

## Governments and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East: Discontinuity and Turbulence

By Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael  
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*Government and Politics of the Contemporary Middle East: Discontinuity and Turbulence* edited by Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacqueline S. Ismael examines the region's politics from Türkiye to the Gulf. The editors consider the region "a critical area of academic study, whose significance ranges from historical to religious to geostrategic domains of scholarly and popular attention" (p. 2). The book's first edition was published in 2011, a year marked by the Arab Spring. The current edition was updated in 2024 by extending its analysis to post-2015 developments.

The book provides a comprehensive guide for students, academics, and policymakers who seek to understand the Middle East's complex and dynamic political structure. It analyzes how the region's political systems and governments have evolved and shaped the current situation by offering a broad historical perspective. The book provides a highly relevant and comprehensive introduction to the complexities of a region in constant flux. The book's multidisciplinary approach, which combines knowledge from political science, sociology, and history to provide readers with a comprehensive grasp of the area's politics, is one of its strongest points. The author's primary motivation is not the Middle East's historical or religious background but rather the recent developments in the region in terms of geostrategic and economic issues. However,



despite focusing on more contemporary politics, the book reserved several chapters for history and religion.

There are 11 chapters divided into two sections. The first part, consisting of 3 chapters, provides a critical background to developing

states and governments in the Middle East. The historical origins of political structures in the region, detailing how the region has been shaped by the nation-state, the influence of nationalism, the role of major powers in shaping the region, and the independence movement since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, are explained in detail. Chapter 2 of the first section evaluates how Islam has affected the Middle East both in history and today. Chapter 3 of this part focuses on the relations between civil society and the state in the Middle East. It addresses the role of the military and the police in Middle Eastern societies as crucial state political institutions.

The second section of the book, consisting of 7 chapters, presents the politics of most Middle Eastern countries under four geographical groupings. From the Fertile Crescent, the authors examine Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine, reserving three chapters in total. Egypt is the only North African country that has a chapter given to it. Türkiye and Iran have been studied in 2 chapters under the Northern Belt, and finally, the GCC states

in 1 chapter under the Arabian Peninsula. Due to the limitations faced by the book, some countries such as Yemen, Oman, Kuwait, and Jordan were omitted. Each chapter deals meticulously with the relevant country's political history, governmental structure, and domestic and foreign policies. This part of the book centered on discussions relating to dominant ideological narratives in the region, the multiple forms of authoritarian rule in the region and its impact on decision-making process in these countries. In exploring these themes, the chapters integrate extensive detail of specific events and case studies within the context of key debates, thereby enhancing the understanding of the historical political trajectory of the Middle East. These debates encompass the purported authoritarianism of the Middle East and North Africa, the ramifications of the structural weaknesses present within Middle Eastern economies, as well as the key economic dynamics in the Middle East, traditional and emerging security threats, including terrorism and political violence. This chapter focuses on four ongoing crises that have persistently shaped regional political dynamics: the 1979 Iranian Revolution and its ramifications, the debates around democratization in the Middle East and Arab world and its relations with the Arab Uprisings, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and the Syrian civil war and failed attempts to reach a political settlement. The second part touches upon the political and social aspects of social life in the Middle East, and issues such as state-society relations and the effects of this situation on the economic welfare of the people are examined. Issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, oil politics, the political role of Islam, and regional cooperation come especially to the fore. The GCC section at the end of this chapter introduces different approaches to interpreting events in the Gulf. The main argument of this section is that, de-

spite media portrayals of GCC governments as forward-thinking regimes investing in reform and modernization, they have actually made significant investments to strengthen the power of a ruthless and dangerous ruling elite, masking internal tensions. It is claimed that this assessment will be more useful for future analyses.

While the book primarily employs a descriptive approach in terms of methodology, it occasionally introduces theoretical frameworks and approaches such as Arab nationalism, colonialism, anti-colonialism, liberalization to explain political events and developments. This allows readers to understand and analyze the region's political dynamics. The book's comparative approach is particularly interesting, as it helps to understand better and highlight the similarities and differences between the various countries in the Middle East. This section of the book highlights that while Middle Eastern countries share certain similarities in terms of religion, history, language, economic structure, and geopolitical challenges, their political systems, economic structures, socio-cultural development processes, and foreign policy agendas differ significantly from one another. The chapters, prepared using a wide range of sources, enhance the academic value of the work. This last edition, which particularly emphasizes developments post-Arab Spring, requires constant revision due to ongoing conflicts and instability persisting in several countries, including Syria, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Palestine-Israel. Although it is stated in the introduction of the book that the main motivation is the recent developments in the region in terms of geostrategic and economic issues rather than the historical or religious background of the Middle East, it is possible to say that this part of the book is weak and needs to be improved in the next editions.

In summary, this timely book offers the opportunity to explore the new dynamics of the transforming Middle East. The post-Arab Spring process in the Middle East continues to be defined by all relevant actors such as political parties and governments in various countries, civil society organizations, international actors, media, regional organizations, and information networks. It is impossible to say that the demands made by the people of the Middle East after the Arab Spring have been fully met. Therefore, in this book, updated 13 years after the beginning of the Arab Spring process, the evaluations of what the state and

social dynamics in the Middle East are evolving towards within the international system would have been very impressive. There is a significant gap in the literature in this regard, and new studies are needed to fill it. Nevertheless, the book is an influential attempt to discuss what students, policymakers, and any motivated reader may face economically, socially, and politically in the future Middle East. The further readings suggestions at the end of each chapter point out that exploring the dynamics of the Middle East is complicated but offer readers an illuminating bibliography to accompany them in their efforts.

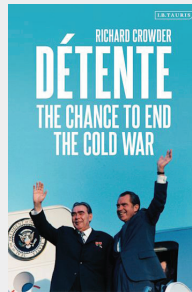
## Détente: The Chance to End the Cold War

By Richard Crowder

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Reviewed by Menderes Kurt, Independent Researcher

Historians often focus on the beginnings and ends of events, as seen in works like Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. This tradition includes studying the rise and fall of empires, such as the Mongol, Ottoman, British, and American "Empires." The Cold War's history is similarly analyzed for its start and end, but intermediate phases like détente receive less attention. Détente, from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s, marked the end of the classical Cold War and hastened its conclusion. Despite its importance, it is underexplored in research. Détente, meaning to reduce tension, describes a relaxation of strained relations. U.S. President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev aimed to reduce Cold



War costs through diplomacy. The 1970s détente included key events like the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), opening relations with China, ending the Vietnam War, shifts in monetary policies, inflation, advancements in communication technology, the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Middle East War (Yom Kippur War), and the oil embargo. These developments significantly impacted the Cold War era.

Despite the significance of détente, academic scrutiny of this period was limited for a long time. Recently, interest has surged, resulting in numerous studies. Key works include Raymond L. Garthoff's *Détente and Confrontation* (1985), Richard W. Stevenson's *The Rise and*