



The Middle East as an Agenda in International Relations and Its Implications for International Security

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Abstract

The Middle East remains a central pillar of the global security architecture, characterized by persistent instability and complex geopolitical rivalries. Grounded theoretically in Neorealism and Constructivism, this paper examines the region's role in contemporary international relations, focusing on the transformative impact of the 2003 U.S.-led invasion of Iraq as a critical juncture in the reordering of Middle Eastern and global security. Drawing on secondary literature, international organisation reports, and historical case analysis, the paper traces the shift from state-centric warfare to non-state threats, the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS, and the proliferation of proxy conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and beyond, to explore how regional volatility challenges the existing global security paradigm. The study further evaluates the humanitarian crises generated by these conflicts, including mass displacement and the securitisation of asylum in host states, and interrogates the repeated failure of collective security mechanisms, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to prevent or resolve these crises. The analysis suggests that the traditional Westphalian, state-centric security model is increasingly insufficient for addressing the Middle East's multifaceted, multi-actor challenges, and that Neorealist balance-of-power logic alone cannot account for the identity-driven and normative dimensions of regional conflict. The paper concludes by advocating for an evolved international security framework, one that integrates human-centred development, inclusive governance, and multilateral diplomacy, and offers suggestions for policymakers and future researchers seeking to foster long-term regional and global stability.

Keywords: Middle East; International Security; Terrorism; Proxy Conflicts; Collective Security

Introduction

The Middle East arguably remains one of the most critical and volatile regions in international relations, characterized by a rich tapestry of cultures, historical legacies, and ongoing conflicts. Geographically, it serves as a crucial crossroads between Europe, Asia, and Africa, further enhancing its strategic importance. This region is endowed with abundant energy resources, particularly oil and natural gas, making it a focal point for global economic interests and energy security. Additionally, the Middle East is home to significant religious heritage, housing sites pivotal to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (in their order of emergence), which adds layers of complexity to its social and political dynamics. The intricate geopolitical rivalries among regional powers, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, as well as the persistent Israeli-Palestinian conflict, contribute to a highly unstable environment that affects global security.

Much of this instability has deep historical roots. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War and the subsequent Sykes-Picot arrangement imposed largely artificial state boundaries on a mosaic of ethnic, sectarian, and tribal communities, embedding structural fault lines that continue to shape conflict dynamics a century later (Gause, 2014). The Cold War superimposed a further layer of great-power rivalry on the region, as the United States and the Soviet Union courted regional clients, armed proxies, and entrenched authoritarian orders in the name of strategic stability. The end of the Cold War did not resolve these tensions; rather, it created a unipolar interlude in which the United States emerged as the region's dominant external power, setting the stage for the interventions of the early twenty-first century.

The U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, justified by the assertion of weapons of mass destruction, significantly altered the political landscape of the region. This military intervention not only led to the destabilisation of Iraq but also precipitated a power vacuum that allowed for the rise of extremist groups such as ISIS. The subsequent civil war in Syria, marked by internal strife and foreign intervention, further exemplified the chaotic aftermath of these events and highlighted the region's interconnectedness. These developments are often perceived as the inception of a prolonged international conflict, with some analysts labelling it an undeclared "Third World War". This ongoing crisis has dramatically reshaped the international security agenda, challenged traditional diplomatic approaches, and emphasised the need for multilateral cooperation to address the multifaceted threats emanating from the region (Chomsky, 2007; Gause, 2014).

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 dismantled the existing state apparatus, leading to the collapse of government authority and igniting a series of interconnected crises throughout the Middle East. This military intervention not only destabilised Iraq but also highlighted the fragility of state institutions, paving the way for widespread chaos and violence. The resulting power vacuum created an environment conducive to the rise of insurgency and terrorism, as various non-state actors seized the opportunity to assert control (Dodge, 2013). Moreover, these developments have compelled global institutions, including the United Nations and NATO, to reevaluate their security strategies. The focus has increasingly shifted from traditional state-centric warfare, characterised by direct military confrontations between nations, to addressing non-state threats such as terrorism, radicalisation, and cyberwarfare. This transformative shift reflects an acknowledgement that modern conflicts often involve complex interactions among sovereign states, transnational groups, and ideologically driven networks, necessitating new approaches to international security (Kaldor, 2012).

Against this backdrop, the present paper sets out to examine the Middle East's place on the contemporary international relations agenda and to assess its implications for global security governance. Specifically, the paper identifies the changing character of security threats emanating from the region, from state-centric warfare to terrorism and proxy conflict; examines the humanitarian consequences of these threats; and interrogates the capacity of existing multilateral security institutions to manage them. The paper is structured as follows: following this introduction, the theoretical framework section outlines the Neorealist and Constructivist lenses that inform the analysis; the discussion section examines four thematic pillars, namely the security paradigm shift, terrorism and counterterrorism, proxy conflicts, and humanitarian crises, alongside the failure of collective security; the analysis section synthesises these themes and evaluates the adequacy of the Westphalian security model; and the paper concludes with suggestions for policy and future research.

The region's energy endowment adds a further, geo-economic layer to its strategic significance. Control over, and access to, Gulf oil and gas reserves has historically shaped the security calculations of external powers, from Britain's early twentieth-century imperial presence to the United States' post-war commitment to Gulf security under successive administrations. While the global energy transition and the diversification of supply sources have gradually reduced the centrality of Middle Eastern hydrocarbons to Western economies, energy remains a critical vector of regional power, financing both state military modernisation programmes and, in some cases, the proxy and non-state actors examined later in this paper. The interaction of energy security, religious geography, and great-power competition thus produces a uniquely dense concentration of strategic interest in a relatively compact geographic space, helping to explain why conflicts that might elsewhere remain localized routinely acquire international, and even global, significance.

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Theoretical Framework or Background

This paper adopts a dual theoretical lens, combining Neorealism and Constructivism, to account for both the material and ideational drivers of insecurity in the Middle East. As a purely conceptual and theory-driven paper, it draws on a comprehensive review of academic literature, peer-reviewed journals, international organization reports (including those of the United Nations and NATO), and historical case material on Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, rather than on primary empirical data collection.

Neorealism, as articulated by Waltz (1979), holds that the international system is anarchic, in the sense that no central authority exists above sovereign states to enforce order. Under conditions of anarchy, states are compelled to prioritize their own survival, seeking security through self-help, alliance formation, and the accumulation of relative power. Mearsheimer's (2001) offensive realist variant goes further, arguing that great powers are never satisfied with the existing distribution of power and continually seek opportunities to maximize their relative advantage. Applied to the Middle East, Neorealism illuminates the balance-of-power dynamics that drive rivalry among Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, as well as the involvement of extra-regional great powers, the United States, Russia, and China, each pursuing strategic advantage through military basing, arms transfers, and proxy support. The security dilemma inherent in Neorealist theory, whereby one state's defensive measures are perceived as offensive threats by rivals, helps explain the region's persistent arms build-up and its recurrent slide into military confrontation.

However, Neorealism's state-centric and materialist assumptions struggle to fully account for the ideational and identity-based dimensions of Middle Eastern conflict, including sectarian mobilization, religious framing, and the transnational appeal of extremist ideology. Constructivism, most notably associated with Wendt (1999), addresses this gap by arguing that state interests and identities are not fixed but are socially constructed through shared norms, ideas, and historical interaction. From a Constructivist perspective, the Sunni-Shia cleavage that underlies much of the Iran-Saudi rivalry, the pan-Islamist and caliphate-restoration narratives mobilized by groups such as ISIS, and the competing nationalist and religious narratives surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not merely instrumental covers for material interest but are constitutive of how regional actors define threat, legitimacy, and belonging (Katzenstein, 1996).

The two theories are treated here as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Buzan and Wæver's (2003) regional security complex theory offers a useful bridge, conceptualizing the Middle East as a security complex in which local actors' security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analyzed in isolation, yet remain open to penetration by external great powers. This framework allows the paper to hold together the material, power-political insights of Neorealism with the identity-based, normative insights of Constructivism, and to interrogate the adequacy of the state-centric, Westphalian security order that has historically underpinned international responses to Middle Eastern crises. The discussion and analysis sections that follow apply this combined framework thematically, organizing the region's security challenges into five interlinked areas: the security paradigm shift, terrorism and counter-terrorism, proxy warfare, humanitarian implications, and the efficacy of international institutions, before comparing the pre-2003 regional order with the current multipolar environment to assess the degradation of international norms.

A further theoretical resource employed in this paper is securitization theory, developed by Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde (1998) within the Copenhagen School. Securitization theory holds that an issue becomes a matter of security not simply because it poses an objective threat, but because a securitizing actor successfully frames it, through speech acts and political practice, as an existential threat requiring extraordinary measures. This perspective is particularly useful for understanding two phenomena examined later in this paper: first, the framing of ISIS and transnational terrorism as a civilisational threat justifying extraordinary counterterrorism measures, including extended detention, expanded surveillance, and military action across multiple sovereign jurisdictions; and second, the securitisation of refugee flows in European host states, whereby a humanitarian crisis originating in Syria and Iraq is reconstructed, through domestic political discourse, as a threat to cultural cohesion and internal security. Read alongside Neorealism and Constructivism, securitization theory helps to explain not only why Middle Eastern insecurity persists, but how and why its effects are transmitted, and often amplified, well beyond the region's geographic boundaries.

Discussion

The following discussion applies the theoretical framework outlined above to five interlinked thematic pillars identified through a thematic review of the academic literature, international organisation reporting, and historical case material: the broader paradigm shift in the character of security threats; terrorism and counter-terrorism; proxy warfare and great-power competition; the humanitarian consequences of regional conflict; the enduring Israeli-Palestinian dimension; and the repeated failure of collective security institutions to manage these challenges. Each pillar is examined in turn, before the analysis section synthesises the themes and evaluates their combined implications for the adequacy of the existing, largely Westphalian, international security order.

The Security Paradigm Shift: From State-Centric Warfare to Non-State Threats

The most consequential shift precipitated by the 2003 invasion and its aftermath has been the reorientation of the international security agenda away from inter-state warfare and toward non-state and hybrid threats. Traditional security thinking, rooted in the Westphalian assumption that the state is both the primary referent and primary threat object of security, is poorly equipped to address an environment in which militias, insurgent movements, and transnational terrorist networks operate across, and sometimes in place of, sovereign state structures. The proliferation of non-state armed actors in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya, from sectarian militias to jihadist insurgencies, illustrates how the collapse of centralised authority produces a security vacuum that state-centric frameworks are ill-suited to fill. This shift has been compounded by the growing salience of cyberwarfare, disinformation campaigns, and drone technology, all of which blur the line between war and peace and complicate attribution of responsibility, further undermining the applicability of a purely inter-state conception of security (Kaldor, 2012).

Terrorism and Counterterrorism on the Security Agenda

Following the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the nation became a breeding ground for various terrorist groups and militias, as the collapse of the government and security infrastructure created a power vacuum. Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the direct precursor to ISIS, exploited Sunni disenfranchisement and the de-Baathification of the Iraqi state to embed itself within local insurgent networks. The emergence of the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014 was a particularly alarming development; it seized significant territories in both Iraq and Syria, including major cities like Mosul and Raqqa, and briefly administered a quasi-state structure that attracted thousands of foreign fighters from across the globe. This rise highlighted how post-war instability could rapidly escalate into global security threats, affecting not only the region but also prompting concerns for international peace, as demonstrated by ISIS-inspired or directed attacks in Europe, North Africa, and beyond.

In response to these developments, counterterrorism strategies were redefined at the international level (Byman, 2016). The United Nations, along with Western alliances such as NATO, prioritised enhanced intelligence sharing to improve situational awareness of terrorist activities. Additionally, drone warfare has become a crucial tactic to target ISIS leadership and operational capabilities, allowing for more precise military actions with reduced risk to personnel, although the practice has attracted sustained criticism over civilian casualties, due-process concerns, and its long-term efficacy in reducing, rather than displacing, extremist violence.

Moreover, significant measures were implemented to combat the radicalisation of individuals, focusing on countering extremist narratives and addressing the socio-economic conditions that allow terrorism to thrive. Efforts to disrupt the financing of terrorism were also intensified, aiming to cut off funding sources for groups like ISIS (United Nations Security Council, 2014). The question of repatriating foreign fighters and their families from detention camps in north-eastern Syria has since become a further point of contention among troop-contributing and origin states, illustrating how the legal and normative architecture built around state citizenship struggles to accommodate transnationally mobile threats. Together, these strategies aim to address not just the symptoms of terrorism but also its root causes in an increasingly complex security landscape.

Proxy Conflicts and the Multipolar Security Challenge

The Middle East has emerged as the epicenter of complex proxy wars, drawing in global powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, alongside influential regional actors like Israel, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. A notable

example is the Syrian civil war, which not only highlights a severe humanitarian crisis but also serves as a battleground for a broader struggle for influence and dominance among these key players. The U.S. and its allies, including European nations and various Gulf states, back opposition groups to counter Russian and Iranian interests, which are rooted in their support for the Assad regime.

Yemen offers a further illustration of proxy dynamics, where a Saudi-led coalition has supported the internationally recognized government against Houthi forces widely understood to receive Iranian backing, transforming a domestic political dispute into a regional contest for influence along the Bab-el-Mandeb strait, one of the world's most strategically sensitive maritime chokepoints. Similarly, the shadow conflict between Israel and Iran, conducted through cyber operations, targeted strikes, and support for aligned militias such as Hezbollah, demonstrates how proxy competition can escalate tensions without triggering formal inter-state war, while still generating significant risk of miscalculation and escalation.

This multifaceted conflict illustrates the transition to a multipolar security environment, where traditional hegemonic power dynamics are shifting. As emerging powers seek to assert their influence, global and regional actors increasingly clash over not only territorial ambitions but also ideological principles. External powers' involvement in regional conflicts has exacerbated tensions, creating a complex web of alliances and enmities that complicates peace efforts and regional stability. These developments underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of Middle Eastern geopolitics and its far-reaching implications for international relations.

Great-power competition further complicates the proxy landscape. Russia's military intervention in Syria from 2015 onward, undertaken in direct support of the Assad regime, marked its most significant projection of force beyond the former Soviet space since the Cold War, and secured it continued access to the Tartus naval facility and Khmeimim air base, both of strategic value for power projection into the Eastern Mediterranean. China's engagement, by contrast, has been predominantly economic, through Belt and Road infrastructure investment and expanding energy partnerships with Gulf states, though Beijing's brokering of the 2023 Saudi-Iran rapprochement signaled a growing, if still cautious, willingness to assume a more overt diplomatic role in regional security affairs. The resulting picture is one in which no single external power enjoys the kind of uncontested primacy the United States exercised in the immediate post-Cold War period, consistent with this paper's characterization of the post-2003 order as genuinely multipolar rather than unipolar or bipolar.

Humanitarian Crises and Security Threats

The ongoing wars in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and the recent escalations between Israel and Iran have culminated in some of the most severe humanitarian crises in modern history. The conflict in Syria, for example, has led to over 6 million people being displaced internally, while millions more have sought refuge in neighboring countries and Europe. Yemen is facing one of the worst famine crises globally due to a prolonged civil war and a blockade, with millions on the brink of starvation. The turmoil in Iraq has resulted in persistent violence and instability, driving families to flee in search of safety. These large-scale displacements have overwhelmed European nations, leading to significant challenges in managing asylum requests and integrating refugees into local communities.

Meanwhile, countries bordering these conflict zones, including Jordan, Lebanon, and Türkiye, have struggled with the influx, experiencing increased political and social tensions as host communities absorb refugee populations that in some cases rival or exceed a significant share of their own national population. As a result of these humanitarian disasters, there has been a notable rise in xenophobia and nationalism within Western states, as some segments of the population view the arrival of refugees as a threat to their cultural and economic stability. This changing sentiment has intensified internal security concerns, prompting governments to reevaluate their immigration policies and border security measures (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh & Daley, 2018). The securitisation of displacement, that is, the reframing of refugees as a security threat rather than a humanitarian responsibility, illustrates the extent to which Middle Eastern instability now reverberates directly through the domestic politics of distant states.

Beyond immediate displacement, protracted conflict has imposed substantial long-term economic and developmental costs on affected states. Reconstruction needs in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen have been estimated by international agencies

at hundreds of billions of dollars, dwarfing the fiscal capacity of the states concerned and donor pledges to date. The destruction of health, education, and water infrastructure has eroded human capital across an entire generation of children who have grown up amid conflict, while the emigration of skilled professionals, doctors, engineers, and academics among them, has produced a pronounced brain drain that will constrain post-conflict recovery long after active hostilities subside. These developmental costs interact with the security dynamics discussed above in a mutually reinforcing cycle: weakened state capacity increases vulnerability to further insurgent or proxy activity, which in turn generates further displacement and economic loss, underscoring why humanitarian and security considerations cannot be treated as analytically separate in this region.

Middle East Instability and the Failure of Collective Security

The failure of the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations, such as the African Union and the Arab League, to prevent or effectively resolve the conflicts in the Middle East underscores significant weaknesses in the existing collective security system. The 2003 invasion of Iraq by a coalition led by the United States, executed without explicit authorization from the UN Security Council, not only contravened international law but also severely undermined the credibility of the UN Charter, which is intended to maintain global peace and security (Thakur, 2006). Furthermore, the frequent invocation of veto powers by permanent members of the Security Council has paralyzed its ability to respond decisively to the Syrian civil war, leading to catastrophic humanitarian consequences. This inaction has perpetuated instability in the region and has drawn the United States into increasingly complex confrontations with Iran and other neighbouring nation-states, exacerbating tensions and complicating diplomatic efforts aimed at conflict resolution. The ramifications of this paralysis extend beyond the immediate crisis, influencing global perceptions of international governance and the efficacy of multilateral cooperation in addressing security threats. The Responsibility to Protect doctrine, endorsed at the 2005 World Summit as a normative commitment to prevent mass atrocities, has been invoked selectively and inconsistently in the Middle Eastern context, exposing the gap between the normative aspirations of collective security and the realpolitik constraints of Security Council decision-making (United Nations, 2005).

The Israeli-Palestinian Dimension of Regional Insecurity

No account of Middle Eastern security would be complete without attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which, although predating the 2003 invasion by more than half a century, has been progressively drawn into the wider regional security complex examined in this paper. Successive escalations between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, alongside intermittent conflict along Israel's border with Hezbollah in Lebanon, illustrate how a conflict rooted in competing national and religious narratives over territory and self-determination has become enmeshed with the broader Iran-aligned versus Western-aligned axis that structures much of contemporary regional politics. The normalisation agreements between Israel and several Arab states in the early 2020s demonstrated the potential for Neorealist, interest-based recalibration of regional alignments; yet the persistence and periodic intensification of violence in Gaza and the West Bank equally demonstrates the limits of purely interest-based diplomacy where underlying identity claims and historical grievance remain unresolved, reinforcing this paper's contention that material and ideational drivers of conflict must be analysed together rather than in isolation.

Analysis

Read together, the thematic discussion above suggests that the Middle East's security trajectory since 2003 cannot be adequately explained by either Neorealism or Constructivism alone, but requires their combined application. The persistence of interstate rivalry among Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Israel, and the involvement of external great powers pursuing relative advantage, is consistent with Neorealist expectations of self-help behaviour under anarchy. Yet the specifically sectarian and ideological framing of these rivalries, and the transnational, identity-based appeal of groups such as ISIS, cannot be reduced to material power calculations; they are better understood through a Constructivist lens attentive to how identity and norms shape actors' definitions of threat and interest. The regional security complex framework advanced by Buzan and Wæver (2003) captures this interdependence well, showing that Middle Eastern insecurity is simultaneously locally generated, in the interlinked security concerns of neighbouring states and communities, and externally penetrated, through the strategic involvement of the United States, Russia, and China.

The comparative analysis of the pre-2003 and post-2003 regional orders further reveals a marked degradation of the norms that once, however imperfectly, constrained inter-state conduct in the region. Whereas the pre-2003 order was characterized by a rough, if authoritarian, equilibrium of state sovereignty underwritten by Cold War and immediate post-Cold War great-power management, the post-2003 order is defined by contested sovereignty, weak or collapsed state institutions, and a multiplicity of armed non-state actors capable of projecting force across borders. This transition from a largely bipolar or unipolar security architecture to a genuinely multipolar and multi-actor environment has outpaced the institutional capacity of existing collective security mechanisms, most notably the UN Security Council, whose permanent-member veto structure was designed for an inter-state, great-power-managed order rather than for the fragmented, hybrid conflicts that now predominate.

The findings further suggest that the traditional Westphalian security model, which privileges state sovereignty and non-intervention as the organizing principles of international order, is insufficient for the Middle East's multifaceted challenges on at least three counts. First, it struggles to address threats that originate from, or are sustained by, non-state actors operating within and across weak or collapsed states. Second, it offers no adequate normative basis for reconciling the tension between sovereignty and the international community's responsibility to prevent mass atrocities and humanitarian catastrophe. Third, it does not account for the securitization of humanitarian displacement in third countries, whereby a crisis of Middle Eastern origin is reconstituted as a domestic security threat in Europe and elsewhere, extending the region's instability far beyond its geographic borders. These gaps collectively indicate the need for an evolved international security framework, a theme taken up directly in the conclusion and suggestions that follow.

A further implication of the analysis concerns the diffusion of authority in Middle Eastern security governance. Where the pre-2003 order relied heavily on a small number of great-power patrons and their client states to manage regional order, the current environment is characterized by a much wider array of consequential actors: not only the traditional great powers and regional states, but also non-state armed groups, transnational religious and ideological movements, and international and regional organizations of varying capacity. This diffusion complicates any single-actor or single-theory account of regional security and lends further support to the paper's central analytical claim that a combined Neorealist-Constructivist-securitisation framework, rather than any one theory in isolation, offers the most complete available account of why the Middle East has become, and remains, so central to the contemporary international security agenda.

Conclusion

In summary, the Middle East is pivotal to the evolving international security agenda. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 marked the beginning of a prolonged phase of global instability, characterized by an upsurge in terrorism, widespread proxy wars, escalating humanitarian crises, and a significant erosion of established international norms and laws. The rise of groups such as ISIS can be traced back to the power vacuum and sectarian strife that followed the invasion, highlighting the unintended consequences of foreign interventions. Whether we choose to label this period as the start of a Third World War or not, the consequences are undeniably global, systemic, and enduring. They manifest not only in immediate conflicts but also in broader geopolitical tensions, affecting relations between major powers and leading to increased militarisation and espionage. The refugee crises stemming from these conflicts have destabilized neighboring regions and impacted global migration trends. Theoretically, the analysis demonstrates that neither Neorealism's emphasis on material power nor Constructivism's emphasis on identity and norms is, on its own, sufficient to explain the region's security trajectory; the two perspectives are best understood as complementary lenses onto a single, deeply interlinked regional security complex. It is essential to adopt a comprehensive rethinking of international security, one that integrates state security with a human-centred approach. This approach must consider issues like economic stability, social cohesion, and the protection of human rights, thereby addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering a more resilient global order capable of confronting these evolving challenges effectively.

Suggestions

Building on the preceding analysis, the paper offers the following suggestions for policymakers, international institutions, and future researchers.

1. First, the United Nations Security Council should pursue structural reform of the veto power, at minimum through a voluntary code of conduct restraining its use in situations involving mass atrocity crimes, so as to restore the credibility of collective security decision-making in cases such as Syria and Yemen.
2. Second, regional and international actors should invest more deliberately in preventive and Track II diplomacy, engaging religious leaders, civil society organisations, and local mediators alongside formal state-to-state channels, given the demonstrated limitations of purely state-centric conflict-resolution mechanisms in addressing identity-driven conflict.
3. Third, national and multilateral counterterrorism strategies should be rebalanced to give greater weight to addressing the socio-economic and governance conditions that enable radicalisation, rather than relying predominantly on kinetic measures such as drone strikes, whose long-term effectiveness in reducing extremist violence remains contested.
4. Fourth, host and donor states should pursue coordinated, burden-sharing approaches to humanitarian displacement, recognising that the securitisation of refugee flows in Europe and neighbouring states is itself a downstream consequence of Middle Eastern insecurity and cannot be effectively managed through border policy alone.
5. Fifth, future scholarship should build on the theoretical synthesis proposed here by undertaking comparative empirical research, whether through structured case-study comparison, elite interviews, or content analysis of policy discourse, to test the relative explanatory weight of Neorealist and Constructivist variables across different Middle Eastern conflicts, and to further develop the regional security complex framework as a tool for anticipating, rather than merely explaining, future instability.
6. Sixth, regional organisations such as the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council should be supported and incentivised to develop stronger independent conflict-mediation capacity, reducing the region's disproportionate reliance on extra-regional great powers and UN Security Council mechanisms whose effectiveness has, as this paper has shown, been repeatedly constrained by veto politics and competing strategic interests.

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