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Center for International and Regional Studies

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST



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ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

Hydrocarbons, petroleum, and, increasingly, natural gas have dominated discussions of the Middle East's natural resources—particularly in terms of their impact on domestic, regional, and international politics—so that little concerted attention has been paid to the broader environmental parameters of the region. The Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS) launched this research initiative to explore the geopolitics of natural resources in an attempt to expand the focus to include the region's many other natural resources, such as land, air, water, and food, but also to study the regional environment as a whole, rather than merely the resources extracted from it. As such, these studies adopt a holistic approach, attempting to integrate the study of the region's diverse natural resources and environmental constraints, and their various impacts on geopolitics.

Natural resources have shaped the Middle East more than most other regions, and hydrocarbon revenues have been especially crucial to powering the rapid state-building efforts underway in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The discovery of oil increased external powers' interest in the region in the aftermath of the Second World War, exemplified by a 1945 US Department of State memorandum describing Saudi Arabian oil as the world's greatest source of strategic power. This intense historical interest in oil and gas, however, has served to obscure the study of the diverse range of natural resources present in the Middle East, which is not to say that many of these—for example, the quality of air in the modernizing Gulf states—can be completely isolated from the legacy of hydrocarbon extraction.

This multidisciplinary project accounts for a broad range of political, economic, social, and geographic variables. Environmental history, an emerging field that has been sparingly applied to the Middle East region, forms one avenue of investigation through which to explore the influence of the region's environment on its people, states, and economies over the long term. Other topics included in the research examine human relationships to the land and country case studies related to contemporary pastoralism; the impact of natural resources on the processes of state formation; and the relationship between natural resources on economic diversification, among other pertinent issues. The research initiative accounts for broader concerns about the depletion of natural resources across the planet, and places emphasis on the environment and environmentalism in the Middle East, which is a severely understudied topic.

CIRS launched this research initiative to explore the geopolitics of natural resources in the Middle East in an attempt to expand the focus to include the region's many natural resources other than natural gas, such as land, air, water, and food, but also to study the regional environment as a whole, rather than merely the resources extracted from it. Some of the issues under investigation include a focus on water scarcity, which is a global issue but one that is particularly acute in the Middle East; its impacts are examined through a case study on Yemen. Food security is studied in the case of Syria, which before the civil war began, in 2011, was one of the region's notable food exporters. Aside from acute food shortages within Syria, the conflict has had ripple effects on the region and has led to rising food prices in neighboring states, such as Jordan, Turkey, and Iraq. This summary report provides synopses of the original chapters published in *Environmental Politics in the Middle East: Local Struggles, Global Connections* (Oxford University Press/Hurst 2018), edited by Harry Verhoeven.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLITICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Introduction: The Middle East in Global Environmental Politics

Harry Verhoeven

Images and storylines of scorching scarcity and exuberant abundance shape a great many conversations about the Middle East. For every evocation of Arabian sand dunes and the seemingly existential inhospitality associated with them, there are equally powerful tropes of rivers, oases, and oil wells miraculously greening the desert and generating immense riches. The Sahara, the Nile, the Rub' Al-Khali, and the Euphrates and Tigris loom large in the geographer's imagination, in the same way that Saudi Arabia's Ghawar oil field, the Straits of Hormuz, and the Suez Canal are avatars of the global economy. The idea that geography is a key determinant of human behavior and of the (lack of) flourishing of civilization has long been intuitive, even self-evident, to many residents of the region and external observers.

This book rejects the separation of the Middle East's ecological trajectory from its political and socioeconomic history, both locally and globally. It argues that the environmental dynamics in the region are both reflective and co-constitutive of broader global political-economic and environmental forces, as well as being integral to the power politics in and of their own locales. Put differently, studying environmental change and natural resources management in the Middle East is essential to understanding the myriad political and socioeconomic hopes, illusions, and problems of its inhabitants, both in their on-the-ground manifestations and in the ways they are imbricated in broader global systems. Conversely, analyses that leave out the ways in which ecological factors are continuously shaped and reshaped, discursively and materially, by struggles over power—who gets what, when, and how, in Harold Lasswell's classic definition of politics—fall woefully short in their diagnosis and thereby also compromise any interventions they propose.

This introduction to the book provides an overview of the history of theorizing the relationship between human society and its environment, demonstrating just how central specific understandings of and practices toward the environment have been to the history of the Middle East and how the politics of the environment in the region, in turn, have shaped the global political economy and imagination. Many categorizations of the dominant traditions and discourses of environmentalism exist, but, in light of its objectives, this book proposes a framework of analysis of its own. First, I briefly discuss the origins of pre-modern environmental determinism: the notion that environmental factors are the prime explanation for societal structures and political outcomes. Subsequently, I identify three major paradigms that have been particularly consequential in the modern age in molding the ways in which their adherents think about science, economic development, and political power in their respective relationships with environmental change. Finally, I introduce the different chapters in this edited volume, underlining how they connect to these different paradigms as well as to one another.

Environmental change is about changes in—and regularly the brutal reordering of—social relations. Ultimately, the chapters in this volume are documents of past, present, and impending clashes of interests, perspectives, and ideologies that spiral across disciplinary and administrative borders—local struggles, regional imaginaries, global connections. As such, the contributing authors urge a widening and restructuring of the ongoing debate about the future of the Middle East and associated tropes of crisis. In

doing so, they emphasize that unless ecological discussions are recognized and recentered as quintessentially political, activists, policymakers, and scholars will continue to disappoint the ordinary people at the heart of the nexus between social injustice, political exclusion, and environmental calamities.

Harry Verhoeven is Assistant Professor in the School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University in Qatar. He is also an Associate Member of the Department of Politics and International Relations of the University of Oxford. He was founder of the Oxford University China-Africa Network (OUCAN) in 2008 and remains a co-convenor. His research focuses on elite politics, conflict, and the political economy of the environment in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region. His publications include *Water, Civilisation and Power in Sudan. The Political Economy of Military-Islamist State-Building* (Cambridge University Press 2015); and coauthor of *Why Comrades Go To War. Liberation Politics and the Outbreak of Africa's Deadliest Conflict* (Hurst/Oxford University Press 2016); in addition to numerous journal articles and book chapters.

1. Environmental Activism in the Middle East and North Africa

Jeannie Sowers

This chapter explores predominant modes of state–society engagement around environmental issues in the Middle East and North Africa and focuses more generally on social mobilization around environmental issues and state responses to these forms of activism across the region. It defines environmental activism as the purposive engagement of individuals in the public sphere to make environmental claims. Popular concern around environmental concerns in the MENA focuses on a range of issues, from the adverse impacts of hazardous industries to demands for public services such as irrigation water and adequate solid waste collection.

Activism around public health and environmental issues constitutes a key element in the broader landscape of mobilization across the Middle East and North Africa. From the protests in Istanbul’s Gezi Park and ninety other towns in Turkey in 2013, to demonstrations against electricity shortages in the Gaza Strip in 2017, new openings for environmental activism across the region have emerged over the past few decades. The expansion of environmental contestation has been intrinsically enmeshed in broader processes of social change that have transformed the region’s political economies and ecologies. The study of environmental activism thus echoes the emphasis in the introduction to this volume on a political ecology approach—the interrelated study of ecological, social, and political change on a variety of scales.

The spread of environmental activism in the region has been most evident in countries with semi-competitive political systems and long histories of collective action, including labor activism. Contestation around environmental issues, however, has also emerged in political and social contexts conventionally seen as inhospitable to activism. As this chapter shows, environmental activism across the region illustrates continuities in organization, discourse, and practice, as well as features specific to particular places and social contexts. State authorities have, in turn, responded with a largely predictable repertoire of action ranging from repression to accommodation.

The 2011 uprisings in the Arab world catalyzed scholarly and popular interest in developing a more multilayered and granular understanding of the dynamics of social protest, which has had a long history in the region. As the popular revolts gave way to complex civil and regionalized wars in Libya, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, however, the largely nonviolent and mass forms of social mobilization and activism have been overshadowed. Yet environmental mobilization has not diminished. Indeed, the phenomenon will most likely continue to intensify in most countries of the region, reflecting changes in political opportunity structures and activist strategies, as well as structural drivers, including population growth, urbanization, migration, climate change, and scarce supplies of water and agricultural land.

This chapter first situates Middle Eastern environmental mobilization in broader comparative studies of environmental activism, and then turns to the structural economic and social changes that created new openings for environmental mobilization. The third section discusses the advent of official, state-sanctioned environmentalism, before turning to the dominant modes of environmental activism that engage the state. These include widespread “wildcat” protests, typically in rural and peri-urban areas; the spread of formal environmental NGOs and voluntary associations; and the popular resistance “campaign” (*hamla*).

State responses to these forms of environmental mobilization are explored in the fifth section, focusing on attempts to co-opt, delegitimize, and sometimes negotiate with environmental activists. Lastly, this chapter also explores some shared features and lessons learned from popular environmental campaigns in Egypt, Lebanon, and Algeria, and looks toward future challenges for environmental activists. Modes of environmental activism will continue to evolve in response to these new circumstances, drawing on the actors, tactics, and forms of engagement already prevalent in the region.

Jeannie Sowers is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of New Hampshire, Durham. Her research focuses on the intersections between political economy and environmental issues in the Middle East, particularly in Egypt where she has conducted extensive field research. Relevant publications include *Environmental Politics in Egypt: Experts, Activists, and the State* (Routledge 2013); coeditor of *The Journey to Tahrir: Revolution, Protest, and Social Change in Egypt* (Verso 2012); coauthor of “Securitization of Water, Climate, and Migration Linkages in Syria, Jordan, and Israel,” in *International Environmental Agreements: Politics Law and Economics* (2015); and coauthor of “Climate Change, Water Resources, and the Politics of Adaptation in the Middle East and North Africa,” in *Climatic Change* (2011); among numerous other articles and chapters.

2. Tunisian Phosphates and the Politics of the Periphery

Francis Ghilès and Eckart Woertz

The Arab uprisings started in December 2010 in Tunisia, a country that until then had been hailed as a role model of economic development and resources management by European governments and international institutions like the IMF and the World Bank. Cracks below the surface escaped the attention of these development planners. The Ben Ali regime combined economic liberalization and export orientation with an increasingly suppressive state apparatus. While Tunisia achieved robust macro growth rates, wealth only trickled down unevenly to the general population and, at the time, the periphery faced neglect. Unemployment rates in the disadvantaged regions in the west and south were almost double the fifteen percent, that characterizes the capital Tunis and the coastal areas. It was here that the vegetable vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself ablaze and the Tunisian revolt started. Similar social unrest before, such as the bread riots of 1984 and the revolts in Tunisia's phosphate mines in 2008, had also started in the Tunisian hinterland. A successful transition in Tunisia can only be achieved if the economically disenfranchised population in peripheral areas gets a fairer deal—which, crucially, implies developing an alternative social contract and restructuring the socio-ecological formations that have generated prosperity for a transnational elite while causing extensive environmental degradation.

The phosphate mines around Metlaoui have played a pivotal role in the economic development of Tunisia's periphery and have been a bone of contention in social protests and trade union politics. In what is otherwise an arid region of high plateaus, the discovery of phosphate ore in the late nineteenth century brought undreamt of wealth for a few. During the colonial period, these few were the phosphate companies that developed the mines, and the colonial authorities for whom phosphate was a precious source of tax income. Tunisia's independence in 1956 and the subsequent development strategy of import substituting industrialization (ISI) saw further expansion of phosphate mining, which was used to provide the finance for any number of infrastructure projects outside the region. Tunisian leaders decided to develop the coast first, where levels of education and infrastructure were better than inland, then they hoped to leverage that development to shift the policy inland. But that shift failed to materialize in the 1970s and 1980s. Neglect of the hinterland was entrenched and accelerated during the economic liberalization of the Ben Ali years.

Using underexplored grey literature and personal interviews with officials, experts, and businesspeople, this chapter discusses the constitutive role of phosphate mining and trade unions in the politics of the periphery in Tunisia—politics that have been crucially affected by post-independence development agendas, the transformation of national elites in the crony capitalism of the Ben Ali era, and its interplay with international donor and development institutions. First, the chapter gives a historical overview of Tunisian phosphate mining and its role in regional development. Second, it analyzes the politics of Tunisia's periphery; the role of the country's trade union, Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (UGTT); and the emergence of new social actors. Third, it takes a detailed look at how such conflicts played out during the strikes in the phosphate mines in 2008 and after 2011. It concludes with an outlook on possible future developments.

Francis Ghilès is Associate Senior Researcher at Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB). He was the *Financial Times* North Africa correspondent from 1981–95, and now contributes to major newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Le Monde*, *El País*, and *La Vanguardia*. His research interests focus on analyzing emerging trends concerning gas, linking them with the political priorities of Spain, Europe, and the US. Ghilès specializes in security, financial, and energy trends in Europe and the western Mediterranean, and is a frequent media commentator, notably on the BBC World Service. He has advised Western governments (UK, France, US) and major European, American, and Japanese corporations working in North Africa. Recent publications include “North Africa’s New Directions” in *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*; and “The Frontiers of North Africa Need Reconsidering” in *The Challenge of North Africa* (University of London Institute in Paris 2014); among many other articles.

Eckart Woertz is a Senior Researcher at the Barcelona Centre for International Affairs and an Adjunct Lecturer at the Institut Barcelona D’Estudis Internacionals. Formerly he was a Visiting Fellow at Princeton University and Director of Economic Studies at the Gulf Research Center in Dubai. His research interests include energy and financial issues in the Gulf region and the Middle East, Middle East food security, Gulf-agro investments, sovereign wealth funds, and economic diversification. Woertz is author of *Oil for Food*, (Oxford University Press 2013) and editor of *GCC Financial Markets* (Gerlach 2012). Other publications include “Environment, Food Security and Conflict Narratives in the Middle East” in *Global Environment* (2014); and “The Governance of Gulf-Agro Investments” in *Globalizations* (2013).

3. *The Securitization of Oil and its Ramifications in the Gulf Cooperation Council States*

Jill Crystal

This chapter examines the political construction of a new understanding of how natural resources and security are linked in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. The chapter begins with the role of oil in state and class formation and examines its broader securitization in the Gulf, a trend of particular salience in the last 10–15 years. I document the driving forces and motivations behind this process, both regionally and locally, then conclude with some reflections on the links between natural resources, development trajectories, and political outcomes.

Oil differs from other natural resources, notably in its economic importance and in the ways it has structured politics in the Middle East. Its early centrality to solidifying the power of Gulf monarchs, its role in creating a more unequal relationship between rulers and the population, and in creating an ideology to support that relationship, both structured and diminished opposition in many other realms, among them environmental activism. Fighting the environmental degradation associated with hydrocarbons (e.g. the 1991 oil fires that darkened Kuwait's skies lowered air quality and contaminated groundwater and Gulf water feeding desalination plants) was claimed early on as the state's preserve, leaving environmental activists to seek out less overtly political ways to express opposition. Yet subsequent developments would lead to a further closing of the space to dissent, framed by the state as protecting resources and people.

The 2006 al-Qaeda attack on Saudi Arabia's Abqaiq oil facility was a watershed and led to rapid securitization of oil, first in Saudi Arabia, then in the other GCC states. Because of the economic centrality of hydrocarbons, governments faced no resistance in applying a security framework when oil facilities were at risk. With the onset of the Arab uprisings in 2011, then the fall in oil prices in 2013–14, Gulf regimes deepened their authoritarian tendencies. The securitization rhetoric, developed initially around oil, could now be deployed against any opposition, around any issue: governments viewed all dissent through a terrorism lens. Once on the same page, GCC rulers were more willing to link their domestic policing to a regional security framework long favored by Saudi Arabia.

The discursive framework of terrorism gave a sense of urgency to a range of problems, reducing the apparent need for public scrutiny. When oil prices fell, governments reduced popular subsidies. The historical trade of political quiescence for wealth was now off the table as governments offered a new bargain: political obedience in exchange for security. Governments had now created an all-purpose securitization discourse that could be deployed in a variety of situations. By 2017, Saudi Arabia was able to dispense with emphasizing the economic vitality of hydrocarbons altogether; it could now invoke a very broadly defined era of terrorism to launch an embargo on its regional rival, Qatar, which deprived it of overland access to food and water. This chapter explains what happened to make this possible.

Jill Crystal is the Curtis O. Liles III Professor of Political Science at Auburn University. She specializes in comparative and Middle Eastern politics, and her current research interests include Gulf politics, authoritarianism and democratization, policing, and political economy. She is the author of two books on the Gulf: *Oil and Politics in the Gulf: Rulers and Merchants in Kuwait and Qatar* (Cambridge University Press 1995) and *Kuwait: The Transformation of an Oil State* (reprinted, Routledge 2017). Other publications include “Tribes and Patronage Networks in Qatar” in *Tribes and States in a Changing Middle East* (Oxford University Press 2015); and “Eastern Arabian States: Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, and Oman” in *The Government and Politics of the Middle East and North Africa*, 8th edn. (Routledge 2018); among others.

4. *Greening Gulf Landscapes: Economic Opportunities, Social Trade-Offs, and Sustainability Challenges*

Ali El-Keblawy

Environmental issues are complex in that they are both intraconnected and interconnected with social, political, and economic problems. Water availability, in particular, is at the center of development: all economic and social processes, ultimately, depend on water for sustainability. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg highlighted the linkages between water management and agriculture and industrialization; health and pollution; and sustainability and power generation. These “hydro-interconnections” are of an existential nature across the Arab world. Yet despite the grave scarcity of water in the Arabian Peninsula, very limited groundwater reserves, and extremely high evapotranspiration, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have for decades invested significantly in the “greening” of their landscapes. This chapter examines the process of greening landscapes from inception to completion.

The term “greening” is linked to the development of green party politics in Europe, increasingly impacting other countries around the world. Greening, and environmental awareness more broadly, refers to new lifestyles as well as brand images. Yet the concept is operationalized here as an active and integrated approach to the appreciation, stewardship, and management of living elements of social and ecological systems. Greening takes place in cities, towns, townships, and informal settlements in urban and peri-urban areas. In my understanding, it covers any active attempt to improve sustainability, from recycling in households to the adoption of environmental philosophies in corporations. In urban landscaping, Krusky et al. used the term “greening” to refer to the process of restoring landscaping and blighted property, promoting growth, and maintaining natural areas, such as parks, gardens, and residential yards. Here, the term “greening” refers specifically to the sustainable use of natural resources to grow plants and vegetation in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. The types of landscapes that are covered in this chapter include agricultural lands, cities, and degraded natural habitats.

Most of the literature covers the problem of agricultural development and sustainability from the perspective of sustainable use and diversification of water resources. Only limited studies examine technical solutions for reducing water demands of plants used in greening landscapes. In this chapter, the sustainability of greening landscapes in cities and deserts of Arab states of the Persian Gulf is examined; it explores ways to work with nature, rather than against it, by suggesting an approach to conserve the very limited water resource while ensuring sustainability of current and new landscapes.

Many of the existing landscapes rely on the introduction of exotic crops or ornamental plants that cannot adapt to the local environment. Therefore, the GCC states are exerting ever greater efforts to diversify freshwater sources, such as desalinated seawater and treated sewage water, to sustain the huge water demands of these plants. The impracticality of using exotic and ornamental plants in landscaping shows the advantage of using native plants as a viable alternative. Native plants are well adapted to the local environment, and consume a fraction of the freshwater guzzled up by exotic plants. This chapter explores the advantage of using native plants, ways of restoring degraded landscapes, and using unconventional water sources, such as seawater, for irrigation. Moreover, using native plants in greening deserts and restoring degraded landscapes would help in reducing carbon dioxide emissions as part of the global mobilization against climate change.

Ali El-Keblawy is Director of the Sharjah Seed Bank and Herbarium and Associate Professor at the University of Sharjah. His research interests include plant ecology, biodiversity and conservation of desert plants, invasion biology, rangeland management, propagation of native plants of the UAE, and domestication of desert native plants for urban landscaping. Published articles include “Artificial Forests as Conservation Sites for the Native Flora of the UAE;” “Restoration of Desert Ecosystems;” and “Biodiversity and the Conservation of Desert Plants;” among many others, in environmental journals such as *Forest Ecology and Management*, *Journal of Arid Environments*, *Arid Land Research and Management*, and *BMC Ecology*.

5. *Burning Somalia's Future: The Illegal Charcoal Trade between the Horn of Africa and the Gulf*

Ilya Gridneff

Somalia's war economy has made illicit charcoal trade one of the country's few lucrative revenue streams. This natural resource, albeit destructive and illegal to export, funds a collection of security forces and earns a handful of individuals the needed revenue to manage their own fragile and tumultuous political environment. The trade, in an incredibly complex and evolving state, illustrates the status quo for Somalia. It symbolizes a nation mired in uneven or limited development while retarded by extreme violence and malfeasance. The industry's negative consequences, from its environmental impact to funding the resurgent jihadist group al Shabaab, undermines the Somali Federal Government's (SFG) rhetoric of development and ignores broader governance issues.

This chapter argues that the charcoal trade exposes Somalia's political economy as a driver of persistent conflict fueled by competing local, regional, and international interests. Of particular note is the tendency of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to buy Somalia's charcoal, whether licit or illicit, for domestic use; such commercial activity contributes to the country's regressive imbalances. At the same time, GCC states jockeying for geopolitical influence across the Horn of Africa increase the uneven spread of resources and access to finance for Somalia's leaders. This process has fed the political elite's insatiable appetite for personal patronage, and has produced a nexus of competing rivalries that further destabilizes Somalia and the broader Red Sea region.

This chapter studies the use of one natural resource, charcoal, and its trans-boundary trade as a vehicle to illustrate how Somalia's ties to the GCC states—and the broader Islamic or Arab world—are being strengthened. I contend that this growing proximity is both offering beneficial forms of assistance and support, as well as proving to be a factor for destabilization at a time when Somalia is becoming of increasing strategic concern for Western and emerging powers.

Somalia's charcoal trade will continue regardless of international pressure, laws, and bans. There is a need for a pragmatic approach to formalize the industry to benefit a wider group than just the handful that are presently benefiting. As the trade directly supplies the markets of the GCC, greater pressure must be applied on end users to invest in reforestation or regeneration programs in specific locations in Somalia. To avoid al Shabaab taxation and control, charcoal initiatives should be run close to urban centers that are under the control of government forces—for example, in Jubaland on the outskirts of Kismayo, where the support of the Kenyan soldiers could be employed to protect traders or producers in legitimate business. Money earned from the formal trade could be earmarked for specific community-based programs like environmental education and protection to security initiatives. Such integrated initiatives, provided they are supported by GCC states, could see the emergence of a formally regulated charcoal development program in Somalia, which could address climate change concerns, deforestation, and poverty.

Ilya Gridneff is Senior Researcher with Sahan Research in Nairobi, Kenya. Previously, he worked as the East Africa correspondent for Bloomberg News. His research interests include security sector reform in Somalia, Horn of Africa politics, war, and famine. Gridneff has earned a number of international journalism awards.

6. *Illegal Fishing and Piracy in the Horn of Africa: The Role of the MENA Region*

Afyare Elmi

The Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, and Indian Ocean have always been vital routes for world navigation and traveling. These waters are particularly important for most of the countries in the Middle East and North Africa. More than 20 percent of world shipping, including 70 percent of the world's petroleum products and 80 percent of Europe's maritime shipments, transit through the Gulf of Aden. The rising economic powers of India and China rely particularly heavily on this route. The majority of the oil products originating from the Gulf region destined for Europe transit through this important route. Maritime piracy, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and legal commerce in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region are closely linked in multiple ways.

Many scholars argue that because of the statelessness, illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping have also increased on the Somalia coast since 1991. Many ships from different parts of the world have taken advantage of the lack of authority in Somalia. Those engaged in illegal overfishing harassed and sometimes killed Somali fishermen. Illegal fishing vessels from Iran, Yemen, South Korea, Egypt, Spain, and other countries use more sophisticated ships, thus making it difficult for the poor Somali fishermen to fish freely from their own waters. Additionally, stories of toxic waste dumping were reported as early as the 1990s. This further fed into the widespread grievances that Somalis developed against illegal fishing, thus contributing to the spread of conspiracy theories. Therefore, pirates politicized these issues by arguing that they were coastal guards fighting against illegal fishing and toxic waste dumping.

Others provided a different political explanation to illegal fishing. Some argued that since Somalia had not claimed its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the past and there was no functioning state, Somali seas were free for all. These politicized legal opinions made the predatory behavior of the ships that were engaged in illegal overfishing look legitimate. Some had obtained illegal licenses from a local chief or a warlord who cannot issue legally binding documents. Additionally, some scholars provided an economic rationale as to why piracy has proliferated in the Horn of Africa. Somalia's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita fell to \$97 in 1991. The economic condition of the country got worse, even prompting the December 1992 US-led humanitarian intervention of Operation Restore Hope. A new Somali generation matured amidst chaos and the prolonged stateless condition. The Somali youth, the primary recruitment target of the pirates, have grown up amidst civil war and economic despair. The argument is that piracy emerges from poverty, which forced pirates to take up arms and attack ships transiting the Gulf of Aden simply because they had no other legitimate means of surviving.

This chapter examines the geopolitics of maritime piracy and IUU fishing in the Horn of Africa waters. First, the chapter provides historical background on maritime piracy in Somalia, arguing that this is a new phenomenon in the region. Second, it discusses the extent of illegal fishing in Somali waters. Third, it revisits and reassesses the political and economic explanations for clandestine maritime activities of statelessness, illegal fishing, toxic waste dumping, and poverty. Fourth, the chapter analyzes the implications of piracy and illegal fishing for the region. On the security front, pirates have attacked and hijacked many ships from MENA countries. On the economic front, the MENA region has lost valuable

trade and paid high insurance premiums. Moreover, during the peak of piracy (2005–12), the fishing and tourism industries of the countries in the piracy-affected areas declined. The chapter concludes by assessing the contributions of the MENA countries in addressing maritime insecurity and environmental destruction, arguing that these countries play a nominal role in the efforts to control piracy, while at the same time perpetuating illegal fishing in the waters of the Horn of Africa.

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7. Learning Geopolitical Pluralism: Towards a New International Oil Regime?

Clement Henry

The Middle East can be viewed as Hell's kitchen, depository of most of the world's most cheaply accessed oil that accounts for much of our global warming. Given its environmental impact, somehow containing its omnipresence must surely be a priority for any political ecology of the region. The Middle East is also viewed by many as a geopolitical prize astride three continents, now sharply fragmented by proxy wars in Libya, Syria, and Yemen. While these conflicts are not about oil and have important local drivers, the imputed strategic value of the commodity has reinforced the region's geopolitical significance as an arena for competition among great powers.

Political ecology, particularly in its more constructivist interpretations, may suggest, however, that oil be viewed as just another commodity without any special strategic value. Was "securing oil" not simply a construct to buttress the US military industrial complex and to legitimate the United States protecting the Free World and pressuring potential adversaries? Yet overemphasizing this narrative risks overlooking not only how oil has been a key material factor in state formation and nation-building in the last century, but also how, under the shadow of Anglo-American hegemony, the oil producers managed to control production first in Texas and then in the whole of the non-Soviet world. In response to an oil glut in the early 1930s, when the price of oil dropped to under 10 cents a barrel, the Texas Railroad Commission acquired the authority to prorate production. Subsequently, the major oil producers developed other means among themselves of managing the production of Middle Eastern oil so as to avoid gluts and financial catastrophes.

In the absence of any state government, the major transnational corporations developed other forms of governance that liberal internationalists define to be "regimes." Underpinning their institutions, rational self-interest may also be seen at work in the form of iterated prisoners' dilemmas. Resolutions of dilemmas of common interest require actors who set greater value on their expected profits over the long term than the quick gains to be had by defecting. As discussed in this chapter, the "strong hands" of major oil producers supported a self-governing oligopoly that kept control over production. Indeed, Texas export prices subsequently served as a marker for international oil pricing. Until 1959, when the United States slapped import controls on cheaper Middle Eastern oil, crude petroleum was a truly fungible commodity (albeit of many varied grades), traded in a single global market.

Whatever lay behind its construct as a uniquely strategic resource at different points of time in the twentieth century, this chapter proposes to view oil merely as a commodity, but one of a special sort requiring lumpy investments, long lead times, and hence ingenious measures needed to match supply and demand: the properties of oil have important consequences for the kind of institutions that can be built around it. The construct of its strategic value, however, offers a useful forum for teaching the great powers, who probably still believe in the construct, the practice of geopolitical pluralism.

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8. Scarcity Drives Economic Development: The Effect of Energy Subsidies on Export Diversification in the Middle East

Wessel N. Vermeulen

The relative lack of sustainable development and economic progress in many Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries is a problem that has been powerfully discussed by UNDP's Arab Human Development Reports and analyzed extensively. The literature has highlighted a lack of competition between existing firms, and prohibitively high barriers for new entrants and competitors to gain a foothold in these economies. Governments often privilege local companies against domestic and international competition through regulatory and trade barriers.

This question of dependency on a marketplace shaped by statist interference is, I contend, at the core of the developmental question in the Middle East and North Africa. Especially for the resource-rich countries in the MENA region, there are serious doubts about the economic sustainability of the non-resource sectors, in the absence of the rents and profits generated in the resource sector. Therefore, natural resources have allowed resource-rich countries to sustain an economy that relies on firms that do not generally match the productivity, efficiency, and innovation present in other countries. In turn, this has consequences for a nation's ability to develop various non-resource industries successfully, i.e. economic diversification, which was and remains the key policy subject in MENA countries. Moreover, such dependence, lack of innovation, and inefficiencies are among the chief reasons why Gulf states especially are the world's biggest emitters per capita of greenhouse gasses. The Arab world contributes disproportionately to climate change because of skewed production and consumption patterns; there is thus both a severe economic and ecological price tag.

In this chapter, I look specifically at one policy tool: subsidies for energy. I am interested in the potential effect these have on trade-based measures of economic diversification and thus act as a crucial (dis) incentive for development in contexts of resource scarcity and abundance. This chapter sidesteps the question as to which political purposes these subsidies may serve. Instead, it uses a positivist approach to investigate the relation between subsidies and the international export performance of countries. This chapter fits in the liberal paradigm of theorizing the relationship between environment and development. It explicitly aims to improve understanding of how state intervention has affected economic development in the MENA region. In the Middle East and North Africa, subsidies are an important part of the political economy and the social contract between state and citizens. If a state chooses to change its subsidy policy, it will require a rekindled social contract.

Energy subsidies can affect trade diversification in two main mechanisms, with opposing effects. By making energy-intensive goods cheaper to consume or produce, subsidy policies can create an advantageous environment for industrial development through the artificially lower costs of inputs or through higher demand, even if the fiscal cost of the subsidy regime can be substantial. However, subsidized fuel may also help to explain the lack in the MENA region of a well-developed and dynamic private sector that generates jobs and stable economic growth. Energy subsidies can discourage innovation and technological development, since the price of energy inputs is kept artificially low. Whereas the rest of the world is aiming to find solutions for increasingly expensive fossil fuel (due to taxation and the need to lower greenhouse gasses), companies in MENA are not equally incentivized to innovate, which may harm their potential to export. Which mechanism dominates is an empirical question that I aim to answer in this chapter, using regression analysis.

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9. *The Politics of Natural Resources in the Caspian Sea: A New Great Game in an Ancient World*

Abbas Maleki

The Caspian Sea is the largest landlocked body of water on earth. It occupies a deep depression on the boundary of Europe and Asia with a water level approximately 27 meters below the level of the high seas and a total volume of more than 78,000 cubic kilometers of brackish water. Having been isolated from the earth's oceans at the end of the Pliocene (1.8 million years ago), its ecosystem incorporates remnants of the fauna of the larger regional seas (mainly the Mediterranean and the Arctic biogeographic complexes). A major difference between the Caspian and other large inland water bodies is its meridian orientation and great length (1,200 km), resulting in significant differences in climate over the sea and especially over the catchment area: the northern shores are subject to extreme continental climate, while the southern and southwestern coast is in the subtropics.

The isolation of the Caspian basin, its climate, and main biophysical characteristics have created a unique ecological system. The Caspian Sea is home to 810 different species. Today, despite this rich heritage, the Caspian faces a potential catastrophe. Overfishing, discharging wastewater, caviar smuggling, and the exploration and production of gas and oil are degrading many Caspian biotas. The victims of this degradation are many, but the threat is encapsulated by the fate facing the bulk of the world's remaining stock of wild sturgeon, the sea's most famous inhabitant. The Caspian accounted in the past for 80–90 percent of world caviar production, but total catches have declined dramatically, from 27,000 tons in 1990 to less than 1,000 tons in 2010, according to the CaspEco project. Five countries—Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Iran—share the Caspian Sea, but the links between science and policy are presently weak, thereby undercutting a much-needed transnational approach to environmental management. The region suffers from the so-called “resource curse” in multiple ways, as this chapter will demonstrate.

This chapter is mostly concerned with the post-1991 period. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a “new Middle East” has been emerging. Most of the Central Asian and Caucasus states have Muslim majorities; and many look, to a considerable extent, to the actual Middle East and Persian Gulf politically, socially, and culturally. The Russian Federation, similarly, has sizeable Muslim populations in different republics. The convergence of paths between the Middle East and the Caspian has a feeling of *déjà vu* about it. While formally the interaction is that between independent nation-states, the legacies of the past influence how geography, ethnicity, religion, and energy presently bring them together.

This chapter examines the politics of the natural resources of the Caspian Sea as littoral states vie for dominance over its energy resources and its routes to world markets against a background of climate change, region-wide sustainability challenges, and local pollution. The Caspian is in full transformation and the potential sources of destabilization—which further complicate environmental cooperation and political integration—include radical interpretations of Islam, lack of sustainable development, ethnic violence, corruption, drug trafficking, and external intervention. These destabilizing factors are compounded by the landlocked position of Caspian countries, uncertainty among littoral states as to each other's intentions, and a decaying infrastructure last updated in the Soviet era. This chapter reviews these challenges sequentially, but first turns to the literature on resources and conflict to contextualize the evolving politics of natural resources in the Caspian region.

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