

Obama and the Middle East: The End of America's Moment?

By Fawaz A. Gerges

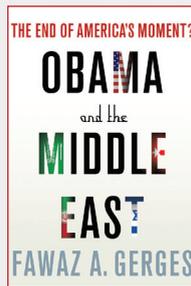
New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, 304 pages, ISBN 9780230113817, \$28 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Cory Ruzicka

WITHIN Fawaz Gerges' text, *The End of America's Moment?—Obama and the Middle East*, the author endeavors to examine President Obama's implementation of inherently stagnant policies towards the highly volatile and rapidly evolving Middle East. Furthermore, Gerges elaborates on the manner in which the globalists and the Israel-first school succeed in shaping public opinion in the United States about the Middle East and how this process perpetually cripples Obama.

Gerges embarks on his assessment by offering a multitude of contextually-rich historical examples and utilizes them to elucidate how the US has precipitated its own fall from dominance within the region. As the book progresses, the author demonstrates that Obama has enacted policies which not only possess no redeemable modern value but also merely serve to continue the realist agenda implanted by previous administrations. He further extends his argument during the concluding portions of the piece by explaining how Obama's adoption of an "anti-doctrinal doctrine" is indicative of a perennial culture of inflexibility and disconnection towards the modern Middle East.

As the piece unfolds, Gerges explains that America's course of self-destruction cannot be attributed to any particular instance but is rather the culmination of five decades of gradual attrition embodied by egregious



policy miscalculations. The most detrimental of which include: US support for the establishment of the state of Israel, the 1953 coup against the popularly elected Mohammad Mossadegh in Iran, the strong support for Israel after the Six-Day War in 1967, the oil embargo of 1973, the Iranian revolution of 1979, and

the resulting hostage crisis and America's military intervention in the Gulf in 1991, which resulted in permanent stationing of troops in Saudi Arabia (p. 31). The author stipulates that each individual incident is a microcosm, which offers crucial insight into the motives of President Obama and his administration.

First and foremost, the establishment of the state of Israel signaled the beginning of an era of great polarity in US-Arab relations. Prior to 1948, President Truman was strongly urged to consider the ramifications of antagonizing the Arab population. However, relentless pressure from Zionist groups coupled with the rigors of the domestic political process caused Truman to disregard his advisors' warnings. (p. 32). From an Arab perspective, this was an ostentatious display of US apathy towards the true sentiments of the region's populous.

The author further scrutinizes this phenomenon via the 1953 coup against Mohammed Mossadegh in Iran. Though Mossadegh was popularly elected, he was perceived as an unreliable radical nationalist, who posed a re-

alistic threat to the interests of American oil companies everywhere (p. 38). Gerges stipulates that this is a quintessential example of the US disregarding the public and forcefully interjecting itself to prevent a shift away from the status quo. He buttresses this assertion as he states, "Instead of viewing the region from the inside out, American officials looked at it from the outside in, from a globalist perspective" (p. 36). The author believes that this globalist inclination has endured and is tantamount to the stances of the current administration.

In an attempt to bolster support from the public, President Obama presented lofty rhetorical promises aimed at restoring the ailing US-Arab relations. From the author's vantage point, these statements were merely an act of political posturing, which never truly mitigated tensions with Muslims but rather were designed to temporarily satiate the public's concern. Gerges examines the tribulations Obama underwent as he navigated through contentious negotiations regarding the "two-state" solution. When Israeli-Palestinian peace talks proved much costlier than he had foreseen, the President first allowed his vice president to be humiliated by the Israeli prime minister and then awkwardly disengaged from the peace-process entirely (p. 11).

Concurrently, Obama has done little to recognize the legitimacy of certain Islamic groups that have been democratically elected. As the author contends, the President is content in preserving the predominately negative stereotypes surrounding supposed "extremist" groups (p. 101). Democratically elected groups such as Hamas and Hezbollah represent a realistic threat to the US hegemonic balance in the region. The author asserts that this tendency symbolizes not only the undying desire to preserve the status quo but also

the President's inability to relate to a populous that is rapidly evolving in the wake of the Arab Spring.

A dissenting opinion would contend that US-Israel relations are symbiotic in nature wherein both parties mutually benefit from the alliance. Furthermore, they would argue that the US has an obligation to preserve the sanctity of the state of Israel due to the fact that it provides a strategic channel through which the US can enter the region. The author opines that Zionists are privy to this and have utilized Obama's malleability to their benefit. However, dissenters would stipulate that the President is justified in his support of Israel and regional dictators because the Arab people are not currently suited for democratic change.

In essence, they would contend that although democracy is a functional instrument in the western world, it is highly volatile when placed in the hands of Middle Easterners. Gerges refutes this claim in the context of the 1973 oil embargo as he discusses the Kissinger model for dealing with Middle Eastern social empowerment. To Arabs, however, Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy was aimed at buying time and reducing pressure on Israel and the United States (p. 52). Gerges indicates that this model is highly translatable to the Obama's current stances. The author opines, "His [Obama] uplifting rhetoric raised expectations within the region but only acted to disappoint the Muslim world as he was unable to translate his hopes and promises into concrete policy" (p. 25). Essentially, the President seems to have adopted this approach because he is desperately hoping that he can avoid any major mishaps in the region while his attention is diverted elsewhere.

Overall, within his book, Gerges examines history of the US presence in the Middle East

and subsequently explains how it relates to the current administration. Throughout the process, he offers a compilation of contextually-rich historical examples to reinforce his stances. Within these parameters, he argues that the Obama administration has acted as a mere perpetuator of the stagnant policies offered by its predecessors and is thus the harbinger of the US's fall from dominance in the

region. Though Gerges' highly critical stances spurned a number of opposing arguments, his assertions were comprehensively justified. Fawaz Gerges judiciously displayed that the Obama administration inherited a destructive framework, which they subsequently employed to defend the status quo, serve their own imperialistic interests, and the repress the Muslim voice.

Modern Islamist Movements, History, Religion and Politics

By Jon Armajani

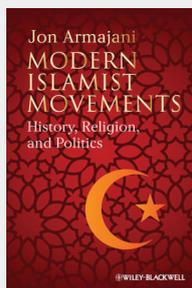
Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 233 pages, ISBN 9781405117425, £19.99.

Reviewed by Azzam Tamimi

THIS BOOK is an easy to read textbook that is structured to present readers with an historical overview of some of the prominent Islamic movements active in parts of the Muslim world, specifically in West and South Asia.

It comprises an introduction, five chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter is about Egypt's Islamism with the main focus on the Muslim Brotherhood. The second chapter is on the West Bank, Gaza, and Israel. A summary of the history of the conflict leads to a discussion of Hamas, Palestine's main Islamic group. The third chapter is on Saudi Arabia tracing the roots of Wahhabism to Najd. The fourth chapter is on Pakistan with an emphasis on Mawdudi and Jama'at-I Islami. And the fifth chapter is on Afghanistan and the rise of Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, and Alqaida.

Although the book is well structured, it suffers from two main caveats: it is not up to date



and it lacks original research, relying mainly on secondary sources.

As a result of the first caveat the book, which has recently been published, falls short of taking into consideration the major developments in the regions under consideration over the past half decade or so, including the Arab Spring and its impact on Islamism as well as on regional and world politics. The author not only fails to consult some of the most relevant and most recent works on Islamic movements published during the decade that preceded his own book's publication, he seems to have made very little effort, if at all, to conduct first hand research at least to verify or question some of the arguments or analyses imported from secondary sources. In fact, in many instances, quotations from secondary sources remained unquestioned. Thus, his analysis of these sources is weak. Some of these sources had either their own circumstances or agendas and therefore may not have done justice to the topic under consideration.