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## WHAT IS “REGIONAL” IN WESTERN ASIA?

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*ARSHIN ADIB-MOGHADDAM\**

*Each dynasty has a certain amount of provinces and land and no more. The reason for this is that the group to which a given dynasty belongs and the people who support and establish it must be necessarily distributed over the provinces and border regions where they reach and take into possession. When these various groups have spread over the border regions and provinces, their numbers are necessarily exhausted. This, then, is the time when the territory (of the dynasty) has reached its farthest extension, where the border regions form a belt around the centre of the realm. If the dynasty then undertakes to expand beyond its holdings, it (a widening territory) remains without military protection and is laid open to any chance attack by enemy or neighbour. This has*

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\* Prof. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam is Professor of Department of Politics and International Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, aalo6@soas.ac.uk.

*detrimental results for the dynasty of the creation of boldness  
towards it and of diminished respect for it.*

*(Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddimah, I, 328)*

## **WHERE IS THE “MIDDLE EAST”?**

The title of this article—largely by necessity—refers to a geographical area that is objectively non-existent: If we take a look at a world map we do not find a region designated “western Asia.” What makes things even more complicated is that the phrase is not in common use. The geographical area under focus here is usually referred to as the “Middle East”, not only by Europeans for whom the phrase makes sense in terms of designating its distance from Europe, but also by the majority of political and cultural elites within the area.<sup>(1)</sup> The “Middle East” like “western Asia” is an invention of course. It emerged out of the discourses of early twentieth century imperialism. It was the US American naval officer Alfred T. Mahan who introduced it in an article published in the British *National Review* in 1902.<sup>(2)</sup> The geographical delimitation catered to the strategic interest of the British Empire and thus focused upon Aden, India and the Gulf area. Thereafter, the “Middle East” was popularised by the *Times* of London where part of Mahan’s article was published. Valentine Chirol, a *Times* correspondent who build a formidable career as an eminent “Orientalist” in Europe and the United States subsequently began publishing a series of articles dealing with the “Middle Eastern Question” centring around India as the strategic heartland of the British Empire. With shifting colonial and “strategic interests” the delineation of the “Middle East” changed as well: when Winston Churchill was British Colonial Minister the term referred to the area between the Bosphorus and the borders of India and when the colonial focus shifted towards Egypt after the Second World War that country was considered to be the centre of the “Middle East”. The borders of the region

thus shifted with the strategic interests of external powers, i.e. Great Britain and after the Second World War increasingly the United States.<sup>(3)</sup>

The short etymology of the term “Middle East” encapsulates my concern in the following paragraphs: How do we designate region in western Asia? I will address this question by surveying the available literature on “regionness” both within the disciplines of “Area Studies” and, more extensively, in the discipline of International Relations. True, geographers typically argue that regionness is defined in terms of regional proximity, that a region is usually constituted by contiguous states.<sup>(4)</sup> But it appears to me that there are normative issues involved as well, that defining the boundaries of a region is also an ideological device delineating “us” from “them”, that regionness is always articulated from a perspective of a narrator who detaches a particular area according to his/her subjective preferences. Defining a region is, in short, an intrinsically sectarian endeavour. When a definition of region is ideologically driven, it is the more important to explore the ways it is constructed, and to unveil the subjective perspective underlying this process. This, at least, would be the epistemological premise of a critical approach towards regionness in the west Asian area and beyond.<sup>(5)</sup>

Within the discipline of “Middle Eastern Studies” such epistemological questions are largely marginal abandoned in favour of positivistic and parsimonious historical methodologies. Positivism suggests that social or political phenomena (such as a region) are “real” that they exist beyond our invention of them. Consider the writings of L. Carl Brown in this regard. In one of his most prominent publications, Brown employed the inherited “Middle Eastern question” articulated by Valentine Chirol to frame his analysis of international politics in West Asia,<sup>(6)</sup> suggesting that an identifiable “Ottoman political culture” distinguishes the territories that were part of the Ottoman Empire from states such as Morocco and Iran, which were not under Ottoman rule.<sup>(7)</sup> In his search for a set of common “variables” governing international behaviour in those regions, Brown assumes a causal

link between that “Ottomanised Middle-Eastern sub-system” and an “homeostasis” diplomatic style which manifests itself in cataclysmic shifts in alliances, heavy “superpower” penetration, reactionary politics, and an overall “zero-sum mentality” in the conduct of foreign relations.<sup>(8)</sup>

Regional scholars have employed similarly problematic criteria such as “mentality” and “character” to define regionness. Ali Eddin Hillal Dessouki and Jamil Matar’s oft-cited work *Nizam al-Iqlimi al-‘Arabi* (The Arab regional order), for instance, synthesises the historical formation of an “Arab state system” with categories such as ethnicity and national affiliation.<sup>(9)</sup> Dessouki and Matar negate the term “Middle East” on the basis of its colonial and ethnocentric etymology. Instead, they present the model of an “Arab state system” extending from Mauritania in the west, to the Gulf in the east singling out Arab nationalism as the primary binding factor that holds that system together. The authors thus suggest to ‘define the Arab system of states not only in terms of regional geography, but also nationally as an Arab regional order.’<sup>(10)</sup> Employing the idea of *al-umma al‘arabiyya* (the Arab nation) instead of *al-sharq al-awsat* (the Middle East) consequently excludes Iran, Turkey and Israel who are usually included in the region. Dessouki and Matar’s paradigm found its way into English speaking scholarly discourse through Saad Edin Ibrahim’s publication *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*.<sup>(11)</sup> Ibrahim himself identified four definitions offered to delineate the area under focus here, which he termed the Middle East, Arab, Mediterranean and the Islamic paradigms arguing that each of them delineates the area according to geo-strategic affiliations and visions about how the region *ought* to be defined.<sup>(12)</sup> This view is shared by Bassam Tibi who found that criteria such as the ones employed by Hillal Dessouki and Matar are “subjective” and ultimately “biased”.<sup>(13)</sup> According to him, the authors challenge the colonial and Eurocentric legacy of the term “Middle East” with an equally problematic “Arab-centric” vantage point and a corresponding yet objectively non-existent “Arab state order”. Essentialising the Arab “self” in

favour of externalising the Kurdish, Turkish, Iranian and Jewish “other”, Hillal and Dessouki’s argument suggests that the politics of lets say Mauritania is and *ought* to be more relevant to Iraq than the politics of Turkey and Iran, a highly improbable notion given the transnational interdependencies between the latter countries.

Comparably problematic categories are employed with regard to the nomenclature of the Gulf. Iranian nationalists often conflated the historically evolved designation of the waterway as the Persian Gulf with “natural” cultural and political pre-eminence in the area. This was especially acute during the rule of the Pahlavi dynasty, whose insistence on Iran’s pre-Islamic heritage fostered the myth that the Gulf has been a Persian lake ever since the Achaemenid kings Dariush and Cyrus established the first Iranian world empire.<sup>(14)</sup> As a consequence the historic designation of the waterway was literally understood as evidence for historically determined Persian pre-eminence in the area.<sup>(15)</sup> The Iranian historian R.K. Ramazani critiqued this disposition as early as in 1972:

*Despite all the vicissitudes of its stormy existence in the past, contemporary Iran seems to perceive its role in the Persian Gulf as almost uninterrupted and as always active. Facts would not seem to support this perception, but the important point is that this belief influences Iran’s behaviour today.*<sup>(16)</sup>

It is no wonder then that the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council established an “Arab Gulf Office” under the direction of Saddam Hussein in 1977 during a period when state sponsored nationalism dominated the state identities in both countries.<sup>(17)</sup> By confronting imperial Iran on the basis of the naming of the Gulf, Ba’thist Iraq wanted to assert its status in the region and counter the chauvinism of Pahlavian nationalism. Likewise, by disseminating maps designating the Gulf as *Khaliji Basra* (the Gulf of Basra) or *al-Khalij al-‘Arabi*, Saddam Hussein claimed a prominent role in the region by appealing to (Iraqi centric) Arab nationalist and anti-Iranian

sentiments. Indeed, that the campaign to rename the Gulf (initially popularised by Nassir of Egypt) was at least partially successful, suggests that aversion to the Iranian presence in the region transcended the confines of Iraqi-Ba’thist state propaganda and was to a certain extent shared by other regional states as well.<sup>(18)</sup>

## REGIONNESS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Let us widen the scope of our enquiry and focus on the discipline of International Relations for alternative views on regionness.<sup>(19)</sup> Since the caesura of the field after the demise of the “bipolar” international system, international relations scholars have attempted to move away from the holist perception that the aggregate (global) level of state interaction determines international politics *in toto*.<sup>(20)</sup> The move to focus on the political and security dimension of regional relations that is at stake here has been spearheaded by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever who are the most forthcoming in their theoretical claim and empirical outreach.<sup>(21)</sup> Whereas the Deutschian idea of “security communities,” re-conceptualised by Adler and Barnett, remains limited to the pacified regions of Western Europe and North America (at least in its empirical grounding), neglecting the non-existence of security communities in most of the areas of the non-Western world, the “Regional Security Complex Theory” (RSCT) put forward by Buzan and Waever sets out to devise the modified patterns of international behaviour into a new security theory, claiming to evaluate the relative power and mutual relationship between regionalising trends on the hand side and globalising trends on the other.<sup>(22)</sup>

The central argument of RSCT, that the international system is constituted by different systems and that the regional level of analysis is operative at any given time, challenges the notion, that there is one, all encompassing system ‘on and around the planet Earth’.<sup>(23)</sup> According to Buzan and Waever, regional security complexes constitute a fourth tier of

structure next to the domestic, inter-regional and global levels of analysis. Focusing solely on the global-systemic level is considered an unnecessary abstraction from what is happening on the immediate, regional level. RSCT hence contradicts both with the global-systemic holism of neo-realism on the one hand side and the globalist notion of de-territorialisation on the other. For most states in the international system, the authors argue, it is the power of the region that is immediately pertinent to national security:

*Security complexes are about the relative intensities of security relations that lead to distinctive regional patterns shaped by both the distribution of power and relations of amity and enmity. A security complex is defined as a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from another. The formative dynamics and structure of a security complex are normally generated by the units within it-by their security perceptions of, and interactions with, each other.<sup>(24)</sup>*

Incorporating “social” elements into the RSCT equation, Buzan and Waever further contend that

*National Security ... is not in itself a meaningful level of analysis. No nation's security is self-contained: it is about other states and thus inherently relational. Global security on the other hand refers at best to an aspiration, not a reality ... The region, in contrast, refers to the constellation where states or other units link together sufficiently closely that their securities cannot be considered separately from each other.<sup>(25)</sup>*

The focus of Buzan and Waever on regional security complexes is an indicator of the increasing unease of western IR scholarship with the orthodoxy of categories associated with political realism and especially the neo-realist version, without however, substantially moving away from its basic inclinations and legacies.<sup>(26)</sup> Whilst Buzan and Waever's innovation is

conducive for a) showing that structure oscillates between local, inter-state, regional and global levels (the “security constellation” in Buzan and Waever’s terminology) and for b) introducing rather more objective criteria to designate region, RSCT fails to detach itself from the (neo)-realist culture of thought. With its level-of-analysis methodology, its positivistic claim ‘to generate predictive scenarios’<sup>(27)</sup> and its holist contention that the theory ‘enables one to understand [the] new [post-Cold War] structure and to evaluate the relative balance of power of, and mutual relationship within it between, regionalising and globalising trends’,<sup>(28)</sup> RSCT fails to move away from the most central tenets of realist thought. In our quest to address regionness in West Asia then, it may be well worth it to develop a methodological critique of the model and to extend concurrently the scope of alternative theoretical paradigms.

### “VIA MEDIA” OR REALIST VARIATION?

Despite the incentive to portray RSCT as a linkage theory, sometimes loyal to “constructivism”, sometimes deemed to be in the neo-realist tradition, and in this effort reflecting a contemporary trend within IR theory to explore a “via media” between the two philosophies, a second look at Buzan and Waever’s work suggests that their model has not distanced itself from realist *Weltanschauung*.<sup>(29)</sup> At least three realist propositions that are central to the theory and methodology of RSCT permeate the argument. The first of these is an evasive conceptualisation of properties of state interaction processes. Here, Buzan has reverted to his earlier “structural realist” notion about interaction processes in anarchic systems. In *Logic of Anarchy*, focusing upon interaction process between states (or units) was essentially a move to soften the rigidity of the neo-realist claim about an all-encompassing, ahistoric, “Hobbesian” international self-help system.<sup>(30)</sup> That argument has not been modified to fit “social” (or “constructivist”) standards as Buzan and Waver suggest, however. RSCT reverts to the conceptualisation of

interaction as process formations occurring at the unit-(domestic) level, undervaluing the structure of interaction itself. But does it suffice to treat interaction as a unit-level capacity defined as ‘absolute capability that transcend the unit level, but which are not structural in the sense of having to do with the positional arrangement of the units’,<sup>(31)</sup> or is it legitimate to attribute structural qualities to regional-systemic processes of interaction themselves, a move followed by Alexander Wendt in relation to global-systemic structures?<sup>(32)</sup>

Second, RSCT remains committed to a negative understanding of the meaning of security.<sup>(33)</sup> Whilst Buzan and Waever suggest a relational approach, in which actors produce security through interaction with each other, the authors infer a negative meaning to security as threats to survival that require or mobilise radical counterstrategies, a semantic misrepresentation that suggests affinity to the realist (and traditional Strategic Studies) credo about perpetual security dilemmas.<sup>(34)</sup> By extension of that negative understanding, RSCs are considered to be “securitised” zones of conflict and distinct from “desecuritised” regions. The term security, also referring to trust, partnership, community etc. is hence reserved for conflict, mistrust, confrontation and essentially *insecurity*. In other words, Buzan and Waever suggest that a “secure region” which we would conventionally understand to be a good thing is actually a “desecuritised” zone, defined as a community where ‘actors stop treating each other as security problems and start behaving as friends.’<sup>(35)</sup> According to Buzan and Waever, even that “desecuritised” stage is not a very relevant option however, implicitly suggesting that the reproductive logic of “securitisation” (i.e. seeing others as security threats) is perennial. That negative misrepresentation of the meaning of security links the RSCT model to the elements of threat and fear, two factors that are essential to its methodology. A look at Buzan’s earlier writings exemplifies the point. According to him, ‘[t]he principal factor defining a complex is usually a high level of threat/fear which is felt mutually among two or more major

states.<sup>(36)</sup> What is problematic, however, is that if a regional security complex is defined by a “high level of threat and fear,” a region can *never* really be a security community in the Deutschian sense, where actors cannot imagine a war between each other.<sup>(37)</sup> RSCT’s amity-enmity continuum is hence reduced to the realist axis, limiting the options to “a little bit of fear” and “a lot of fear.” It comes as no surprise then that in its empirical application, RSCT classifies regions as inherently conflict ridden and trapped in the “Hobbesian” world of self-help anarchy. Thus, even the European Union, characterised in earlier writings as a ‘resolved or matured security complex’<sup>(38)</sup> and recently as a ‘security community’ remains haunted by its conflictual past,<sup>(39)</sup> integrating first and foremost to re-attain global power:

*The integration scenario at first sounds like the classical idealist vision of “unify for peace” as it was professed by philosophers and irenists for centuries, but in contrast to their futile appeals, there is today a real power basis for taking integration and fragmentation as two equally realistic options: Europe is today as never before in its international history one region amongst many. In this situation, the main European powers are not global powers in their own right, and the vision of integration is therefore no longer an idealistic appeal to the globally leading powers for surrendering their power. It is a precondition for re-gaining global standing and - as the other side of this coin - for representing internal dynamics of power balancing, fear and rivalry.<sup>(40)</sup>*

Propensity for conflict and aversion to movement towards communitarian systems is central to the methodology of RSCT. By focusing upon polarity as the nucleus of regional structure, the reproductive, rather than transformative logic of conflictual anarchy is accentuated. Movement, and here especially change towards the amity end of the continuum, is dampened by the stratification of structure along the lines of polarity on the one hand

side and a typology of different manifestations of security complexes on the other (standard, centred, great power, supercomplexes). The essential structure of regional security complexes hence remains material, firmly steeped into the neo-realist notion of relative power capabilities and self-help anarchy. As the third realist streak permeating RSCT, holding on to a materialist notion of structure renders impotent the option of amicable relations, because actors interact in an anarchic sub-structure of the international system. Moreover, that regional anarchy is reproduced by the deep structure of the global system itself which constitutes the ‘condition for the nature of regional dynamics.’<sup>(41)</sup> There are then three methodological presuppositions which prevent movement towards the amicable end of the RSCT continuum: First, variations of enmity and amity are confined to the level of threat and exclude any transcendence of “self-other” delineation. Second, stratification of regional structure along the lines of anarchy and polarity requires balance of power calculations, which are anathema to communitarian principles. And third, regional structure is reinforced by the deep structure of the global-systemic level, trapping actors into a perennial cycle of international “self-help” anarchy.

By drifting away from global-systemic holism, Buzan and Waever have elevated discourse about regionness to a higher ontological, theoretical and methodological status. I feel that analytically their application of rather more objective criteria to delimit region are superior to the models developed by students of “Middle Eastern Studies” which I have sketched at the beginning of this article. Yet, by reverting to a negative interpretation of security, a materialist conceptualisation of structure and the attribution of process to the unit-level, the study of the exogenous regional structure and its impact on the internal constitution of states has continued to be excluded. By necessity of its realist nucleus then, RSCT has an overt propensity for conflict. That realist demeanour is not only central to the methodology of the approach, it is also exemplified in the empirical operationalisation of the theory. As we have seen, even the European Union is not considered to constitute a security

community in the Deutschian sense and remains haunted by its conflictual past to the extent that the return to “barbarism” postulated by John J. Mearsheimer is not ruled out.<sup>(42)</sup> It does not come as a surprise then that Buzan and Waever confirm the oft-repeated representation of the “Middle-Eastern” regional complex (and the Gulf as its sub-complex) as the archetypal “perennial conflict formation”.<sup>(43)</sup> That ultimately hermetic conclusion follows—by necessity—RSCT’s pessimistic demeanour and lends “theoretical legitimisation” to the unwarranted fatalism intrinsic to most scholarship on West Asia.

#### **AN ALTERNATIVE ONTOLOGY: THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF REGIONAL STRUCTURES**

Let us take the critique of the RSCT model as a springboard to further enhance our understanding about the theoretical and methodological implications of regionness. It appears to me that the representation of world politics in materialist terms exaggerates the obduracy of self-help anarchy, whilst undervaluing the effects of process. Accentuating process would warrant attributing structural qualities to interaction. Buzan and Waever, however, stick to the notion that process is separable from structure, since the methodology of RSCT requires a justifiable distinction between levels of analysis and adheres to a reproductive rather than transformative logic of anarchy.<sup>(44)</sup> A critical approach towards regions draws an alternative picture. If we attribute structural qualities to interaction process, the social system under focus develops emergent properties which may have causal impact on its constituent units. In other words, to say that social systems have emergent properties is to say that they shape and are being shaped by their members.<sup>(45)</sup> This argument is in many ways embedded in Ibn Khaldun’s concept of ‘*asabiyah* (usually translated as “group solidarity”) which designates the necessary ‘inter-subjective condition for the creation of a higher form of collective existence.’<sup>(46)</sup> Ultimately ‘*asabiyah* is the *Endziel* of a transformative process which carries society through different

civilisational stages (barbarism, sociability and social solidarity). Social interaction, Ibn Khaldun would thus agree, is not merely a capability of societies without structural qualities, it does not merely refer to the unit-level. Rather the contrary: by interacting with each other, societies (units) construct a system of relationships and patterns with reflexive causal powers which transcends and shapes its constituent components. In (international) society that relational structure is analogous to a “cultural system,” constituted by norms, institutions, values, rules, in short ideational propositions, shared among two or more units. Sociologist Margaret Archer agrees:

*As an emergent entity the Cultural System has an objective existence and autonomous relations amongst its components ... At any moment the CS [Cultural System] is the product of historical Socio-Cultural interaction, but having emerged (emergence being a continuous process) then qua product, it has properties of its own. Like structure, culture is man-made but escapes its makers to act back upon them.*<sup>(47)</sup>

Archer refers to an objectively existing cultural system which is the product of interaction and which acts upon its constituent parts. This systemic property of culture is close to what Clifford Geertz called ‘extrinsic sources of information’—the structural formation of intersubjectively shared knowledge.<sup>(48)</sup> But that cultural system is not overwhelmingly deterministic. Unit and cultural system interact continuously. They are mutually constitutive and codetermined.<sup>(49)</sup> Culture conceived of in this sense is ‘not a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions, or processes can be causally attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly—that is, thickly—described.’<sup>(50)</sup>

In their focus on international society, IR scholars are not primarily interested in the relationship between individual and society but the interaction between political actors (or units, primarily the state) and the

international system. The cultural produce of this interaction is what Mlada Bukovansky termed “international political culture.”<sup>(51)</sup> Political culture has a long and some would say troublesome history in the social sciences and reconstructing its utility for the purpose of regional interaction would not be without perils. Reviewing “traditional” literature on the subject, John Duffield defines political culture as ‘the subjective orientations toward and assumptions about the political world that characterise the members of a particular society and that guide and inform their political behaviour’.<sup>(52)</sup> In his analysis of “cultures of antimilitarism” in Germany and Japan, Thomas Berger differentiates between two other approaches of political culture: The “anthropological” bottom-up approach, relating to the deep structure of a particular society and defined in terms of its personality, religion, language, and primary socialisation. And the “historical-cultural” approach, referring to processes of socialisation which shape the perception of decision-makers and influences state behaviour.<sup>(53)</sup>

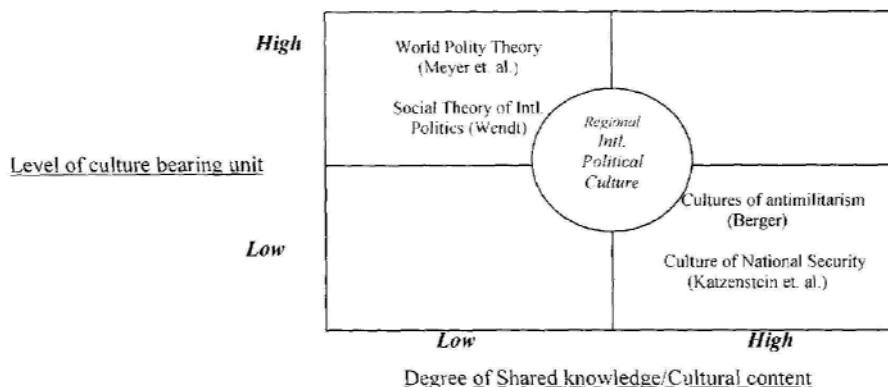
Both Berger and Duffield and indeed the majority of contemporary cultural IR approaches follow the lead of traditional analysis on political culture as a unit-level phenomenon. In its manifold manifestations, political culture appears as “cultures of national security,” “cultural realism,” or “political-military culture” in recent IR scholarship, accentuating the unit level of analysis as the appropriate one for exploration.<sup>(54)</sup> Apart from treating political culture as a domestic property, however, cultural systems can also be discerned at higher structural levels— global as Meyer and colleagues would argue and regional if we would revert to Buzan and Waever’s argument.<sup>(55)</sup> In abstract terms that international political culture can be defined as the ‘most fundamental fact about the structure of an international system, giving meaning to power and content to interest’.<sup>(56)</sup> More specifically it has been referred to as

*that set of implicit or explicit propositions, shared by the major actors in the system, about the nature of legitimate political authority, state identity, and political power, and the rules and*

*norms derived from these propositions that pertain to interstate relations within the system.*<sup>(57)</sup>

Focusing on the cultural structure of regional systems privileges process over statism or action over “defensive-positionalism”<sup>(58)</sup> A critical cultural alternative to Buzan and Waever’s model would be interested in the outcomes of the relationship between the constituent parts of the regional society.<sup>(59)</sup> Employing political culture as an analytic device to conceptualise regional systems yields an alternative model of process on Buzan and Waever’s “fourth tier of international structure.” Figure 1 illustrates the spectrum of culture bearing units and the degree of cultural content or shared knowledge. In the upper left quadrant, we have holist theories which are concerned with the culture of (global) international society, where the degree of shared knowledge or cultural content is relatively low. In the lower right quadrant, we have concepts dealing with cultures expressed on the national level, where the cultural content inhibiting the unit is relatively high. Both variations have gained inspiration from the style of thought pertinent to discourse produced by US American IR scholars and its two most notable traditions: National Security Studies and neo-realism. A regional-cultural approach may be positioned in between and would operate on the same level of analysis as Buzan and Waever’s Regional Security Complex Theory.

**FIGURE 1: POSITIONAL ARRANGEMENT OF CULTURAL IR THEORIES**



Cultural IR scholarship is neutral regarding the appropriate level of analysis in world politics. The focus on regional cultural systems would not predetermine causal superiority, neither would it suggest a fixed essentialisation of culture that would exclude alternative narratives. Yet, it appears to me that the regional level of international politics yields a higher degree of shared knowledge in terms of political-strategic interaction (and not necessarily so much in economic relations) than the global level. For most states, the region is the environment of *primary* socialisation, inhibited by a *thick* layer of shared knowledge, constituted by a higher degree of interaction than on the global level. “Constructivists” highlighting the impact of norms on state behaviour support that notion, observing that ‘[n]orms may be regional ... but not global’.<sup>(60)</sup> To give an example: shared knowledge about the norm of “Islamic communitarianism” between Iraq and Iran is “thicker” than shared knowledge about the same phenomenon between lets say Iraq and Germany. The same could be said about norm relations between Brazil and Argentina or India and Pakistan, suggesting that the ideational structure of the region is ontologically superior to the global level. So as analysts we can “see” the impact of cultural systems easier if we explore the immediate environment political actors are embedded in. This does not mean that regional cultures can be somehow detached from national or global ones, that a region can ever be culturally autonomous. But it does mean that regional cultures are relatively stable and that they do not immediately yield to outside pressure. Isn’t this the reason why nationalist and Islamic norms continue to have an impact on the international politics of western Asia and beyond? ❖

## NOTES:

1. On the invented delineation of the Middle East see Pinar Bilgin, 'Inventing Middle East: The making of regions through security discourses', in Bjørn Olav Utvik and Knut S. Vikør, eds, *The Middle East in a Globalised World. Papers from the Fourth Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Oslo 1998*, London, C. Hurst & Co., 2000, pp. 10-37; Roderic H. Davison, 'Where is the Middle East?', in Richard Nolte, ed., *The Modern Middle East*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1963, pp. 13-29; Ghassan Salamé, 'The Middle East: Elusive Security, Indefinable Region', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 25, no.1, 1994, pp. 17-35; Bassam Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East. From Interstate War to New Security*, second edition, London, Macmillan, 1998, pp. 43-60.

2. On Mahan see P.A. Crowl, 'Mahan: The Naval Historian', in Peter Paret, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy*. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1986, pp. 444-447.

3. For such a US centric perspective see among others Peter Duignan and L.H. Gann: *The Middle East and North Africa: The Challenge to Western Security*. Stanford, Hoover Press, 1981.

4. See, for instance, Michael Don Ward, ed., *The New Geopolitics*, Philadelphia, Gordon and Breach, 1992.

5. For a defence of a critical approach to politics and international relations see my *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, London: Routledge, 2006 and *Iran in World Politics: the Question of the Islamic Republic*, London/New York, Hurst and Columbia UP, 2008.

6. L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East Old Rules, Dangerous Games*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 5

7. Ibid., pp. 7-11.

8. Ibid., pp. 16-18.

9. See Jamil Matar and Ali Eddin Hillal, *al-nizam al-iqlimi al-'arabi. Dirasah fi al-'alaqat al-sisyasiyya al-'arabyya* ("The Arab Regional System: An Examination of Inter-Arab Political Relations"), 3<sup>rd</sup> extended edition, Beirut, Dar al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, 1983.

10. Ibid., p. 32.

11. Boulder, Westview Press, 1982.

12. See his 'Future Visions of the Arab Middle East'. *Security Dialogue*, vol. 27, no.4 (1996), pp. 428-436.

13. Tibi, *Conflict and War in the Middle East*, p. 48 and 49 respectively. See also F. Gregory Gause III, 'Systemic Approaches to Middle East International Relations', *International Studies Review*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1999), p. 16 ff.

14. See further Adib-Moghaddam *Iran in World Politics*, especially part 2.

15. See revealingly Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, *Answer to History*, New York, Stein and Day, 1980, p. 156.

16. Rouhollah K. Ramazani, *The Persian Gulf: Iran's Role*, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1972, p. 26.

17. Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, chapter 2.

18. Ibid.

19. Parts of the following paragraphs are excerpted from my 'Regional Security Complex Theory: a critical examination'. *International Studies Journal*, 2/9 (July 2006).

20. The "state-systemic project" has been pioneered by Kenneth N. Waltz. See his seminal *Theory of International Politics*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1979. His structural perspective of international politics has been recently re-conceptualised by Alexander Wendt in a rather more "constructivist" fashion. See his *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

21. See Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wild, *Security. A new Framework for Analysis*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998; Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

22. See Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, eds, *Security Communities*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

23. David J. Singer, 'The Global System and Its Subsystems: A Developmental View', in James N. Rosenau, ed., *Linkage Politics: Essays on the Convergence of National and International Systems*, New York, Free Press, 1969, p. 30.

24. Buzan et. al., *Security. A new Framework for Analysis*, p. 201, emphasis in original.

25. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, 'An Inter-Regional Analysis: NATO's New Strategic Concept and the Theory of Security Complexes', in Sven Behrendt and Christian-Peter Hanelt, eds, *Bound to Cooperate - Europe and the Middle East*, second edition, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2001, p. 58, emphasis in original.

26. The "complex interdependence" model developed by Keohane and Nye which softens

realist propositions without leaving its inclination towards conflict and military force, would be another example. See Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence*, third edition, London, Longman, 2001.

27. Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, p. 65.

28. Ibid., p. 3.

29. Wendt and other “mainstream” constructivists write with a similar spirit. See also Emanuel Adler, ‘Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 3, no. 3, September 1997, pp. 319-363.

30. See Barry Buzan, Charles Jones & Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1993.

31. Ibid., p. 72.

32. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, especially chapters 4, 6 and 7.

33. On this point see also Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests. A Sociology of International Relations*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 37-44 and Helga Haftendorn, ‘The Security Puzzle: Theory-Building and Discipline Building in International Security’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 35, no.1, 1991, pp. 3-17.

34. See also McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests*, p. 52 ff.

35. Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, p. 56.

36. Barry Buzan, *People, States and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, second edition, Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991, p. 193 ff.

37. See Adler and Barnett, *Security Communities*, especially part 1.

38. Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, p. 218.

39. Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, pp. 375-376.

40. Buzan and Waever, ‘An Inter-Regional Analysis’, in Behrendt and Hanelt, eds, *Bound to Cooperate*, pp. 68-69, emphasis in original.

41. Buzan, *People, States and Fear*, p. 62.

42. See John J. Mearsheimer, ‘Back to the Future. Instability in Europe After the Cold War’, *International Security*, vol. 15, no.1, 1999, pp. 5-56. On the prospect of conflict in Europe see Buzan et. al., *Security. A new Framework for Analysis*, pp. 179-189 and Buzan and Waever, ‘An Inter-Regional Analysis’, in Behrendt and Hanelt, eds, *Bound to Cooperate - Europe and the Middle East*, pp. 68-72.

43. See Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers*, part three.

44. For the level of analysis problematic see David J. Singer, ‘The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations,’ in Klaus Knorr and Sydney Verba, eds, *The International*

*System: Theoretical Essays*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1961, pp. 77-92 and Barry Buzan, 'The Level of Analysis Problem in International Relations Reconsidered', in Ken Booth and Steve Smith, eds, *International Political Theory Today*, London, Polity Press, 1995, pp.198-216.

45. Most sociological and "constructivist" analysis subscribes to that viewpoint. See Mlada Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics. The American and French Revolutions in International Political Culture*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2002; Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, especially chapter 4; Nicholas Onuf, *The Republican Legacy in International Thought*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998; Margaret S Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory*, revised edition, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

46. See Robert W. Cox, *Approaches to World Order*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 163.

47. Archer, *Culture and Agency*, p. 107.

48. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books, 1973, p. 92.

49. It is important to remember that cultural systems, however monolithic and deterministic they may appear, are essentially human fabrications. Their objective status does not divorce them from human action. The relationship between the individual, the producer, and the cultural world, the product, is and remains a dialectical one. Both are in constant interaction with each other. I have argued elsewhere that these aspects receive their proper recognition once cultural systems are understood in terms of an ongoing dialectical process composed of the four moments of externalisation, objectification, internalisation, and introjection. See Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics*, part 1 and Adib-Moghaddam *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf*, especially chapter 1.

50. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 14.

51. See Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*.

52. John S. Duffield, 'Political Culture and State Behaviour: Why Germany Confounds Neorealism', *International Organization*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1999, p. 774.

53. See Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism. National Security in Germany and Japan*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, pp. 9-10.

54. The phrases were employed by following authors respectively: Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press; Alastair Iain Johnston, 'Cultural Realism and Strategy in Maoist China', in Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security*, pp. 216-268; Thomas U. Berger, 'Norms, Identity and National Security in Germany and Japan', in Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of*

*National Security*, pp. 317-356.

55. See John W. Meyer, John Boli, George M. Thomas & Francisco O. Ramirez, 'World Society and the Nation-State', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 103, no.1, 1997, pp. 144-181.

56. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 250.

57. Bukovansky, *Legitimacy and Power Politics*, p. 2.

58. For the term see Joseph M. Grieco, 'Realist International Theory and the Study of World Politics', in Michael W. Doyle & G. John Ikenberry, eds, *New Thinking in International Relations Theory*, Oxford, Westview, 1997, p. 167.

59. Wendt calls that perspective 'interaction-level micro-structural theorising'. See Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, especially pp. 147-150.

60. Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink, 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change', *International Organization*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1997, p 892.