

ciliation period is only glossed over. The fifth chapter, which reiterates recommendations for convergence, would have better-served readers by covering the Al-Ula reconciliation and its implications for bilateral relations.

Apart from the aforementioned omission, the book will be of great interest to researchers

and scholars interested in understanding the continuous power politics struggle between the GCC and Türkiye. Kaddorah successfully provides the motives paving the way for the Gulf reconciliation in detail to help readers comprehend the recent diplomatic efforts of the GCC states to review and renew their bilateral relations with Türkiye.

East Asia's Strategic Advantage in the Middle East

By Shirzad Azad

Lexington Books, 2021, 191 Pages, \$85.44, ISBN: 9781793644626

Reviewed by Salman Nugraha, Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University

In *East Asia's Strategic Advantage in the Middle East*, Shirzad Azad argues that the arrival of East Asian countries in the Middle East offers the region enormous benefits and rewards “on a silver platter” (p. 1). Azad questions the assumption that the Western countries that arrived earlier in the Middle East will dominate the region permanently. Instead, he posits that the late arrival of East Asians in the Middle East is “more fortunate and privileged” than the West (p. 3) and suggests that the peculiar policies of the West have paved the way for East Asian countries to become more deeply involved in the Middle East (p. 7).

The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter summarizes the concept of strategic advantage, i.e., that having strategic value will give certain players a competitive advantage that puts them above other players (p. 4). Throughout the following chapters, Azad examines five fields in which East Asian countries possess strategic advantages in the Mid-



dle East –politics, military, economy, technology, and culture– and how they should be optimized.

In the political field, Azad first explains the political outcomes of Western involvement that brought authoritarian statism to the region. Consequently, this presents a major strategic advantage for East Asian countries in the political field: the state is the only actor they need to engage in a bilateral political relationship (p. 15). Moreover, the image of Western actors in the region has been severely damaged, as the Western realpolitik ‘management’ of the Middle East is widely held responsible for the current chaos in the region. Arriving with a “clean past record” (p. 15) and bringing with them a model for successful development at home gives East Asian countries an upper hand in building new strategic partnerships with the Middle East. However, it is necessary to state here that the author overlooks the rise of non-state actors in the Middle East that to some extent undermine the government and change the politi-

cal dynamics of the region. For instance, how should East Asia engage with terrorist organizations in Syria or Yemen that threaten the state's political structure?

In the military sector, Azad sees the ongoing arms and weaponry transactions between regions as opportunities to improve bilateral relations. Throughout history, one of the main tools of Western conduct in the Middle East, especially of the U.S., has been the use of military deployment to achieve a strategic interest. Indeed, this approach has contributed to the escalation of inter and intra-state conflict among states and non-state actors. The author argues that in such a chaotic environment, the region has become home to the globe's largest markets for arms and weaponry (p. 47). Azad proposes that this situation should be optimized by East Asian countries, which have developed their military capabilities in recent years. While this argument is undeniable from a purely pragmatic point of view, it undermines the main thesis of the previous chapter: If East Asia wants to be an alternative strategic partner with a clean slate to replace Western influence in the Middle East, why rehash Western conduct in the region by selling military armaments that are likely to escalate conflict?

In the economic sector, Azad begins by comparing the economic structure of the Middle East and East Asia. While the Middle East has been blessed with vast oil reserves (that somehow created a 'trap' that led to rentier statism, as many observers argue), since the end of WWII, East Asian countries have been successful in industrialization and economic development. However, such development necessitates a huge amount of oil supply, and East Asia is not endowed with adequate domestic oil. Therefore, Azad argues that oil diplomacy should be optimized as a strate-

gic advantage for both regions. Specifically, through such a partnership, the Middle East can secure a stable customer, while East Asia can get easy access to the oil supply it needs.

In the technological sector, the Middle East has not effectively leveraged the capital it receives from its oil resources into technological and scientific development. Azad argues that it has not been part of the Western strategy to industrialize the Middle East; hence, since the Western arrival in the region, the latter has not made progress in developing a significant scientific and technological sector (p. 104). In contrast, Azad points out that Western interest in East Asia from the late nineteenth century onward was all about industrialization, development, and the integration of the region into the global market (p. 105). Consequently, East Asia is now very accomplished in technological innovation and quite independent from the West –so much so that East Asia and the West have entered a global technological race. As a result, East Asian countries can fill a huge technological void in the Middle East. Moreover, technology and foreign policy are now often intertwined in international relations, meaning that the more East Asia is ready to transfer technology to the Middle East, the better bilateral relations could be built (p. 118).

Lastly, in the cultural sector, the West has always framed the Middle East as the opposition to its civilization –e.g., the 'clash of civilization' thesis and the 'global war on terror' that cast Middle Eastern culture as the enemy of Western civilization. The enforcement of Western 'universal' values is viewed with suspicion by non-Western societies; in fact, it didn't work properly at all. In contrast, some Asian leaders like Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore, propose the concept of 'Asian values,' i.e., sovereign soci-

eties guided by certain moral principles and a code of behaviors that contributes to industrialization and economic development. This concept emphasizes the importance of family, respect for authority, communalism, and so on. Such values are diametrically opposed to the Western prioritization of individualism, privacy, and liberty. Azad believes that East Asia's cultural alternative to Western values inspires sympathetic feelings between East Asia and the Middle East, which should be optimized to build better relations between the regions (p. 139).

East Asia's Strategic Advantage in the Middle East succeeds in presenting an overview of the opportunities for both regions to forge

a deeper partnership. Azad articulately examines the historical facts and compellingly presents the prospects for strategic partnerships. The caveats mentioned above suggest the need for further attentiveness to the nuances of the Middle East's volatile complexity, and more detailed consideration of the part East Asia may wish to play there –specifically how it will differentiate its involvement from that of the West as relations between the regions evolve. Nonetheless, the book deserves appreciation for filling the gap in the knowledge of strategic relations between two important regions that are often overlooked in the global political discourse. The book will be a great benefit to anyone interested in Middle Eastern and/or Asian politics.