Identity and Security in the Middle East

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Abstract

The Middle East has witnessed dramatic changes in the last few years. Although some countries are experiencing new democratic changes, others face serious problems. Some state formal relations have changed from close relations to some unfriendly exchange of words and severed relations. Some countries are on the verge of civil war while others witness daily acts of terror. The main question this paper addresses is how the plurality of identities have led to security challenges in the Middle East. The article argues that the plurality of identities may explain many security challenges in the region. Following a look at the variety of discourses that constitute different political identities in the region, their impact on domestic and regional security will be discussed.

Keywords: Middle East, security, identity, discourse

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(Received: 23 July 2013 - Accepted: 1 October 2013)

Introduction

The Middle East has for a long time witnessed periods of instability and conflict, jeopardizing the security of the countries. The central issue in building security at domestic and regional levels is the reduction of the possibility of organized violence (Krause 2004). National security policies of the countries in the Middle East are based on weapon build-ups or deterrence to deal with threats. But there have been little attempts to further regional security through cooperation (Landau and Malz 2004: 1). Regionalization, as "an active process of change towards increased cooperation, integration, convergence, coherence and identity" (Allison 2004: 465) has not seriously developed in the region. Neither has security regime as a cooperative structure based on a shared aversion to war that may lead to regional solutions to inter-state disputes (Stein 2004) has been successfully developed in the region. Morgan (2004) argues that the Middle East lacks broad political consensus among parties regarding their desire to avoid war and that makes the formation of a security community improbable.

Yet, in the Middle East, states see security challenges from domestic sources as well. It is often the case that state institutions lack the required capacity to incorporate various demands of different social groups within their countries. Different minorities, ideologically or numerically, are regarded as potential (if not actual) sources of threat. These include ethnic, religious, and even sometimes gender-based groups. It is also the case that social groups too experience insecurity. This is sometimes due to the existence or the threat of

violence, like what one may see in street bombings. In other cases, it is less in material form and more ideational in nature. How can insecurity in the region be explained? Security and insecurity are related to threats as "*an expectation of significant harm to a political body*" (Kreppell 2011: 453; original emphasis). And there are various approaches to threats and security in the Middle East.

The dominant approach to security in the Middle East has been a realist one. Security in realism is traditionally defined in terms of *physical* safety of a given state from *external* threats. Here, security and threats are both state-centered[1] and military. Even if individuals are concerned, they are as state citizens whose security might be jeopardized if the security of the state is threatened (see Maoz 2004: 20-23; Bilgin 2010: 34). Realist understandings of the Middle East focus on inter-state conflicts and more often see security in the region in terms of great powers' interests. Regional developments, such as (limited) institutional cooperation and the rise of new issues, such as disputes over water resources, has led to analyses based on liberal approach to security in which economic, cultural, and environmental well-being, besides physical security, is considered to be important to states (see Maoz 2004: 24-26). A degree of concern with domestic sources of security threats is taken into consideration. It is in critical approach to security that the security of non-state actors and non-military issues are mostly focused on and the fact that security for state actors may lead to insecurity for groups and individuals is emphasized (see Bilgin 2010).

Considering the fact that Middle East states, as other Third World countries, are in the process of state building and often confront security challenges from domestic sources, "subaltern Realism", with its focus on state security that can be threatened both from within and without (Ayoob 2002), can be seen as a more helpful approach to the security in the region. Here again, state-centrism is obvious, but the source of threats can be from within the states. Furthermore, it is argued that the state may not be able to guarantee

the security of the citizens and it may even become a source of insecurity for them in the course of state-building process. Constructivist approaches to security see the role of ideas and identities in security-seeking behaviors and vice versa. In constructivist analyses of security, issues such as seeking security through "representational politics" and deploying "symbolic power" instead of military power to enhance security are focused on (see Barnett 1998), and the role of identity in foreign and security policies is emphasized (see, for example, Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002). Yet, here again, in most cases, security against external threats is more emphasized.

On the basis of a constructivist approach, this paper[2] sees security and threats as social constructs constituted in discourses, but it does not have to be seen originating solely from outside. My main argument is that multiple discourses that shape the identities of the states as well as social groups and define their ideal or existing "normative order" lead to a wide range of possibility for securitizing other states in the region. The first part of this article presents its theoretical basis. Then, I point to a number of discourses that constitute the plurality of identities in the region. In the third part of the article, I illustrate my argument with examples of the events in the region. The paper concludes with a look to the future and the possibilities for change and stability.

I- Conceptual Framework

Security is a social construct. In the words of Ole Wæver (1995), it is a speech act. Threats to security do not exist outside discourse. It is through state agents that an issue is "securitized." Securitization refers to a process through which a threat is specified so that special measures to deal with it can be justified and legitimized. Security constitutes the opposite of politics which implies the possibility for engagement and dialogue (Wæver 1995: 56–7). The audience of the speech acts is very important, since it is their consent that makes a

securitizing move successful. In other words, security is constructed intersubjectively. According to McDonald (2008), this aspect of securitization is under-theorized. In other words, how the conditions for a successful securitization should be specified. Three inter-related concepts of discourse, identity, and normative threat may help us see how securitization becomes possible.

Discourses are inter-related concepts that give meaning to social and political phenomena. They are structures in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed (Laclau 1988: 254). Various discourses are politically relevant including religious, ethnic, nationalist, regionalist, etc. The way in which social agents can be identified and/or identify themselves within a certain discourse shapes their identity (Carpentier and De Cleen 2007: 268). Human beings cannot live without a definition of themselves (Kachoyan 1386 [2007]). Thus, identity is a significant aspect of human life. Identities are not single and/or fixed. All human entities, including individuals, groups, and states may on the basis of a variety of discourses have various identities. Yet, in some cases, there is a hegemonic discourse that defines the primary or major identity of an actor and in some others, there is no hegemonic discourse and therefore identities become more fluid. As for states, one may say that in cases, it is the international discourse or culture that determines the main identity of a state in its relations with others, while in others, elements of some other discourses (with domestic or regional origins) articulate with the elements of the predominant discourse and even may become the dominant discourse. Social groups and individuals in a state may define themselves primarily as state citizens or may have other definitions of themselves on the basis of various discourses that may have sub-national or transnational elements.

Definitions of the self are usually accompanied by defining others. In other words, discourses by specifying what constitutes the self, define the other potentially as whoever is not identical to the self. Sometimes this identification of the other becomes more specific, that

is, the other is named. This other is different. David Campbell (1992) sees threat perception as a response to identity needs. Hostile others are constructed in order to reproduce one's own identity on the basis of its difference from the other. But, as Creppell (2011) argues, difference does not necessarily lead to a sense of threat. It does when "a group's understanding of its identity is tied to basic orders or states of the world that are being disrupted." Thus, it is reasonable to examine the role of "normative orders" within which identities are located.

Politically-relevant discourses not only shape identities, but they also define normative orders. Orders are functional arrangements in which objects are related to each other and these should be normatively justified. Norms "about right, justice, and the nature of the good" are normative beliefs (Creppell 2011: 465-7) and these are created within discourses. Discourses, through defining the role and significance of various elements in socio-political, as well as private life, determine the nature of a normative order. Conceptions of individual, family, religion, religious doctrines and rituals, economic relations, political life, gender relations, and so on are thus defined within discourses. Those who belong to the same normative order constitute "we" and those who do not are "others". If it is felt that the other may want to disrupt one's "normative order" (Creppell 2011), a sense of threat arises that may lead to securitization of the other or a positive response to securitization by another agent.

If there are many discourses and sub-discourses that at the same time constitute a variety of identities and define normative orders at various levels, then one may expect that at all these levels securitization be likely to occur. Wæver (1995) sees states as the securitizing agent and emphasizes the significance of the audience for the success of securitization. One may argue that if the public (or at least a significant part of it) sees securitizing move as a response to a threat against their normative order, they react to it positively. On the other hand, if a significant part of the public sees a threat against their

identity and the normative order within which they define themselves, they may make the state elite to securitize it. Furthermore, in conditions that organized groups have access to means of violence, they may directly appeal to force when they securitize a social group or even a state.

What is regarded as a realist understanding of security can be explained by referring to a system-based identity, that is, the way in which states define themselves in the state system as sovereign entities seeking security against other states in an anarchical environment where power (especially military capabilities), geopolitical concerns, and balancing against threats become important. This is referred to as international culture (Wendt 1999) or may be called the hegemonic discourse of the interstate system.

Yet, as it was pointed to above, this is not the whole story. States may identify themselves on the basis of domestically originated discourses in which others are also defined and might be securitized. Furthermore, they do not limit security issues to those originating from outside. They may also have to securitize others on the basis of the demand of the public. And finally, there might be securitizing agents other than states involved. These non-state actors may or may not have access to coercive means[3], but if they do, they may appeal to violence as an exceptional measure against others.

II- Plurality of Discourses Constituting Identities

Scholars, such as Bernard Lewis (1998), have discussed the existence of "multiple identities in the Middle East". Of course, this might be the case in other parts of the world and not unique to the region. Yet, when states acquire a plurality of identities that when activated leads to securitization of others, it becomes more significant. Securitization of identities in a region, defined by plurality of self-definitions, may lead to multi-layered security challenges and a very complex security environment. Thus, representations of self and other not only impact those who produce them, but also those who are represented (Bilgin

2010: 14). This may result in a vicious circle of mutual securitization that can lead to tense or even violent interactions.

In the Middle East, one may see how various discourses other than the so-called international culture (see Wendt 1999), shaping different state identities, may at the same time securitize others as enemies and make coercive measures against them justified and in this way act as threats against others. These others are not just state entities and may be social groups within states. Yet, their shared identity with other states makes their securitization more justifiable.

States, as defined in the modern state system, are territorial entities enjoying sovereignty rights. In the absence of a central mechanism to regulate their relations, their security and the power to ensure it become their primary concerns. Thus, their identity as members of the society of states is primarily as security seekers. According to Alexander Wendt (1999), in the existing international society, there are three main cultures (Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian) leading to three types of identity (enemy, rival, and friend, respectively) at different parts of the world and amongst various countries. The systemic culture in the Middle East seems to be a combination of the first two. This means that countries see each other either as enemies or rivals.

In such a setting, contending national interests, security dilemma, geopolitical rivalries, balance of power, distrust, sense of threat, misperceptions about the intentions of others, and perhaps all other characteristics of a realist power politics become significant. Thus, one may expect that neighboring countries may see each other as potential threats due to territorial disputes or very different power positions (such as the mini-states in the Persian Gulf and Iran), regional rivalries over hegemony in the region may lead to securitization of others (like that between Iran and Turkey or Saudi Arabia and Iran) and so on. Yet, there are other cases of what security challenges due to "realist" perceptions should emerge, yet they do not due to the lack of threat perception of the other. What shapes threat

perceptions should be traced back to hostile identities based on rival normative beliefs and discourses.

States do not enter into the regional system without their prior identities. Domestic politics, cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, nature of elites and their ideologies, domestic rules and regulations all play a role in determining states' identities and hence their beliefs about the self and the other, their interests, and their policies (see Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002). Arab, non-Arab, Sunni, Shiite, secular, Islamist, radical, moderate, anti-Zionist, anti-Imperialist are the main identities of the states with domestic roots and/or resulting from historical experiences in their interaction with the modern state system. The result is a very complicated security complex in the region.

III- Secularism

Secularism, as a modern ideology and way of political organization, was introduced to the Middle East in the colonial era and has been the main principle in politics in many countries of the region despite varieties in their political regimes. In its first usage by George Holyoake, the term referred to "a variety of utilitarian social ethics and sought human improvement through reason, science, and social organization." It advocated that the state should be tolerant to all religious and philosophical doctrines, and should be especially impartial in religious matters (Wu 2007: 55). The view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil affairs or public life can be meant as just the separation of the religious institutions and the state and the neutrality of government and all public services in matters relating to one or more religions, or as a doctrine that rejects religion and religious considerations altogether (Mavromaras 2007). It seems that the second understanding has become more prevalent around the world.

As Morrison (2012) suggests, in constituting an "impermeable boundary between the public and private spheres, the secular state

also carefully defines the identities, practices, ways of being and forms of reason proper to each sphere." It is assumed that religion belongs to private sphere, and in the public sphere, the individuals adopt the universal identity of the citizen"; an abstract human with no particular identity. As for the Middle East, Arab secular thinkers of the early 20th century believed that "religion was not linked with any fixed ruling system [and that] Islam does not prohibit Muslims from establishing new political systems on the basis of the new theories of human rationality and experiences of various nations." The Muslim Arab secularists of the mid 19th century to the mid 20th century tried to reconcile between secularism and Islam, and illuminate the position of Islam in the secularist thought system (Wu 2007: 60). In non-Arab countries, such as Iran and Turkey, secularism was introduced by political thinkers and intellectuals together with other modern ideas and similar discussions as in the Arab world were developed.

Secularism became a state principle in most Middle East countries in the modern era as a part of development and modernization project. Pursuing aggressive secularization programs aimed at entrenching personal power and also somehow meant marginalizing Islam (Hatem1994:664). In these countries, various steps were taken to secularize the polity: *Shari'a* courts were abolished, Islamic seminaries were closed or restricted, headscarves were banned, and the *ulama* became debilitated. What has been said about Bourghiba, the post-colonial Tunisian president, was not far from the image of many statesmen in the region; to them "Islam represented the past" and "the West" was the "only hope for a modern future." In practice, the Middle East version of secularism in most cases meant privatization of Islam, autocratic state power, and tacit support for continued European economic and political interests. Thus, secularization in the Middle East was a state-imposed political project associated with authoritarianism and the marginalization of national histories and traditions (see Al-Jazeera 11 April 2012).

IV- Islamism

Sunni versus Shia Islam. Islamic discourse is not a monolithic one. Perhaps the oldest identities in the region (apart from ethnic and tribal) are related to intra-Islam divisions, mainly among Sunnies and Shias. Sunnies make roughly about 80 percent of Muslims in the world. Following sayings, deeds, and practices (*sunnah*) of the Prophet is the main principle in Sunni Islam. The emphasis is on texts and legal interpretations. Shia Muslims make about 15 to 20 percent of the whole Muslim population in the world (including the Twelver Shiites in Iran and Iraq, Ismailis, the Zaidis in Yemen, the Alawites in Syria, and the Druze in Lebanon and southern Syria). Their belief in the right of the Prophet's kin for succeeding him is what unites them and this idea together with some theological and ritual differences make them different from their Sunni fellow Muslims (see Crittenden 2012; *The Economist* 12 May 2012). The two discourses (apart from the identity-constitutive element) have traditionally been more legal in nature.

In the history of Islam, there have been many examples of the two factions' conflict (and in cases, bloody ones) over their differences. Some have defined each other as the main enemies that should be defeated (or perhaps eliminated) not only theologically but also physically. In cases, this has led to not only internal clashes between the two at the societal level, but also to inter-state wars, such as those between Safavid Iran and the Ottoman Empire (see Mahdavi 1367 [1988]). Political Islam[4], or what has been conceptualized as Islamism or ideological Islam (Shepard 1987), is not a new phenomenon in the region. In its manifestation in the modern world, it can at least be traced back to the colonial era when the struggles against Western powers began to be justified as an Islamic task. Later, it became the *ideology* of socio-political movements and popular political organizations. It is a discourse in which Islamic teachings, traditions, symbols, figures, and causes are used in a political context

with political objectives (see Ayoob 2005: 953). It might be conceptualized as the injection of Islam into society and politics, whether by the state or by popular movements (Bouzid 1998: 5). And it can be said that it is a reaction against the particular secularist policies of the authoritarian regimes in the region, offering "alternative institutions, policies, and social order" (Aşyk and Erdemir 2010:112).

Although some scholars may incline to characterize it as a "totalitarian ideology" (Mozaffari 2007), it is not a monolithic phenomenon and, as we see below, it may have very various sub-discourses. Even if "Islamic" ideas and symbols are used in Islamist discourse, they are used in support of a variety of claims and demands (see Ayoob 2005: 952-53). The word "Islamism" perhaps became more in use after the Islamic Revolution of Iran and with more frequency after the September 11th events (Mozaffari 2007: 17-18). As Wu (2007) suggests: The Islamist success in Iran was an example for Arab Islamists in the Arab world. As the non-Arab Turkey, was an example for Arab states, is carrying out secularization in the beginning of the 20th century, the non-Arab Iran, through its Islamic Revolution, gave impetus to Islamist movements in the Arab world in the late 20th century as a counterattack to secularism and secularization. Many Arab secular regimes were challenged by modern Islamism, including Egypt, Algeria, Syria, and Iraq, and Sudan even became an Islamic Republic ruled by Islamists.

Islamis discourse is a call for Muslims to follow Islamic principles and ethics not only in individual life, inter-personal relations, and social life but also to engage in politics in Islamic terms while taking into account Islamic ideals and Islamic ethics. It challenged the legitimacy of state secular discourse that recognized Islam as the religion of the society but demobilized it politically (Hatem1994:665). Yet, Islamism is not monolithic itself. There are many sub-discourses including Shiite and Sunni and some others to which I refer below. These are usually regarded as binary oppositions.

Maximalist versus Minimalist Islamism. The Islamist discourse in its *maximalist* reading is characterized by believing in Islam as the solution, as a religion, a government, the Constitution, and the law. Here, Islamic law or shari'a, Islamic state (or Islamic politics), Islamic society, and the like become important signifiers in the Islamist discourse. One may see Sayyid Qutb as a pioneer in formulating maximalist Sunni Islamist ideas (see Bouzid 1998) and Ayatollah Khomeini as its Shiite version initiator. The Maximalist reading of Islamism is not necessarily politically radical and should not be mixed with radical Islamism. In its minimalist reading, the Islamist discourse is a call for a return to Islamic traditions and ethics and defining the "self" primarily as a Muslim in social relations and public sphere as well as in private life. An Islamist here may engage in a secular polity as a Muslim with Islamic ideals. The sub-discourses of Islamism are the products of various socio-cultural, political and economic contexts within which they have emerged to which I refer below. One may see Islamist discourses primarily in two versions of radical and moderate and then in their manifestations in two sub-discourses of Sunni and Shiite versions.

Radical versus Moderate Islamism. The politicization of Sunni discourse - and to a lower degree, Shia discourse - has in some ways led to radical ideas. Of course, radical Islamism itself is not a monolithic discourse and has itself various sub-discourses from that of Sayyid Qutb to Al-Qaida. The main signifier in this discourse is perhaps the slogan "Islam din wa dawla" (Islam is religion and state), "a version of the faith that encompassed both the conception of an independent, self-sufficient state and a comprehensive religious system that could satisfy the individual's spiritual needs. In this discourse, the West is reduced to a materialistic, invasive and largely evil construct" (Adib-Moghaddam 2012: 23).

This radicalism has multi-facet manifestations. Perhaps Salafism is its prime example. Here, the "self" is not defined principally just as Muslim, but a very special Muslim whose identity is defined in terms

of struggling against non-Islam, which embraces Shias, non-Muslims, Western powers, Sunnis allied with Western powers, Muslims not practicing Islam as it is defined in traditional texts, and in general a very broad "Other" who is in one way or another either "comprising God's unique status" (*Mushrek*), or "heretic" (*Murtad*), or "infidel" (*Kafer*). "*Jihad*" is an important element of this discourse which is used to legitimize using force against all these "Others".

In its Shiite version, the radical discourse emphasizes *jihad*, yet it is less linked to physical violence, but is instead rhetoric;[5] it is most often linked to struggle than war; it is more against Western powers, Zionism, and the allies of Western powers in the region; and it is less opposed to Sunnis or even non-Muslims. Another difference is whereas in the Sunni version, it is somehow a departure from the great traditionally respected *ulama's* understanding of Islam, the Shiite version is produced by some of the grand Shiite *ulama* of the time.

Moderate Islamism is an Islamist discourse with a non-violent philosophy, political pluralism, dialogue-orientation, democratic conceptualization of political life, justice orientation, and a willingness to engage even in secular polities yet as an Islamist.[6] One may see its manifestations in Turkey (Justice and Development Party), Morocco (Justice and Development Party), Egypt (more recent discourse of *Ikhwan* and *Jama'at al-Islamiya* (see Tammam ND), and Tunisia (*An-nahdha*) (see *Al-Akhbar English*, 2005). In its Shiite form, the best examples is perhaps the "Freedom Movement" (*Nehzat Azadi*) in Iran.[7] Although it is suggested that throughout the last decade, the mainstream of Islamist movements in the Arab world has been moving toward more pragmatism and moderation (Hamzawy 2005), this discourse can be traced back at least to the 1950's.

What is emphasized is a 'bottom-up' program of societal change designed to bring about irresistible popular support for the establishment of a truly Islamic society rather than abrupt revolutionary violence, aiming at the establishment of an Islamic state and is far less strident in its approach to the relevance and

implementation of *Shari'a* (Horrocks 2007: 2, 15). Some call the followers of moderate Islamism "Islamic liberals", whose peaceful struggle is aimed at establishing democratic governance in the Islamic world (Kurzman 2002: 13). Thus, it has been portrayed as an Islamic positive reaction to modernity. Some see moderate Islamism as the result of the impact of globalization on more or less traditionalist or radical Islamists. It is argued that these Islamists experienced upward social mobilization accompanied by engaging in participatory institutions at domestic and global levels. Islamism in Turkey, in particular, has this characteristic. It has emerged "as the language of rapidly mobilizing societal forces seeking further opportunities in the global marketplace to become a force of modernization and Westernization" (Kosebalaban 2005: 27).

Some call this sub-discourse of Islamism as manifested in recent political upheavals in the Middle East "post-modern Islamism". It is depicted as being "diffuse, networked, differentiated, multi-institutional and (in the sense that it is neither paternalistic, nor primarily feminist) 'transsexual'". It is seen as the result of a context that is less fluid and insecure (see, especially Adib-Moghaddam 2012: 23). What Adib-Moghadam (2012) suggests about Ikhwan might be generalized to other moderate Islamist identities: The Ikhwan itself is in no way a vanguard movement of the kind envisaged by Sayyid Qutb. It is an amalgam of charitable organizations, social endowments and political factions: a pluralistic abstraction rather than a substantive, driven, totalitarian movement. There is no Qutbian vanguard that is specific and deterministic about the contours of the 'Islamic state'. Rather, there is an 'Avicennian' political philosophy that is pragmatic and cautious, indeterminate in its prescriptions and post-ideological in its political syntax." (Adib-Moghaddam 2012: 24)

V- Ideology

Arabism versus Nationalism: Nationalism can be seen as the appropriate ideology for modern nation-states and the modern state

system. One may see elements of nationalism in different countries in the region. As far as non-Arab countries are concerned, one can find Turkish and Iranian nationalism, which sometimes acquire an anti-Arab tone. In both countries, there is a strong version of nationalist discourse. In its Turkish version, it seeks the unification of Turkish speaking territories and in its Persian version, it aims at the unification of the territories that historically belonged to Iran.

As far as Arab countries are regarded, they too have their own nationalisms, but the opposition to the nationalism of independent Arab states is an ideology known as Pan-Arabism, or Arab nationalism. In the late 19th century, with the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the idea that Arabs ought to unite to form a powerful unified nation emerged. This has been an ideal that could change the anarchical regional system to a hierarchical one (see Gause III 1998: 26). In 1945, the Arab League, as an organization to promote regional cooperation, was formed. When the joint efforts of some Arab countries to prevent the creation of Israel in Palestine failed, the idea of unification of Arab countries got momentum in the 1950's and 1960's. But, in practice, it was not realized despite attempts for unification of some countries. Many observers argue that Arabism, as a force in inter-Arab politics, is on the decline (see Bilgin 2010: 11; Choueiri 2000). Yet, a discourse of Arabism still exists and constitutes Arab identity against non-Arabs in the region. This Arab identity is a major force in the Middle East. Inside the Arab world is portrayed as the realm of security and the threats are assumed to be stemmed from outside (Bilgin 2010: 5). Turks and Persians are the most important non-Arabs in the region.

Anti-Zionism versus Zionism: Perhaps the only identity in the Middle East, which has purely European origin, is Zionism or Jewish nationalism. It is said to be an example of "invented tradition" (*Turkish Weekly* ND). It is one of the most controversial ideologies to shape life in the modern Middle East. Zionism started in Eastern Europe in the 19th century with the objective of creating an

independent homeland for Jewish people who suffered from anti-Semitism in many European countries. Initially, countries such as Argentina or parts of Africa were suggested as a new homeland, but a return to the site of the Jewish ancient kingdom was finally agreed upon. Several thousands of Jews moved to the region, forming the basis for a new community in Palestine based on Zionism. This, finally led to the creation of Israel (see Altman 1998 and for a succinct version, see Gale Global Issues in Context).

Since the time when Jewish emigrants from the West moved to Palestine and later occupied the whole territory, opposition to Zionism (which cannot be seen as, or equivalent to, anti-Semitism; Muslims have had a long history of tolerance for Judaism) has become an important shared identity among the people of the Middle East. It is defined as being against the occupation of Palestinian territories as well as the oppressive policies of Israelis against Arabs. This identity is not limited to Islamists or even Muslims, but is more or less prevalent across various factions from Leftists to liberals among seculars and from traditionalist Muslims to moderate and radical Islamists. It has, however, failed so far to become a basis for unity across countries, cultures, and sectarian politics.

Anti-Americanism versus Americanism: The experience of Westernization in the Middle East has been a traumatic event due to the experience of colonialism in its direct or indirect forms. It has led to a sense of historical defeat and hatred from the Western powers (and in case, West in general). The historical imagination resulting from this experience has been a "sense of threat" and a desire to be respected. (Aşyk and Erdemir 2010: 114). The discourses that rely on this experience and at the same time construct it, have "anti-imperialism" or similar concepts as important bases for self-identification. The Other (the West in general, Western powers, and more particularly the US) is portrayed as aggressive, dominance-seeking, illegitimate, and continuing old colonial atrocities in new forms.

The discourse is widespread. Yet, its articulation with elements of other discourses has led to a variety of concepts and various degrees of opposition. Sometimes, it is against certain policies of the West, sometimes against the socio-economic formation of capitalism, sometimes against the cultural invasion of imperialists, and sometimes against the West as a whole. In cases, it is manifested in a more diplomatic language, condemning a particular US policy or action. While in others, it may mean a negation of the West and even a desire for its subjugation. Perhaps, its most widespread manifestation among ordinary people and sometimes even the political elite is a "strong dislike for American foreign policy" in the region, which is not necessarily combined with a dislike for American people or their way of life; and it is "for the most part a response to perceptions and judgments regarding US foreign policy (Tessler 2003: 179; 181).

Thus, we see that there are numerous discourses in the region that constitute the identities of the actors at various levels from individuals to states. The division caused by these discourses and identities may become reinforcing or cross-cutting each other. That makes the possibilities for security challenges in the region very numerous and the developments in the region very complicated.

VI- Plurality of Identities and Security Challenges

These discourses exist in the Middle East and they constitute the identities of various actors: individuals, civil society forces, and states. Yet, it is not possible to claim that every actor has one of these identities in a fixed unchanging way. The identities of various actors are constituted by a number of these discourses at the same time or in the course of time in various occasions. Identities are fluid and multiple even for one single actor due to the plurality of discourses and the way their elements are articulated and re-articulated. Discourses constituting these identities define the other as well and in many cases this other is easily securitized. Securitization, as a process whereby certain entities or issues become constructed as a threat, is a

discursive phenomenon. An existential threat is constructed and reconstructed perpetually to make the use of exceptional measures legitimate. The discourses referred to above are sometimes used as securitizing speech acts. In what follows, I illustrate some of major oppositional discourses/identities and their impact on the security in the region.

Secular states see religiously defined forms of state as an ontological threat. Religious groups within states are also seen as security threats. Then, the association of the latter with the former makes both legitimate targets of securitization. Thus, for example, before recent changes in the Middle East, any Islamist activity within secular states, such as Egypt and Turkey, was associated with Iran. Iran was considered to be interfering in internal affairs and the Islamists were seen as foreigners' agents. When states or the ruling elites define themselves as "Islamic", they may see secular states as the "other". It is particularly so, because secularism is associated with westernization and the West as the source of modern imperialism. When this "other" is securitized, it is seen as a source of threat, if not physically, ontologically. In other words, an Islamic state may see secular states (as well as secular groups inside the country) as a threat against its identity. This is perhaps best seen in the case of Iran where Islam is regarded to be the main identity of the state.

Although the historical clashes between Shiites and Sunnis has had its impact on the two, during the last few decades there have been serious attempts by high-ranking theologians of the two branches of Islam to emphasize unity instead of differences. This has led them to recognize each other and have dialogues. It seems, however, that factors other than theology make *some* followers of the two branches see each other as the major "other" leading to renewed clashes in the name of religious differences. Theology, in the words of some scholars, has become intertwined with geopolitics, interests, and power. Therefore, one may conclude that the discourses constituting this identity opposition are articulated with elements of the realist

discourse. Regional subsystems are porous and intervention from above can overlay local dynamics (Kelly 2007: 197). Thus, Shiite-Sunni divisions can be manipulated by outside agents as well.

The widespread fear among Sunni countries from Shiism can be seen in concepts such as Shiite Crescent or religious *fatwas* against Shiites describing them as non-Muslims. This has led, for example, to constant securitization of Iran in the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council resolutions. It has also caused the securitization of the Shiite population and their organizations inside countries with an active Shiite combination. What makes state coercive measures against these Shiites justifiable is that they are automatically associated with Iran. Since Shiites form a minority in the Islamic world, they too feel insecure and this makes them politically active whenever they find an appropriate opportunity structure, as may be seen in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Since ruling Islamism in Iran is Shiite, Sunni minority's organizations are formed to promote their identity and they too sometime become securitized. It is especially so in case of Salafi organizations which are supposed to have links to foreign countries.

Minimalist moderate Islamism in Turkey and maximalist radical Islamism in Iran have to a lesser degree been a source of oppositional identities as two leading examples of Islamic governance. They, however, have not led to mutual securitization at the state level, but have shown to be a potential source of securitization against domestic factions with inclinations towards the other. A recurring example of Arabism versus non-Arab nationalism is the conflicts between Iran and Arab countries over naming the Persian Gulf and the Arab countries' overall support of UAE territorial claims against Iran. Here, we see that even Syria under Alavites was not usually an exception. Anti-Zionism and its manifestations against Israel and its policies are widespread, but in various degrees. Iran, Salafis, Ikhwan, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and many movements in the region have the strongest version of anti-Zionist discourse. Moderate Islamists and seculars' anti-Zionism is thinner yet exists and is activated occasionally as one

may see it in tense relations between Turkey and Israel. In cases where Zionism is not securitized, it is at least a source of grievance and/or aversion. (see Creppell 2011)

Anti-imperialism and its major manifestation in anti-Americanism are also activated both at the state level and particularly at the movement level. Among the countries in the region, Iran again has the strongest version of the discourse and here again, it shares it with radical Islamist movements in the region with whom it has important disagreements. These examples show how difficult it becomes to identify any actor with a specific fixed identity. It is even difficult to say how and under what circumstances one particular identity becomes active or which one becomes prioritized. Changes in identity become possible under various contexts; and even with a change in circumstances, an identity may be de-prioritized and another one gain priority. And, it is not very easy to foretell an actor's acting identity in a particular situation or in the course of time. This means interests and behaviors of an actor may easily vary. Hence, there would be unpredictable patterns of action and interaction; cooperation, conflict, alignments, friendships, and enmities may change rather rapidly to new kinds of interaction.

When Islamists in Turkey gained power, Iran as an Islamist country welcomed the change. It seemed that the two countries had become close and even intimate friends, an almost unprecedented pattern in their long bilateral relations. Yet, this changed rather rapidly following the developments in Syria, where a secular regime (which was once seen as "a model for the Middle East" by Western observers (*Christian Science Monitor* 13 July 2010)) was supported by Islamist Iran, and Islamist extremists were located in the oppositional camp, which was supported by secular Turkey (*Hurriat*, translated in *irdiplomacy.ir*). It seems that Iran's anti-Zionist identity and to a lesser degree its Shiite identity worked more actively. While in Turkey, European and Sunni identities became more prioritized (for Iran-Turkey relations in recent years, see also Ebrahimi 2012).

When Mohamedd Morsi gained power in Egypt, more than three decades of severe relations between Iran and Egypt seemed to be finally over. Iranians saw new Egypt as an Islamist anti-Zionist, anti-imperialist country with which they could make a regional alliance. But the developments showed once again that these were not the major identities to determine the new government's alliances or cooperation with other countries; even if Mohammad Badi'e, the leader of *Ikhwan*, had just recently emphasized the movement's anti-Zionist commitments, President Morsi did not hesitate to ensure Israelis about his friendly attitude (see Ghaderi 1391 [2012]). This shows that a movement can experience a shift in identity once it becomes a part of the establishment. President Morsi's reaction to Israeli atrocities in Gaza, however, shows the continuing importance of anti-Zionist discourse. Again, as far as Syria is concerned, Egyptians' Sunni identity seems to have become more important in their role in Syrian developments and they find Saudis as their allies despite the very fact that they are politically different in many regional and ideological issues.

Some analysts suggest that developments in the region, including Sunni-Shiite clashes in Iraq, the awkward alliance of Al-Qaida and moderate Islamists, as well as the triple alliance of Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in Syria, the anti-Shiite *fatwas* of some Wahhabi *ulama*, recent developments in the [Persian] Gulf Cooperation Council, King Abdullah's coining of the term, "Shiite Crescent", and recent remarks by Syrian *Ikhwans*' leader about breaking the "Shiite Crescent" may indicate that Sunni-Shiite identity is becoming the most significant one, since it may lead to serious conflicts within and between the countries (see Crittenden 2012; Rubin 2012; see IR Diplomacy 1391 [2012] for Ikhwan leader's remark). Yet, as far as the interests of all nations in the region are concerned, this is the worst configuration of identity politics. It means the material, human, and intellectual resources in the region would be exhausted to the cost of all the people in the region. The manipulations of third parties may be important here. This may be in

their interest in the short term, but it may lead to consequences that jeopardize regional security for all involved.

Conclusion

The emergence of social movements and the following changes in the Middle East had made some observers of the region to hope that conspicuous changes may lead to a less conflictual, more prosperous region. Yet, now it has become obvious that new security challenges are emerging. Political reform, as it had been predicted by some analysts, has resulted in some degree of instability in the region (see Ben-Sahil and Panahi 1386: 63). Some countries are experiencing severe domestic violence and some bilateral relationships now are being deteriorated. Fear of "others" is growing at various levels. It is not just at the state level; it can also be seen amongst social groups and individuals. This means that the politics of identity may become increasingly securitized.

Identities in their various forms exist in the Middle East; hence, identity politics is inevitable. It might be seen at three levels: societal, transnational, and inter-state. What is seen at all levels is the existence of differences between and within discourses that result in differences in normative orders and fear of others who might jeopardize one's normative order and this leads to the securitization of others. The only way out of this dilemma is de-securitization. It is the means through which one may expect to see "progressive marginalization of … security concerns" (Wæver 1998: 69). And that can be achieved through multi-level dialogues. Differences cannot be denied, neither should they be suppressed (Morrison 2012: 4). If differences are not expressed and debated in dialogical way, they may lead to violent clashes. So, it seems that a multi-level dialogical approach to differences is the only viable solution.

Note

1. State-centrism can be defined as "treating the state as the central actor in world politics and concentrating on states' practices when studying international phenomena" (Bilgin 2010: 18).
2. Paper Presented at ISA- Corvinus University Joint Conference on Security Challenges in an Evolving World, Budapest, Hungary, June 2013.
3. Coskun (2010) even mentions historians as possible securitizing agents.
4. In its traditionalist reading, Islam is regarded as less political than in Islamist discourses. Traditionalists see Islam as a way of being, a life-style, as well as a religion as far as faith and rituals define it. The Traditionalist understanding of Islam sees it more as a heritage to defend and a way of life to perpetuate. It is most often used about Sunnis. It is here defined more as adherence to one of the four traditional schools of Sunni jurisprudence. The traditionalists believe in the continuation of traditional religious institutions, which were developed and formalized after the establishment of Islam, such as the four legal schools. In matters of law and doctrine, the traditionalist Islam underlines following the past *ulama* rather than deriving direct conclusions from the Qur'an and *hadiths*. The *ulama* deserve respect as the carriers of (religious) knowledge; they are considered as the 'heirs of the prophets.' (Bruinessen 1996). The term "traditional Islam" is especially used by some traditionalist Muslims in the West to identify and distinguish themselves from Salafists. Some see it as a reaction against modernity that seemed to undermine the very beliefs of Muslims. Robert Crane (2007) has defined it more positively as a forward-looking perspective that seeks to revive the best of the past in order to shape a better future. The best of the past in Islam consists of its universalist view that all revealed religions contain a universal paradigm of thought. Muslims call this Islam. It is based on the affirmation that there is an ultimate reality of which humanity and the entire universe are merely an expression; that, therefore, every person is created with an innate awareness of absolute truth and love; and that persons in community can – and should – develop a framework of moral law from the various sources of divine revelation to secure peace through justice. Recognition of this paradigm is the essence of wisdom. Bruinessen and Wajidi (ND) emphasize the social and moral aspects of this discourse which makes it somehow similar to moderate Islamism as it is, for example, in the case of Ikhwan in Egypt.

5. Since during the post-occultation era using force in the form of initiating jihad is banned, violence in this discourse is more rhetorical. It is only in reaction to others' use of force that defensive *jihad* can be legitimate. So far, no Shiite radical discourse has questioned this idea.
6. See, for example, the interview with Tunisian An-nahdha Leader, Hamadi Jebali in *Al-Akhbar* 9/6/2006.
7. One may even include Iranian "reformism" (*Eslaha-talabi*). The difference is that most reformists have a maximalist reading of Islamism, while the Freedom Movement has had a minimalist one. This shows that maximalist/minimalist divide should not be confused with radical/moderate one.

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چکیده‌ها

هویت و امنیت در خاورمیانه

حمیرا مشیرزاده
دانشیار دانشگاه تهران

در سالهای اخیر خاورمیانه شاهد تغییرات گسترده‌ای بوده است. با وجود اینکه بعضی کشورها تغییرات دموکراتیک را تجربه می‌کنند، بعضی دیگر با مشکلات جدی روبرو هستند. بعضی از روابط نزدیک و دوستانه به روابط غیردوستانه و تبادل کلمات کوبنده تبدیل شده است. تعدادی از کشورها در آستانه جنگ داخلی و برخی شاهد حملات تروریستی روزانه هستند. سوال اصلی این مقاله این است که چگونه تعدد هویتی به چالش امنیتی در خاورمیانه تبدیل شده است؟ مقاله تعدد هویتی و بسیاری از چالش‌های امنیتی در منطقه را بر اساس این تعدد بررسی می‌کند. در این رابطه این مقاله به گوناگونی مباحثی که تشکیل دهنده هویت‌های سیاسی متفاوت در منطقه است، توجه دارد و به تاثیر آنها بر امنیت داخلی و منطقه‌ای می‌پردازد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: خاورمیانه، امنیت، هویت، گفتگو