

CONFLICT AND WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Also by Bassam Tibi (in English)

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Conflict and War in the Middle East

From Interstate War to New Security

Second Edition

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Preface

This book is not simply a translation of my *Konfliktregion Naher Osten* as was originally planned. The crucial events of 1990–91 have changed the world to such an extent that they have necessitated new patterns of thought. Numerous parts of the book have therefore had to be rewritten, and new chapters added. In 1989, when the earlier and very different German edition was first published, the Middle East, conceptualised in this book as a regional subsystem, had a different configuration from that which it has now in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The pre-1989 international system also differed greatly from the one now beginning to shape the international environment of the Middle Eastern subsystem. In short, the regional and global changes of the 1989–91 period made the rewriting of this book imperative. A straightforward translation of the previous edition, completed in 1988, would have presented the Anglo–Saxon reader with a somewhat outdated study. This English edition is therefore to all intents and purposes a new book.

Work proceeded in the following manner: Clare Krojzl translated the three Parts of the German edition, omitting Chapter 7, and I then made a substantial revision of her translation. The present Introduction, Chapter 7 and the whole of Part Four are thus completely new texts, unlike the first updated and revised Parts. The new texts have been prepared bilingually – some in German and others in English. Having combined these in a new English draft, Clare Krojzl then returned them to me for further revision. Her work has thus been a mixture of translation and copy-editing of those parts, such as this Preface, written directly in English. As a result of this somewhat convoluted process of rewriting, editing and translating so as to accommodate the events of 1990–91, the present edition is a rather different kind of book – forming a sequel to the German edition. Rewriting has included a full updating of the Notes. Chapter 8 in Part Four is based on a current analysis of the much shorter Part Four that forms the conclusion of the German edition, while Chapters 9 and 10 are completely new. The earlier German edition predicted the recent Gulf War in the context of my analysis of the war epidemic that has spread across the whole of the Middle East – the most militarised regional subsystem in world politics.

Major recent changes addressed in the book are viewed from both regional and global aspects. On the international level the Cold War came to an end as a result of the new *perestroika* policy pursued under Gorbachev.

The end of the Cold War, an 'imaginary war' (Kaldor, 1990), has witnessed the replacement of many communist regimes in Eastern Europe by democratically elected governments. The breakdown of communism in Eastern Europe in turn led to the end of bipolarity, bringing about a cessation of superpower competition in Third World regional conflicts. During the Gulf crisis and war the two superpowers cooperated closely on both the superpower and UN levels. Subordination of Soviet policy to US demands, in the guise of the cooperative attitude of Soviet decision-makers, has given rise to a debate about the Soviet Union as an 'Incomplete Superpower' (Paul Dibb). Some commentators have suggested that the Soviet Union has ceased to be a major superpower even before it was dissolved in December 1991.

While these crucial global changes were taking place in the international system, a regional Third World power, Iraq, was staking a questionable claim to have emerged as victor from the 'longest war' since the Second World War, i.e. the Gulf War of 1980–88. On the strength of this dubious claim Iraq made a move towards territorial expansion. This had the parallel aims of relieving its ailing economy from the adverse effects of the 1980–88 war and enhancing its regional power base through access to the shores of the Gulf, thereby overcoming the disadvantage of being landlocked. These aims formed the background to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In 1989–90, world attention focused on Europe, where the post-World War order was dissolving in the wake of German reunification, brought about by the breakdown of the communist regime in East Germany. Iraq seized on this opportunity as an auspicious moment to gobble up Kuwait in pursuit of its twin goals, mentioned above. Busy with other affairs on 2 August 1990 commentators, therefore, voiced scarcely more than verbal dismay at the Iraqi invasion. To the best of my knowledge, no commentator at that stage anticipated the internationalisation of the Gulf crisis in military terms. In its early days, it was perceived as little more than an Iraqi–Kuwaiti border dispute.

The Gulf War has provided further evidence to support the assessment put forward in the previous German edition of this book, that the geopolitical global importance of the Middle East is rated as second only to that of Europe. Ongoing changes in the international system are closely connected with the reordering of the Middle East itself in the aftermath of the Gulf War. Among the latter's repercussions, in addition to the surfacing of other conflicts in the region besides the Arab–Israeli one, is the fact that the Arabs are no longer able to divert attention from their own inter-Arab conflicts by focusing on Israel. The Palestinians are not the only people seeking their rights: there are also the Kurds and other ethnically suppressed

non-Arab minorities (the Berbers in the Maghreb, the Dinka in Sudan, etc.). More than this, the Arabs themselves are in dire need of democratisation, and are sick and tired of the rhetorical exercises in distraction to which they are being subjected by their neo-sultanic oriental tyrants. Saddam Hussein is merely one of the more dauntless among these tyrants.

The internal problems of the Middle East have thus surfaced and become global issues. The resolution of conflict in the region will not be forthcoming on global grounds alone, that is without addressing crucial specifically Middle Eastern conflicts, both internal and regional. Local–regional–global linkages lie at the heart of this book which stresses the regional dynamic of conflict, although not to the detriment of analysing the international environment of the Middle East. My critique of globalism was never aimed at replacing globalist outlooks with confined regional ones. It has always rather been motivated by a desire to establish patterns of combined, although not reductionist global–regional analysis. This has been the driving force behind the writing of this book, directing my efforts when I was at Princeton in 1986–87, and remaining unchanged while rewriting this book at the Harvard Center for International Affairs during the Spring Term of 1991.

I am deeply indebted to many institutions and individuals who helped facilitate my research through grants, affiliations, sponsorship and scholarly advice. In Princeton, the German Research Council (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) provided support for research carried out in 1986–87 for the previous German edition of this book. Professors Abraham Udovich, Carl Brown and John Waterbury of Princeton University were my close colleagues, and also supported my Princeton Fellowship. In the Middle East the al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo provided many affiliations in 1987–90, while numerous colleagues were generous with indispensable advice. Dan Tschirgi at the American University of Cairo was glad to incorporate my work into his Cairo Papers. At Khartoum University, I enjoyed being a visiting professor in 1987 before the disintegration of the Sudanese state. At Harvard, Professor Joseph Nye augmented the Volkswagen grant, which I am presently enjoying while on leave from Göttingen, with additional funds from his project on international institutions, to support my affiliation at his Harvard Center for International Affairs. I am also grateful to Joseph Nye for enriching my understanding of ongoing changes in the international system. Professors Samuel Huntington and Herbert Kelman have been close Harvard colleagues since 1982, when Samuel Huntington invited me to join the visiting faculty for my first Harvard term. Since that term Harvard has become almost my permanent scholarly home, and I feel a keen lack of such an inspiring International

Relations environment at German universities, which tend to suffer from provincialism. Reunification has exposed Germany to global challenges which this economically potent but politically insignificant country will be unable to meet if 'international studies' continue to be absent from the German academic scene as they are at present. Many Germans are reluctant to see their country playing a major role in world politics.

The President of my German Georg-August University, as well as my Göttingen colleagues from the Social Science Department, are happily not marked by the overall provincialism of the German academic scene lamented above. Thanks both to the President of the Georgia Augusta University, who provided funds, as well as to these colleagues, I have been able to establish a modest centre for international affairs in Göttingen without which the project for this book could not have been successfully completed. My research assistants Anke Houben and Kai Dierke have been unwavering in their assistance in rewriting this book and updating its materials, information and scope. My staff assistant Petra Geile carefully and patiently word-processed all new and rewritten drafts. As always she has shown commitment to our joint work and her assistance has been unflinching. Clare Krojzl has taken on the translation of a second book of mine into English. The demanding work involved in translating my earlier book, *Islam and the Cultural Accommodation of Social Change* (Boulder, Col., 1990), did not deter her from undertaking a further joint project. I am grateful to Keith Povey for copy-editing the manuscript and for the meticulous supervision of the production, to Denise Byrnes for proof-reading while checking and improving the language in the translation and to my research assistant Kai Dierke for compiling the bibliography and completing the index.

This time, my beloved wife Ulla was relieved from the ordeals arising from my writing, unlike earlier occasions when she was my editor and most critical reviewer. Her emotional support has nevertheless, as always, been an unflinching source of stability which, unlike some scholars, I avowedly need to keep me going through long and weekendless working weeks.

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Preface to the Second Edition

The history of this book parallels a history of radical changes, both in the international system and concurrently in the Middle East itself. The region at issue is conceptualised in this volume as a regional subsystem – due to changes in the international environment the patterns of conflict in the Middle East have changed, but not its regional dynamic – being the central premise of this study.

When the very first draft of this book was written, my concern was to study the interplay between international and regional constraints of conflict and its development to war. Its first publication grew from research conducted during my term as Visiting Research Fellow at Princeton University in 1986–7 and was published in German in 1989 as *Konfliktregion Naher Osten*. During my term at Harvard University from 1988–93 I continued this research. I was partly on leave from my German home university in Göttingen, with grants from the Volkswagen Foundation and from the German Research Council/DFG. During that tenure I was involved in several research projects and the rewriting in English of my 1989 book *Konfliktregion Naher Osten*. In late 1990 I was forced by the Gulf crisis to rethink my earlier study for an English publication sponsored by Harvard's Center for International Affairs.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union the international system was no longer the same. The demise of bipolarity and the corresponding superpower rivalry changed the foundations of regional conflicts. Thus the rewriting in 1990–3 involved a thorough reconsideration of the entire frame of reference earlier employed as well as a new interpretation of regional conflicts in the Middle East with reference to a past era. In short, the result was this new book completed at Harvard and published in 1993 as *Conflict and War in the Middle East* under the auspices of Harvard's Center for International Affairs. Despite all the radical changes in world politics, the course of events supported the major hypothesis of the book that regional conflicts have their own dynamic; Middle Eastern wars were never proxy wars. This expanded second edition has a new Part Five updating the entire framework of this study.

Returning to the concurrence of the history of this book and parallel changes in international politics, this second edition required studying new patterns of conflict. Regional integration is viewed as a tool for strengthening the statehood of Middle Eastern states in the new era. The

pertinence of this new topic lies in the fact that internal conflict is moving to centre stage, thus becoming the major source of conflict posing threats to regional stability. In my view, weak institutional statehood promotes the escalation of conflict.

The nature of Middle Eastern states, as many others in Asia and particularly in Africa, leads me to define them as *nominal nation-states*, that is to say as institutionally weak states. From this observation it follows that the cessation of superpower rivalry, once artificially bolstering regional stability, has had far-reaching consequences. In fact, by struggling for influence the superpowers ignited regional conflicts, but they did not cause them. On the contrary, they were concerned to stabilise the existing states and contain regional conflict in order to avoid superpower confrontation. However, regional dynamic counts. As I show in my analysis of the Six Day War in 1967 and the October War in 1973, the superpowers were consistently at pains to prevent the escalation of Middle Eastern conflicts from the regional to the international level. Their underlying motive was the avoidance of a global nuclear confrontation. These efforts required a policy of bolstering regional stability. In consequence the Middle Eastern states achieved some stability and it is clear that regional stability in the Middle East is essential to international security. The demise of bipolarity and of the Cold War meant the end of this stabilising system. Hitherto suppressed destabilising factors have increasingly been coming to the fore and continue to pose a threat to regional stability. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is just a case in point. It could not have happened during the years of the Cold War. Similarly the two Katyusha wars of July 1993 and April 1996 in South Lebanon are an indication of the new patterns of violence in the new era.

My contention in Chapter 11 is that Arab integration would contribute both to regional stability and to strengthening the statehood of the institutionally weak Middle Eastern states without questioning their sovereignty. The vision is that this Arab integration could embrace an overall Middle Eastern economic integration following a real Arab-Israeli peace process. It is unfortunate that the peace process of Oslo has been stalled since the election of the Likud government in July 1996. The prospects for an enhanced regional integration are now in grave jeopardy, although not Arab integration itself.

A second, most important threat to stability and regional security in the Middle East on the non-state level is the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the challenge it poses to the existing secular order of nation-states. What is threatening is not so much the terrorism involved, but rather the challenge to the secular legitimacy of the existing nation-states.

Delegitimisation and desecularisation are the foremost issues when the political destabilisation of the Middle East is referred to. This is the pivotal subject addressed in the new Chapter 12. There, I draw on my work pursued at the Fundamentalism Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences to outline that fundamentalism is much more than the sensational media coverage suggests: fundamentalism is much more than terrorism. I warn of the misconception that leads to equating both, as Edgar O'Ballance suggests in his work. No doubt, fundamentalism and terrorism, in some cases, can be interrelated, but they are not the same. In a study concerned with conflict and regional order, fundamentalism has to be dealt with in a manner differing from the sensational references that prevail in the media. Seen from this angle, terrorism matters inasmuch as the use of force is an expression of the shift from external to internal conflict and from interstate war to the wars of 'irregulars'. In view of these changes, the subtitle of this book has been changed from 'Regional Dynamic and the Superpowers' to 'From Interstate War to New Security'; for the use of force is no longer confined to interstate wars. The violence of 'irregulars' does matter and can be more destabilising. Moreover it is increasingly coming to the fore.

The work on the new Part Five began at my home university in Göttingen and was completed at Harvard's Center for International Affairs in Autumn 1996, revised and updated in Autumn 1997, again at Harvard. This work has been related to several research projects that I would like to acknowledge: the project on 'Arab integration' at Georgetown University, Washington, DC; the project on 'The Middle East after the Gulf War' at the American University of Cairo (sponsored by the US-Institute for Peace); the project 'The Ethics of War and Peace' at the Ethikon Institute, California; and foremost 'The Fundamentalism Project', conducted at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and chaired by Professors Martin Marty and Scott Appleby. Last but not least I need to mention the Harvard Project run by Professor Lenore Martin on 'New Frontiers of Middle Eastern Security' with two most important research workshops held subsequently in Ankara at the Middle East Technical University, Turkey, and in Bellagio at Rockefeller Foundation Center, Italy. I acknowledge with gratitude and admiration the intellectual impact of the work of my dear friend at Harvard, Professor Herbert C. Kelman, on my thoughts and my understanding of conflict resolution.

However, the institution that deserves the foremost gratitude in my acknowledgements is Harvard's Center for International Affairs (CfIA). It hosted me as a Research Associate and Visiting Scholar while I was rewriting *Konfliktregion Naher Osten* in English during 1990–3 and again

while completing this new edition in Autumn 1996 and subsequent updating in 1997. The publication committee of Harvard's CfIA – since November 1997 the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs/WCfIA – thankfully consented to continue sponsoring this book by providing the auspices for publishing this new edition in association with Macmillan. I am grateful to the new director of Harvard's WCfIA, Jorge Dominguez. He was among the IR scholars who affected the debate on the subsystem (see pp. 25 and 35); we share the view that the end of the Cold War has rather increased the exposure of the subsystem approach, as the specific dynamic of the regional conflicts appear largely independent from changes in the international environment. Special gratitude goes to Ann Emerson, the WCfIA's Executive Director, for her support, as well as to her associates, Tom Murphy and Jennifer Cairns. Again, my very dear friend, Professor Herb Kelman at Harvard – the embodiment of the spirit of peace – has been my inspiration there; the study of conflict from the point of view of peace has been the intellectual grounds for the precious friendship between Herb Kelman and myself. For this reason I have devoted my recent book on the Oslo Peace Process published 1997 in German under the title *Pulverfass Nahost: Eine arabische Perspektive* to Herb Kelman.

I am in particular grateful to director T. M. Farmiloe and his colleagues Karen Brazier and Annabelle Buckley at Macmillan and also to my copy-editor Lesley Steward. My own associates in Göttingen, Daniela Heuer, Jost Esser, Silke Fauzi, Anke Ringe and in particular Katja Bruder, provided unfailing assistance while working on this edition, both in Göttingen and – through the fax connection – at Harvard.

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