PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION (2025) 62(05):299-313
ISSN: 1553-6939

Geopolitical Changes in the Arab Region and Their Impact on Regional Security

Dr. Fatiha Tamzour[1]
[1]Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Ammar Thelidji University of Laghouat (Algeria).
The E-mail Author: f.tamzour@lagh-univ.dz
Received: 18/11/2024 Published: 05/05/2025

Abstract:
The Arab region has witnessed profound geopolitical changes since the beginning of the 21st century due to both internal and external factors such as the Arab Spring, the rise of regional and international rivalries, and the shifting balance of power. These changes have directly impacted the stability and security of the Arab regional system, leading to the reshaping of alliances and the emergence of new challenges. Among the most significant of these geopolitical shifts are the consequences of the Arab Spring ("2011 and beyond"), which destabilized countries such as Syria, Libya, and Yemen, resulting in civil wars and foreign interventions. This period also saw the rise of non-state actors, including armed groups and militias. Furthermore, regional competition among Arab and non-Arab powers led to increased Iranian influence through support for allies in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, as well as the expansion of Turkish involvement in Libya and Syria. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry became one of the main drivers of regional conflicts.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Arab Region, Regional System

Introduction

The Arab region has been witnessing profound geopolitical transformations that have reshaped the map of alliances and regional security since the beginning of the twenty-first century, especially following the events of the so-called 'Arab Spring' (2011) and the subsequent conflicts and foreign interventions. These transformations were not isolated from the historical contexts of the Arab Israeli conflict or the regional competition between major powers like the United States and Russia and regional powers like Iran and Turkey, which created

unprecedented challenges for the Arab regional order as well as the concept of collective security.

The Arab region has long been a model of geopolitical fragility due to internal factors such as ethnic and sectarian diversity, the declining legitimacy of some regimes, and external factors such as continued occupations and interventions. The recent acceleration of these transformations, from the collapse of the central state in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Libya, to the rise of unconventional alliances such as Arab normalisation with Israel through the Abraham 2020 agreements, has raised questions about the ability of the Arab League or existing security systems such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to maintain stability.

In this context, this article highlights the impact of these transformations on Arab regional security, which according to the Copenhagen School is defined as 'the protection of societies and states from transnational threats through joint political and military mechanisms.' On the one hand, civil wars such as Yemen and Syria have undermined the idea of national sovereignty, while regional rivalries such as the Saudi-UAE axis versus the Turkish Qatari-Iranian axis have redrawn alliances that were unimaginable two decades ago, and the penetration of non-state actors such as armed militias and jihadi groups has further complicated the landscape.

This article relies on 'geopolitical analysis' to understand these dynamics, drawing on international relations theories such as neo-realism and constructivism, with case studies such as the Palestinian issue, the Syrian crisis, and the Gulf crisis (2017-2021): How have recent geopolitical shifts redefined the concept of Arab regional security, and what are the implications for the future of the regional order?

Axis1: The Palestinian Issue and Its Historical and Political Transformation

The Palestinian issue is one of the most prominent international issues that has undergone radical transformations since the beginning of the twentieth century, as it has been linked to the developments of the Arab Israeli conflict and the interventions of world powers . This issue represents an existential struggle for the Palestinian people over land and identity, and its transformations reflect the changing balance of regional and international powers.

I. Historical Transformations:

The roots of the Palestinian question began with the end of the First World War (1914-1918) and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, as Palestine was placed under British mandate under the Mandate Deed (1922). During this period, tension between Palestinian Arabs and Jewish settlers increased due to the Balfour Declaration (1917), which supported the establishment of a "national home for the Jews" in Palestine[1].

Palestinian protests escalated, such as the Buraq Revolt (1929) and the Great Arab Revolt (1936-1939), but British repression and ever-increasing Jewish immigration exacerbated the crisis. After World War II (1945) and the declaration of the State of Israel (1948), Palestine experienced the "Nakba", which resulted in the displacement of some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes[2].

II: From the Liberation Organisation to the Peace Process:

In the 1960s, the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) emerged as the main representative of the Palestinians, especially after the 1967 Naksa war,

[1] Khalidi R, The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood, Beacon Press, 2006.
[2] Morris B, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited, Cambridge University Press, 2004.

which resulted in Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza[1] Strip, and as armed resistance increased, such as the 1968 Battle of Dignity, the issue began to gain an international dimension.

In the 1990s, the issue underwent a radical shift with the signing of the Oslo Accords (1993-1995), which established the Palestinian Authority as a temporary self-governing entity. However, negotiations failed to achieve a Palestinian state due to continued Israeli settlement and the division of Palestinians between Fatah and Hamas after the 2006 elections[2].

III. Contemporary Challenges:

In the last two decades, the priority of the Palestinian cause has declined regionally due to the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, while Israel has strengthened its relations with some Arab countries through the 'Abraham Accords' (2020), however, popular resistance has continued, such as the Return Marches in Gaza 2018, and international movements have emerged in support of Palestinian rights, such as the BDS campaign.[3]

The Palestinian cause has witnessed profound transformations from the national liberation struggle to peace negotiations, then to an existential struggle with new complications such as internal division and Arab normalisation, as these transformations show that the solution to the issue will only be to end the occupation and ensure the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people.

Axis 2: The Geopolitical Transformation of Syria: From A Centralised State to an Arena for Regional Conflict .

[1] Sayigh Y, Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993, Oxford University Press, 1997.
[2] Rabbani M, The Making of the Palestinian Authority, Journal of Palestine Studies, 2008, 37(3), 23-40
[3] Barghouti O, Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights, Haymarket Books, 2011

Syria has undergone radical geopolitical changes since the outbreak of popular protests in 2011, which turned into a brutal civil war that reshaped its regional and international role. Syria is no longer just a 'centralised state' ruled by the Baath Party but has become an open arena for foreign interventions and competition between regional and global powers, which has profoundly affected security and regional order in the Middle East.

I. Historical Context and Internal Transformation:

Before 2011, the Syrian regime maintained its stability through its alliance with Iran and Hezbollah and its reliance on repressive security apparatus. With the outbreak of the Arab Spring, peaceful protests turned into an armed conflict after the regime's violent repression, which led to the fragmentation of the country into multiple spheres of influence:

- Regime control with Russian Iranian support.
- Armed opposition with Turkish and Gulf support.
- Islamic State (ISIS)(2019-2014)
- Kurdish forces with US support

This division has redefined the concept of sovereignty in Syria.

II. External Interventions and The Reshaping of Alliances:

Syria became a model of proxy conflict, with regional and international powers playing decisive roles such as:

- **Russia :**

Intervened militarily in 2015 to protect the regime, turning Syria into a fulcrum for its influence in the Mediterranean.

- **Iran :**

Used Syria as a link in the "resistance axis" to support Hezbollah and expand its influence.

- **The United States :**

  Focused on combating terrorism and supporting the Kurds, but its policy oscillated between toppling the regime and containing threats.

- **Turkey**

  It has supported opposition factions for the dual purpose of weakening the Kurds and stopping the flow of refugees. These interventions have complicated any political solution and made Syria a "fragile" state that depends on external support to survive[1].

III: Implications for the Arab regional system

The Syrian crisis has affected:

1. **The Arab League :**

It suspended Syria's membership (2011-2023), revealing divisions between loyalists such as Egypt and Algeria and opponents such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

2. **Regional security :**

Through the proliferation of cross-border armed militias such as Hezbollah and Iranian factions.

3. **New balances :**

Russia has imposed itself as a regional mediator, while the traditional roles of Arab countries have declined[2].

We conclude that Syria has turned from an active player in the regional system into an arena of geopolitical conflict, which raises questions about the

[1] Phillips C, The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East, Yale University Press, 2020
[2] Gause F, G, Beyond Sectarianism: The New Middle East Cold War, Brookings Doha Center, 2014

possibility of reconstruction and the success or failure of the transitional phase led by Ahmad al-Sharaa and what are the ways to restore Syria's political and security stability and its regional and international standing.

Axis 3:Security of the Arab Regional System: Challenges and Mechanisms

Regional security is one of the most important pillars on which Arab countries rely to ensure their stability and sovereignty in a turbulent geopolitical environment. The Arab regional system faces multiple challenges, ranging from internal conflicts to external interventions, which calls for strengthening security cooperation mechanisms between Arab countries.

I: Challenges Facing Arab Regional Security:

1- Internal Conflicts and Divisions:

Many Arab countries suffer from internal conflicts, such as the civil wars in Syria, Libya and Yemen, which leads to regional instability, as studies confirm that these conflicts hinder the building of an integrated Arab security system[1].

2- External Interventions:

Regional and international powers interfere in Arab affairs, such as Iran, Turkey and the United States, which further complicates the security situation, as security expert Mohammed Hassan points out that "external interference represents a direct threat to Arab sovereignty."[2]

3- Non-Traditional Threats:

These threats include terrorism, organised crime and illegal migration, where groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda are considered a threat to Arab national security, as they exploit the security vacuum in some regions.

[1] Al-Ali, Ahmed. Arab Conflicts and Their Impact on Regional Security. Dar Al-Maarifa, 2020, p. 45
[2] Hassan, Mohammed. (2019). External Interventions in the Arab World. Journal of Security Studies, 12, 110–125, p. 112.

II: Mechanisms for strengthening Arab regional security:

1- Strengthening Joint Security Cooperation:

Institutions such as the League of Arab States can be activated to enhance security coordination. A report issued by the Arab Security Organisation proposes the establishment of a joint Arab force to confront security threats.[1]

2- Resolving Disputes Through Peaceful Means

Preventive diplomacy and mediation between Arab countries should be strengthened, as mediation efforts have succeeded in resolving some conflicts, such as the Riyadh Agreement between Palestinians and Israelis.[2]

3- Confronting cyber threats:

With the development of cyber threats, it has become necessary to establish unified Arab cyber defense systems, and strengthening economic integration reduces the factors of instability.[3]

It is concluded that the Arab regional system faces complex challenges that require effective Arab cooperation to ensure security and stability; by strengthening joint security mechanisms and adopting peaceful solutions, Arab countries can build a more secure and effective regional system.

Axis4: Foreign Interventions and The Escalation of International Competition:

1- **US-Chinese-Russian Rivalry:**

[1] Arab Research Centre. (2021). Report on security threats in the Arab region.
[2] Al-Ghunaim, Khalid. (2018). Arab diplomacy and conflict resolution. Emirates Studies Centre, p. 78.
[3] Abdullah, Sara. (2020). Cybersecurity in the Arab world. *Arab Future Magazine*, 45, 55–70.

Competition between major powers for influence in the region is increasing, whether through security alliances such as the US alliance with the Gulf states or economic projects such as the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, this competition may weaken Arab regional integration and deepen divisions.

2- **Non-Arab regional role:**

Powers such as Turkey, Iran and Israel are emerging as key players, as they expand their influence through military tools, supporting militias in Syria, Iraq and Yemen, or economic investments by Turkey in the Horn of Africa, which threatens the hegemony of the traditional Arab system.

3- **Internal Divisions and Armed Conflicts:**

- **Civil Wars and Regional Interventions :**

The continuing conflicts in Libya, Yemen and Syria weaken the Arab League's ability to stabilise the situation and allow non-Arab powers to fill the vacuum, such as the Iranian role in Iraq and Syria.

- **Gulf Divisions :**

Despite improved relations between some countries, such as the 2021 Qatari-Gulf reconciliation, differences over issues such as the relationship with Iran or Turkey remain a threat to Arab solidarity.

Axis 5: Non-Traditional Security Challenges:

1- **Water and Food Security :**

Dam projects such as the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam and climate change increase tensions between the Nile and Arab countries.

2- **Cross-Border Crime :**

Arms smuggling and human trafficking from Libya and Yemen threaten the security of neighbouring countries.

3- **Economic and Social Transformations:**

- **The Effects of The COVID-19 Pandemic and Economic Crises :**

Increasing poverty and unemployment rates in countries such as Lebanon and Egypt could fuel political instability.

- **The New Gulf Model :**

Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE's move towards economic diversification (Vision 2030) may enhance their regional influence but may increase the gap with other Arab countries that are under-resourced.

Axis 6: The Future of The Arab Regional System:

I. Weakness of The Arab League :

The League's inability to resolve crises such as the Syrian crisis reduces its credibility and pushes countries to seek alliances outside the Arab framework, such as the alliance between Israel and some Gulf states within the 'Abraham Accords.'

II.The Rise of Sub-Alliances :

New regional blocs such as the Egypt-Iraq-Jordan axis may emerge to face common challenges, but they may compete with other axes such as the Turkish Qatari axis.

Axis7: Potential Scenarios for The Impact of These Transformations on Regional Security:

I -Relative Integration Scenario :

If Arab countries can unify their positions, such as a unified stance towards Ethiopia or Iran, the regional system may maintain a minimum level of stability.

II -Fragmentation Scenario :

Continued divisions may deepen dependence on external powers and turn the region into an arena for proxy conflicts.

III -Digitalisation Scenario and Investment in Cybersecurity :

Some countries may develop unconventional tools to compensate for their military or political weakness.

We conclude that the geopolitical future of the Arab region depends on its ability to manage external rivalries, build flexible internal cooperation mechanisms, and face economic and security challenges, without which the security of the Arab regional system may continue to erode in favour of non-Arab powers and actors.

Conclusion

Finally, we conclude that geopolitical transformations in the Arab region pose an existential challenge to the Arab regional order, reshaping the balance of power and threatening regional security through interrelated factors including internal conflicts, external interventions, and economic and social challenges. This study shows that the disintegration of Arab unity, the decline in the role of the Arab League, and the rise of non-Arab influence (Iran, Turkey, Israel) have turned the region into an arena for international competition, which has increased the fragility of regional security.

However, these transformations are not inevitable, as there are still opportunities to rebuild the Arab regional order by enhancing economic and security

integration, adopting sovereign strategies that reduce dependence on external powers, and facing non-traditional challenges, such as water and cyber security, requires more effective Arab institutional co-operation.

The future of Arab regional security will depend on the ability of Arab countries to overcome their differences and adopt a common vision that rebalances the regional system in favour of Arab interests, away from external geopolitical influences. This requires not only internal political and security reform, but also a collective will to restore the active Arab role in shaping the future of the region. If tools and strategies do not change, the results will continue to revolve in a vicious cycle of crises and dependency.

The geopolitical transformations in Syria since 2011 have been a critical turning point in reshaping the regional order of the Middle East, not only by changing the traditional balance of power, but also by dismantling the classical concepts of sovereignty and the national state. Syria has turned from a central entity in the Arab Israeli conflict into an open arena for regional and international competition, where unconventional alliances such as the Russian Iranian Turkish axis have emerged and the roles of traditional actors such as Arab and Gulf states have diminished, resulting in a more complex regional order.

Syria has become a model of a ‘fragmented state’ that is managed through a network of external influence (Russia, Iran, Turkey) and non-state actors (militias, extremist organisations), in addition to the erosion of the concept of national borders with the increasing role of transnational militias and the interference of regional powers in internal affairs, which has increased regional instability, as well as the transformation of international strategies through the decline of the US role in favour of Russian influence, and the rise of new roles for countries such as China and Turkey in reconstruction processes.

Despite these shifts, Syria remains an unstable arena. Fragile political settlements and deep geopolitical divisions predict their continued impact on the region. Security implications such as the proliferation of militias, economic implications such as the conflict over gas and energy lines, and even demographic implications such as the refugee crisis will continue to multiply regional challenges in the coming decades.

Considering this, this study raises questions about the possibility of the emergence of a 'new regional order in the Middle East' based on flexible alliances and decentralised power structures, or whether the region is about to enter a phase of long-term 'creative chaos'. It also recommends the importance of new research approaches based on the interaction between geopolitics and geoeconomics to understand the complex Syrian scene, especially considering the increasing competition for post-conflict resources and Syria's entry into a new transitional phase led by Ahmad al-Shara'a.

It can be said that the transition process in Syria will be complex and require major political compromises, as comparative experiences show that the success of transitional periods depends on three main factors:

1) The existence of a clear institutional framework,
2) Regional and international consensus,
3) Taking into account local specificity .

In the Syrian case, the most complex equation is balancing the demands for radical change with the need for political stability and security.

References

1. Al-Ali, A. (2020). *Arab conflicts and their impact on regional security*. Dar Al-Maarifa.
2. Hassan, M. (2019). External interventions in the Arab world. *Journal of Security Studies*.
3. Arab Research Centre. (2021). *Security threats in the Arab region report*.
4. Arab Security Organisation. (2022). *Prospects for Arab security cooperation report*.
5. Al-Ghunaim, K. (2018). Arab diplomacy and conflict resolution. Emirates Studies Centre.
6. Abdullah, S. (2020). Cybersecurity in the Arab world. *Arab Future Magazine*.
7. Khalidi, R. (2006). *The iron cage: The story of the Palestinian struggle for statehood*. Beacon Press.
8. Morris, B. (2004). *The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem revisited*. Cambridge University Press.
9. Sayigh, Y. (1997). *Armed struggle and the search for state: The Palestinian national movement, 1949–1993*. Oxford University Press.
10. Rabbani, M. (2008). The making of the Palestinian Authority. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *37*(3), 23–40.
11. Barghouti, O. (2011). *Boycott, divestment, sanctions: The global struggle for Palestinian rights*. Haymarket Books.
12. Phillips, C. (2020). *The battle for Syria: International rivalry in the new Middle East*. Yale University Press.
13. Gause, F. G. (2014). Beyond sectarianism: The new Middle East cold war. Brookings Doha Centre.