

West Asia: A New American Grand Strategy in the Middle East

By Mohammed Soliman

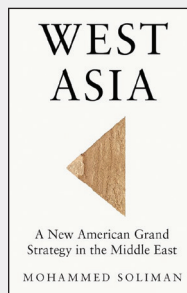
Cambridge: Cambridge and Hoboken: Polity Press, 2026, 272 pages, €66, ISBN: 9781509568376

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DOI: 10.25253/99.2026282.4

The Middle East's position in global politics has been extensively debated both conceptually and strategically over the last two decades. In the post-Cold War era, the region has often been characterized by chronic crises, failed states, and unending conflicts, while American foreign policy has generally been inconsistent, oscillating between military interventions and withdrawal from the region. Mohammed Soliman's work, *West Asia: A New American Grand Strategy in the Middle East*, questions this established perspective and argues that the Middle East should be rethought within a broader geopolitical framework. The book aims to develop a new grand strategy proposal for the U.S. while discussing the historical origins and boundaries of the concept of Middle East.

Soliman's central argument is that the Middle East is no longer an isolated region. The author argues that the global power balances of the 21st century are shifting from a Europe-centered order to a Eurasia-centered one. In this context, he contends that the Middle East has become part of a broader West Asia region that should be considered alongside South Asia. According to Soliman, this area extending from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean serves as a strategic link between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the book is not merely an attempt at geographi-



cal renaming, but also constitutes a strategic call to redefine the U.S.' position in the global competitive landscape.

The book consists of four main chapters. The first chapter provides a framework for what Soliman conceptualizes as the end of the Middle

East and explains why American foreign policy failed to establish a durable regional order in the post-Cold War period. He identifies the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the post-2011 Syrian civil war as critical turning points that fundamentally altered the regional balance of power. According to Soliman, these interventions not only weakened existing state institutions but also created power vacuums that enabled actors such as Iran to project influence beyond their immediate regional environments. During this period, the U.S., he argues, expended significant political, military, and financial resources on regime-change operations most notably in Iraq and prolonged nation-building efforts involving state reconstruction, security sector reform, and governance engineering, thereby diverting attention from broader global strategic priorities.

In the second part, Soliman paints a broader geopolitical picture that transcends the internal dynamics of the Middle East. This section highlights the rising role of the Gulf monar-

chies and the region's increasing integration into Asia-centered economic networks. The author presents the sovereign wealth funds of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, along with their infrastructure investments and technology-focused development strategies, as the geoeconomic backbone of West Asia. Soliman argues that this transformation has turned the Middle East from a mere security issue into a critical area for global trade and connectivity.

The third section focuses on India's and South Asia's role in this new geopolitical framework. According to Soliman, India is an indispensable actor located at the eastern edge of West Asia and the cornerstone of the connection between the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East. Initiatives such as the India-Israel-U.S.-UAE partnership (I2U2) and the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC) are interpreted by the author as a contemporary revival of historical trade routes. These projects strengthen the perception of West Asia not only as a regional but also as a continental strategic area.

The final section of the book presents a concrete grand strategy proposal for the U.S. Soliman argues that Washington should avoid direct and sustained military engagements in the Middle East. Instead, he argues that the U.S. should return to an "offshore balancer" role compatible with alliance systems in Europe and the Indo-Pacific, but that this strategy places greater responsibility on regional actors. Countries such as France, Greece, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and India are identified as key components of this multi-layered partnership network. This approach aims to reduce the risk of an excessive military burden in West Asia while enabling the U.S. to focus on global competition with China and Russia.

One of the important contributions of West Asia is that it approaches the Middle East not through short-term crises but through long-term historical and geographical connections. Through his narrative built on maritime routes, trade networks, and imperial legacies, Soliman situates the region's place within the global system within a broader context. This approach transforms the book from being a narrowly defined policy report into a more comprehensive attempt at strategic thinking.

However, the book also has some limitations. Soliman's prioritization of balance-of-power politics and interstate stability leads to an analytical framework in which domestic-level dynamics such as social mobilization, democratic contestation, and regime-society relations are treated as secondary variables rather than constitutive forces shaping regional order. Since the West Asia framework is largely built on interstate relations and alliance networks, the impact of non-state actors and domestic political dynamics on foreign policy is addressed to a limited extent. Furthermore, presenting regional actors as states making rational, consistent strategic calculations often fails to adequately reflect the complexity of decision-making in politically fragile regions such as the Middle East and South Asia.

Another controversial point is the sustainability of the U.S. simultaneously competing with China in the Indo-Pacific and assuming a balancing role in West Asia. While Soliman is aware of this risk, he assumes that the multilateral partnership model he proposes will alleviate this burden. However, given the U.S.' domestic political polarization and economic constraints, the long-term viability of this strategy remains an open question.

The term Western Asia is discussed in both an academic monograph and a politically

oriented strategy text. Soliman consciously avoids lengthy theoretical discussions; instead, he opts for language that is readable for decision-makers, policy analysts, and academics. This approach, on the one hand, renders his work more directly related to discussions of grand strategy centered on the U.S. than to the literature of classical international relations theory. While this choice by the author increases the book's accessibility, it also limits the analytical framework to a state-centered perspective. On the other,

West Asia is an ambitious and controversial work that aims to reframe the U.S.' perspective on the Middle East and the broader Eurasian geography. The book offers an important contribution to academics, policy-makers, and graduate students interested in grand strategy, U.S. foreign policy, and Eurasian geopolitics. Whether accepted or criticized, Soliman's proposed framework constitutes a noteworthy intervention, as it forces us to rethink the Middle East's place in global politics.

Handbook of Middle East Politics

Edited by Shahram Akbarzadeh

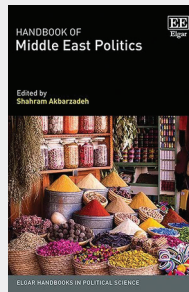
Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023, 416 pages, \$288, ISBN: 9781802205626

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DOI: 10.25253/99.2026282.5

Shahram Akbarzadeh's edited book, *Handbook of Middle East Politics*, sheds light on the Middle East's dynamic social, political, and ideological transformations and provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the global dimensions of regional problems. Akbarzadeh is a research professor of Middle East and Central Asian Politics at Deakin University in Geelong, Australia, and his work particularly revolves around Iranian foreign policy, sectarianism, and Islamism. His book offers readers a rich analysis by bringing together different academic perspectives on various topics, including citizenship, ideologies, political Islam, environmental security, and regional dynamics.

The book's central theme focuses on the social and political structures in the MENA



region. Topics from the historical transformation of citizenship regimes to the evolution of political Islam, from ideological conflicts to environmental security issues, are covered in detail. The concept of citizenship is analyzed in the context of historical social contracts, shedding light on the relationship

between the individual and the state. Periods such as the Islamic social contract, the colonial order, the socialist Arab contract, and the authoritarian stability contract reveal how individual rights and state control mechanisms were shaped.

The book is structured into 23 chapters. These chapters reflect the complexity and multidimensionality of the region's political landscape, offering a thematic and analytical approach rather than a strictly chronological or