastructural reasons. In Gaza, for instance, HAMAS provides free medical treatment, food, education and cash to its followers.\(^46\) Islamist organisations and voluntary organisations provide similar services in Egypt.\(^47\) Moreover, they all offer a sense of identity to peoples who feel alienated from their governments.

Security is defined by the proponents of the Islamist vision in relation to two criteria: the absence of un-Islamic influences and the achievement of greater unity of

Muslim peoples which would ultimately enable them to be ‘virtuous and powerful’. Arguably, there is more agreement amongst the proponents of the Islamist vision as to what they are against than what they are for. They often define un-Islamic (but not necessarily non-Islamic) influences as the major threat to their security, but there is little agreement among these actors as to what constitutes ‘un-Islamic’ or Islamic for that matter. During the Gulf War (1991) the conservative Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was criticised for following un-Islamic policies when it invited US troops to step on the holy lands. Some Islamists criticise the existing political and religious establishments as well as the forces of Arab (or any other) nationalism as being un-Islamic. There are others who define the existence of structural violence as un-Islamic and fight towards its erosion.

The case of these Islamist movements serve to remind us how problematic the task of defining security is. From the perspective of the United States, Egypt and Israel, Islamist organisations constitute threats to regional security due to their anti-status quo discourses and (at times) violent practices. Viewed from the lenses of some regional peoples, they serve as major security agents by providing the goods and services to peoples that their own governments fail to provide. From Middle Eastern women’s perspective, on the other hand, these Islamist actors that may be considered as engaging in emancipatory practices at the same time constitute a major threat to their security. For it is often women who get caught in the middle when Islamist actors -be it the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Hizbullah or HAMAS- play up their Islamic credentials.

In sum, although the Islamist vision makes a crucial contribution in criticising top-down and statist approaches to security, it still suffers from an external-oriented conception of security where threats to Muslims are associated with non-Muslims on the one hand and un-Islamic influences on the other. A major contribution the Islamist vision has made is the emphasis it has put on non-military dimensions of security, such as

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48 Ibrahim, ‘Future Visions of the Arab Middle East,’ 432.
50 Esposito, The Islamic Threat: 128.
religious and cultural identity and basic needs such as food, health, education and shelter.

II.3. The Mediterranean Vision

The Mediterranean vision has began to take shape from the 1970s onwards largely in line with the changing security conceptions and practices of the European Union (previously the European Community). The EU’s interest in Middle Eastern affairs goes back to the early 1970s -a period marked by the OPEC oil embargo that intertwined with the 1973 Arab-Israeli war. Over the years, EU policies toward the Middle East have been shaped around three major concerns: energy security; regional stability (understood as the maintenance of domestic stability especially in the geographically closer North African societies); and the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the 1980s, the changes in the societies of EU-member states as a result of the growth of the Middle Eastern diaspora in Western Europe, led the EU to re-think its priorities and come to consider stability in the Middle East, especially in the southern and eastern Mediterranean states, as an integral part of security in Europe. In line with this thinking EU policy-makers sought to create co-operative schemes with the Mediterranean-rim countries of the Middle East to encourage and support economic development and growth toward serving the dual purposes of reducing refugee flows into Europe and preventing Middle Eastern conflicts from being exported into Europe via the Middle Eastern diaspora in the EU.

Over the years these co-operation schemes have taken the form of the ‘Euro-Arab dialogue’, the EU’s ‘overall Mediterranean policy’, multilateral agreements with sub-regional organisations such as the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) and the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), the Italian-Spanish proposal on the establishment of a ‘Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean’ and the ongoing


Although other actors such as the International Peace Research Association (IPRA) have also encouraged and supported some of these schemes, the EU has been the main actor in constructing the Mediterranean as a region. This is not to deny the disagreements among the member states regarding the EU’s Mediterranean policies. Nor is it to gloss over the differences amongst members regarding the sense of urgency they feel for the adoption of an independent and common European foreign policy towards the Middle East and/or a prominent role in the Arab-Israeli Peace Process. Such differences notwithstanding, the EU has so far almost single-handedly (with some backing from Egypt) shaped the Mediterranean as a region to meet its own security interests. Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states, on their part, have participated in these schemes largely in return for EU economic aid and technical/technological support.

The EU’s conceptualisation of the Mediterranean does not include non-Mediterranean littoral Middle Eastern states (Gulf Co-operation Council members plus Iran and Iraq). Although Egyptian policy-makers have expressed a desire to ultimately incorporate all members of the Arab League into the Mediterranean scheme, the EU has so far not been too forthcoming on this issue, preferring to deal with the GCC on a bilateral basis. This is largely because the EU’s delineation of the Mediterranean region reflects its own societal security concerns that have less to do with the Gulf than the geographically closer Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states. Furthermore, in line with its conviction that the threat and use of force would not solve these problems that are non-military in character, the EU has so far emphasised democratisation and economic development as the means to establish security in the Mediterranean. On the issue of Gulf security, however, EU policy-makers still follow the US lead and do not rule out the threat and use force as an instrument of policy as was the case with the Gulf War and the recent bombings of Iraq. Although the EU remains divided over the latter issue, EU policy-makers to a large extent share US conceptions of security in the Gulf which prioritises military stability over democratisation and development.

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58 Volker Perthes, ‘Europe, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process,’ in Allies Divided, op.cit., 79-100.
59 Selim, ‘Mediterraneanism’.
61 Perthes, ‘Europe, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process,’ 90.
The EU’s stress on the relationship between democracy, economic development and security in the Mediterranean can be deduced from the two major schemes that have been proposed over the last decade, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) proposal and the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The long-term objectives and principles of the CSCM were modelled after the CSCE. Its purported aim was to achieve an agreement among the participant states on a set of principles and rules dealing with issues of security, economic co-operation and human rights.\(^6^2\) The CSCM proposal was not followed up for various reasons that will not be discussed here. The momentum created by thinking around that proposal, however, gave additional pace to the Euro-Med partnership which took shape at the Barcelona Conference (November 25-26, 1995) with the participation of Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Syria, the Palestinian Authority, Tunisia and Turkey. At the end of the conference the Barcelona Declaration was signed to establish Euro-Med Partnership on three areas: political and security relations, economic and financial relations, and social, cultural and human relations. In order to give practical expression to the scheme, the Conference agreed on a work programme of activities in a multilateral framework that brought in the private sector to play a role in transferring additional resources both technological and financial. The cornerstone of the Euro-Med Partnership is viewed as the creation of a free-trade zone in industrial goods and services over a 12 year period. The idea behind this formulation is stated as not only to create an expanded trading bloc, but also to provide incentives for sound economic and financial decision-making by Middle Eastern participants, to create a framework for labour-intensive European-funded development projects, and even reduce intra-Middle Eastern conflicts by providing a non-threatening forum for participation across divides.\(^6^3\)

The programme agreed at the Barcelona Conference, although less ambitious in terms of expectations from members compared to a CSCM-type organisation, nevertheless envisaged that the partners would discuss issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The partner states also agreed on the establishment of an ‘international instrument’ in this area and called for exchanges at the civil societal level as a key element of the implementation of the partnership programme.\(^6^4\) The Euro-Med Partnership has so far not made any significant impact largely due to the momentum

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\(^6^3\) Satloff, ‘America, Europe and the Middle East in the 1990s,’ 23.

created by the Oslo process. One key achievement of the partnership has so far been to bring together Syria and Lebanon with Israel as part of a multilateral scheme. Syria has been boycotting the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) summits organised by the United States and Russia (formerly the Soviet Union) as a part of the Madrid Peace Process. It should also be noted that one of the strengths of the Mediterranean vision is the assistance it provides to the NGOs under three different programs, the ‘MEDA Support for Economic and Social Reforms in Mediterranean Third Countries,’ ‘MEDA Democracy Program’ and ‘Support for the Middle East Peace Process’. Between 1995-1999 the EU has set the amount of $5.528 billion to be granted under the MEDA program.65

The Euro-Med Partnership is also supported by Egyptian policy-makers who had their doubts about the CSCM proposal.66 Mediterraneanism has deep roots in Egyptian politics that go back to the 1930s. This interest was revitalised in the 1990s in conjunction with Egypt's re-definition of its identity and interests in the wake of the Cold War. Egypt's expectations from a Mediterranean scheme could be summed up as economic co-operation and cultural exchange with Europe, and to a lesser extent, some breathing space for diplomatic manoeuvres if need be. This could also be deduced from Egypt's record within the Euro-Med fora in that Egyptian policy-makers have so far proved hesitant to discuss security matters, preferring to settle them with the United States on a bilateral level.

Although the CSCM proposal of 1990 failed to start a Helsinki-type process in the Mediterranean, European actors at the sub-state level have been active in conducting people-to-people diplomacy. In February 1992 a meeting was organised in Paris entitled the ‘Citizens of the Mediterranean’ bringing together the peoples of the region and the Helsinki Citizens' Association.67 A similar bottom-up activity was the three day UNESCO supported meeting of the Consultation on Educating For Peace in the Mediterranean that took place in Malta in November 1991.68

Since it is relatively new, the Mediterranean does not have too many proponents at the societal level; nor does it have many enemies. Some Islamist

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65 ‘European Union Funding for the Middle East NGOs,’ Bulletin of Regional Cooperation in the Middle East 7:4 (Winter 1998/99) 15.
66 Selim, ‘Mediterraneanism.’
67 See Sanaa Osserian, ‘The Democratization Process in the Arab-Islamic States of the Middle East,’ in Building Peace in the Middle East, op.cit. in note 57, 87.
movements and organisations, however, do view the Mediterranean vision as a project of the coalition between Western European and Arab governments to downplay the Islamic and Arab character of this part of the world.\textsuperscript{69} The main strength of the Mediterranean vision stems from the fact that it is a relatively neutral conception; it does not a priori exclude some other states - as does the Arab regional order or the Muslim World - or have a colonial baggage - as does the Middle East. Moreover, the Euro-Med partnership remains to be the first and only scheme that has managed to bring Syria and Israel (at the state-level) and a wide spectrum of NGOs (at the sub- and trans-state level) together.

III. A CSS template for re-thinking security in the Middle East

So far we have focused on the answers the proponents of each four visions would give to the questions ‘what is security?’ and ‘whose security?’ - questions that have been central to Critical Security Studies.\textsuperscript{70} The answer we give to these questions depend upon whether we adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach to security. Bottom-up approaches serve to remind us that basic needs such as subsistence, health and education, and issues such as democratisation and human rights rate higher on individuals and social groups’ security agendas than military stability that has topped the US regional security agenda. Although the US view - that military instability in the Middle East threatens global economic security - remains valid, it merely captures one dimension of the insecurity problematique in the region. The security concerns of various actors from within the region, as outlined in the foregoing sections, attest well to this. Furthermore, conceiving security in the Middle East in solely military stability oriented terms helps gloss over other structurally-based (economic, political, societal) security concerns that continue to plague the region. From a Critical Security Studies point of view the choice is not between adopting a top-down or bottom-up approach to security. Students of Critical Security Studies need to rethink security in the Middle East from the top-down and bottom-up.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{69} This has been pointed to me by an Egyptian academic at the 4th Conference of Nordic Society for Middle Eastern Studies (August 13-16, 1998, Oslo) in response to a paper I presented outlining the origins of contending visions of security in the Middle East.

\textsuperscript{70} For a fuller list of questions raised by Critical Security Studies, see Booth & Vale, ‘Critical Security Studies and Regional Insecurity,’ 329-330.

\textsuperscript{71} Ken Booth, ‘Conclusion: Security Within Global Transformation?’ In Statecraft and Security op.cit. in note 19, 349.
Related to the questions ‘what is security?’ and ‘whose security?’ are the next three sets of questions put by Critical Security Studies. These are: ‘what are the threats that must be considered?’ ‘what would security in the Middle East look like?’ and ‘what are the best arrangements to further security?’ Let us consider them briefly.

III.1. What are the threats that must be considered?

Each of the four visions analysed here give primacy to different kinds of threats depending on their choice of primary referent and conception of security. During the Cold War, the Middle Eastern vision emphasised the military challenge by the Soviet Union as the main threat to security in the Middle East. In the wake of the Cold War this has been replaced by the threat posed by Iran and Iraq as well as that of terrorism. Although many Arab policy-makers share US concern with terrorism they would also add the military threat posed by Israel (to individual Arab states as well as to the Palestinian peoples) to their agenda. Moreover, some (e.g. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia) view the political challenge posed by those regimes of alternative ideological convictions (e.g. Iran or Turkey) as well as the demands of Arab civil societal actors for increasing political participation as significant threats to regime security. Arab civil societal actors, whilst sharing policy-makers’ perceptions regarding the Israeli threat, consider some of the policies their own governments have adopted to cope with it as a threat to their security. Identifying the Arab civil society as their primary referent, they point to the threats posed by the statist and military-focused security policies of their own governments that frequently engage in human rights abuses, curb political and religious rights and freedoms, and divert meagre economic resources into the military leaving Arab peoples (at home and abroad) impoverished. Viewed from some Islamist actors’ perspective, on the other hand, the threats posed by the so-called ‘un-Islamic’ influences—that may range from the forces of globalisation (understood as Western cultural domination) to regional regimes that repress Islamists- top the security agenda. It should however be noted that whatever their discourses may be, the very same actors’ security practices focus on meeting daily threats to peoples’ security such as lack of educational infrastructure or adequate health and food provision. Those state-level Islamist actors such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, view those that do not subscribe to their versions of ‘Islam’ or the concept of ‘Islamic’ state as threats to their regime security. Lastly, the Mediterranean vision largely reflects the threat perceptions of its main backer, the European Union. Accordingly, political instability and economic

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underdevelopment in the Mediterranean region are considered as the main threats to security.

Although the securitisation of such a wide range of issues may not be considered as desirable by some, from a Critical Security Studies perspective keeping the security agenda open is a must if we are serious about moving beyond statism in our thinking about and acting for security. After all, the issues discussed above are all security concerns for some people. Keeping the traditional security agenda cannot be justified given the divergent concerns of myriad actors. Nor could giving the governments the final say over securitisation be justified. For one thing, not all governments provide security for their citizens. There are enough examples in the Middle East that prioritise regime security before that of individuals and social groups. Moreover more often than not states, in the attempt to provide security, create structures (e.g. militarism) that ultimately undermine the security of some (e.g. women). It could also be argued that those states that are able to provide security for their citizens are only able to do so due to their privileged position on the international economic system which deepens the insecurity of some other peoples. Hence the need for a comprehensive approach to security cognisant of the dynamic inter-relationships between the security needs of myriad actors.

**III.2. What would security in the Middle East look like?**

Having considered four approaches competing to impose their own vision for security in this part of the world, it could be argued that it would be highly unlikely for their proponents to come to an agreement on one common vision. If they cannot agree on the definition of the region they live in, how could they ever agree on common security policies? However, if we are to consider the fact that these four spatial conceptions (definitions of the region) derive from their proponents’ conceptions of security, it may be argued that an alternative conception of security could give rise to a new definition that would be acceptable to all -a conception that aims at moving towards

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stable security maintained not because of the threat and use of force, but due to mutual satisfaction with the existing situation; security achieved together with one’s adversary, not at their expense. A common conception of security needs ultimately to be agreed between regional actors themselves. One starting point might be to get regional actors to view the state of insecurity they are in as the main threat to coalesce around. This, in turn, requires them to become aware of the dynamics of the security dilemma, and the value of the practices of common security. Some steps have already been taken towards raising regional actors’ awareness on these issues.

What also needs to be done is to incorporate non-state actors’ concerns into the security agenda and make use of their agency in meeting some of these threats. For, ‘comprehensive security requires foreign policy from below as well as at the interstate level’. Re-conceiving security practices is crucial to the project of re-visioning security unless we are to resort to traditional practices when coping with a broader range of threats. Critical Security Studies’ move is to call for re-thinking security both as a concept and as practice, and to try and think up alternative practices to meet the new agenda. This involves stressing the roles played by non-state actors such as NGOs, grass-roots movements and intellectuals in drawing up alternative security agendas and their endeavour to meet these threats via creative (non-military, non-zero-sum, non-statist) practices. It also involves being self-conscious and open about the normative and mutually constitutive character of the theory/practice relationship when theorising about and acting for security.

Not all non-state actors’ agendas are compatible with the Critical Security Studies conception of security as a process of emancipation. As experiences elsewhere have shown, there clearly are problems involved in an unthinking reliance on non-governmental actors’ agency. Those that do adopt non-statist, non-zero-sum, non-military conceptions and practices could serve as agents for security in a region where states often act more like gangsters rather than the guardian angels they are supposed to be. However, an uncritical adoption of their agendas could prove to be problematic.

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78 Feldman & Toukan’s Bridging the Gap is a book produced solely for this purpose.
82 P.J. Simmons, ‘Learning to Live with the NGOs,’ Foreign Policy 112 (1998) 82-96.
as the case of Islamist grass-roots movements in the Middle East demonstrate. While
groups such as HAMAS and FIS do serve as significant providers of security for some,
their practices constitute major threats to the security of some others (e.g. women).

It should nevertheless be noted that the fact that some Islamist actors resort to
(personal as well as structural) violence should not constitute a justification for
neglecting their concerns. On the contrary, addressing their concerns is crucial if a
region-wide reconciliation is to be achieved. The proponents of the Islamist vision may
not (yet) have enough material power to push their own vision to the forefront. However,
they have the power to break other schemes by alluding to symbols most Muslims in the
Middle East hold sacred. For, the Islamist vision presents a major challenge in that its
proponents not only reject the involvement of other ‘un-Islamic’ entities thereby making it
harder for a number of visions to co-exist, but they also do it in a very efficient fashion
with the involvement of social movements. A Critical Security Studies vision of security
for this part of the world should try to address most if not all of their concerns if a
stable security architecture is to be set. This brings us to the third question, ‘what are the best
arrangements to further security?’

III.3. What are the best arrangements to further security?

As was the case with the previous question, the answers we provide to the
questions ‘what is security?’ and ‘whose security?’ will give us a starting point for
thinking about the best arrangements to further security in the part of the world. After
asking a similar question (‘what arrangements will deliver (what sort of?) security (for
whom?)’) within the Southern African context, Booth lays out the alternatives as follows:
‘the maintenance of the status quo, the fragmentation of some (or all) states in some
fashion, or the consolidation of the existing pattern of states into a formal economic and
political “community”’. Samuel Huntington would add a world order based on
civilisations to the list of alternative arrangements whereas Robert Kaplan would stress
the inescapability of ‘the coming anarchy’. The prospect of fragmentation is a concern
Middle Eastern policy-makers share with their Southern African counterparts. The
destabilising and potentially violent repercussions of any territorial arrangement have so
far ruled out the fragmentation of Iraq which returned from its brink in 1991. Where
territorial arrangements would prove to be inescapable is the Israeli occupied territories

84 Ibrahim, ‘Future Visions of the Arab Middle East,’ 90.
86 Huntington, The Clash of Civilisation and the Remaking of World Order; Robert D. Kaplan, ‘The Coming
whose fate would be decided following further negotiations between Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Syria.

Otherwise the maintenance of the status quo is the preferred solution of most state-level actors (with the possible exception of Iraq as was exemplified in its invasion of Kuwait). Indeed with the exception of the territorial arrangements that the Arab-Israeli peace process would require, most regional policy-makers would be content with the maintenance of the status quo. The main problem with this non-arrangement is that ‘it delivers order but not justice’;[88] and it is the latter that non-state actors often seek in their efforts. As Section II argued, for those who are made insecure made by the existing order, a breach of its rules may constitute a step taken towards greater justice. This, in turn, puts at odds the security interests of pro- and anti-status quo actors at the state as well as sub- and trans-state levels. The prioritisation of the security of one (the state) at the expense of the others has so far not proved to be stable.

Moreover, the reasoning that the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict would significantly enhance the security of regional peoples is an underestimation of the magnitude of the problem of insecurity in the region. The assumption behind this thinking is that the Arab-Israeli conflict has been a very significant threat to the security of Middle East and that the status quo established following its cessation would deliver security for all.[89] Even when viewed through Cold War Security Studies lenses, however, the Arab-Israeli conflict was no more of a threat to regional security than the Iran-Iraq war or numerous civil wars for the simple reason being that the latter have claimed many more lives than the former.[90] Furthermore, a broader conception of security enables us to view the Arab-Israeli conflict as merely one dimension of the insecurity problematique (some other dimensions of which have been laid out in Section II). Leaving aside the crucial issue of the scepticism of many on both sides of the Israel/Palestine conundrum regarding the potential within the recent peace agreements to deliver ‘security’,[91] the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict may not bring about the

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[89] An optimistic look at the potential effects of the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict was presented in Shimon Peres (with Arye Naor), The New Middle East (Dorset: Element, 1993).
expected improvements in regional security dynamics simply because there is more to insecurity in the Middle East than this infamous conflict. Accordingly, any arrangements to be made to address the problem of regional insecurity in the Middle East should address its multiple dimensions -those other than the cessation of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the maintenance of the status quo that have so far dominated the security thinking and practices of many policy-makers in the region.

The third alternative, that of the ‘consolidation of the existing patterns of states into a formal economic and political “community”’ emerges to be the most acceptable amongst the three. First, there is an increasing trend for the regionalisation of security arrangements in world politics and Middle Eastern actors have for long expressed an interest for moving towards this direction. Second, one way to avoid the problem of the incommensurability of these four visions of security is to come up with an alternative vision, that of a ‘security community’ which could be acceptable to most states. It could be called the ‘Southwest Asia and North Africa’ security community - a neutral label that encompasses all states within the Middle Eastern (in)security complex but avoids the colonial baggage that comes with it.

From a Critical Security Studies point of view, the processes of imagining, creating and nurturing security communities could be conceived as emancipatory practices (‘the road to emancipation is through community’). A security community may be formed by community-minded actors who come together and pool their resources to address their security problems. Such a conception does not necessarily require the pre-existence of physical, linguistic or cultural ties among potential members. Nor is it necessary for a sense of community to exist among the potential members for them to be able to construct a security community. As Deutsch et al emphasised when exploring the idea of security communities in the 1950s, security communities may have

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94 On security complexes, see Buzan, People, States and Fear.
humble origins. Parties' willingness to work together to form a community may constitute the necessary conditions initially required to form a security community. This willingness could be generated by the perception of insecurity itself as the main threat to their security, as argued above. Non-state actors such as intellectuals could play crucial roles in helping construct identities that cross physical as well as psychological borders.

For common definitions of security to emerge, regional actors have to become aware of their own and each other's conceptions of and concerns regarding security and be willing to address them. Needless to say, not all issues could be addressed at the same time. The formation of a security community is a good way to bring states together in the search for security. For, security could only be stable when sought together with one's adversaries, not against them. The creation of a non-violent conflict culture (in nurturing which security communities have proven to be effective) is crucial if issues as diverse as democratisation, water scarcity, energy security, arms control and human rights are going to be addressed among actors which have a poor record in co-existence.

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96 Deutsch et al., Political Community.
97 For an exploration of the conditions necessary for the formation of security communities, see Emanuel Adler & Michael Barnett, 'Security Communities in Theoretical Perspective,' and 'A Framework for the Study of Security Communities,' in Security Communities op. cit. in note 93.