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The Middle East in the world hierarchy: imperialism and resistance

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This study deploys a structuralist framework of analysis, modified by elements from other theories, to examine the place of the Middle East in the world hierarchy. It surveys the origins of the regional system in imperialism's peripheralisation and fragmentation of the region, the core-periphery clientalist hierarchy thereby established, regional agency within the system, including the foreign policies of dependent and rebellious states, and the on-going struggle over the hierarchical order between revisionist forces in the Middle East and the global hegemons.

Introduction

The Waltzian image of world politics as a timeless, uniformly anarchic states system has been widely critiqued on the grounds that there are elements of hierarchy within this anarchy (Hobson 2000: 30–8; Hobson and Sharman 2005). As seen from the global south, it would be more accurate to say that there are elements of anarchy (at the regional level) within a global hierarchy (Escude 1998). This is especially so of the Middle East, the only major high civilisation that has not reconstituted itself as a global power in the post-imperial era (Buzan 1991). It remains, as Brown (1984) argues, the Third World region most exceptionally penetrated and subordinated within the world hierarchy, but also the one most stubbornly resistant to this, hence an epicentre of instability that spills out in periodic global crises.

The notion of hierarchy in international politics is best understood through the lens of Marxist-inspired 'structuralism', which is taken here to embrace dependency theory, world systems theory and neo-Gramscianism. Although ignored by dominant IR approaches such as realism and constructivism, structuralism's key concepts — imperialism, the core-periphery structure and dependency — are essential to understanding the processes and consequences

of the incorporation of the Middle East into the global hierarchy. However, in Marxist structuralism, as in its realist counterpart, the global structural level appears over-determinant to the neglect of regional agency; therefore, just as this has been corrected for realism, for example by Buzan and Weaver's (2003) regionalism and neoclassical realism's bringing in of domestic politics (Lobell *et al.* 2009), so Marxist structuralism has to be similarly 'upgraded' by bringing in identity (from constructivism) and by incorporating polarity and anarchy (from realism), variables that shape motives and opportunities for agency at the regional level. Subsuming these variables within a structuralist framework allows a more powerful explanation of the international politics of the Middle East region than any of these theories can, on its own, provide. The paper will first lay out an 'upgraded' structuralist framework of analysis and then use it to organise and interpret the (chiefly but not exclusively) structuralist literature on the region.

A structuralist paradigm for understanding hierarchy

This section sketches a structuralist approach regarding the origins of world hierarchy, its structure and the forces of change in the system, particularly as regards the Middle East.

The origin of hierarchy

Among the contributions of structuralism to IR theory is its explanation of the fundamental inequalities captured in the notion of hierarchy. World hierarchy is underlain by capitalist relations of production that determine an unequal control of world economic surplus. The most fundamental conflicts in world politics are about the globalisation and reproduction of these unequal power relations (Rupert and Soloman 2006: 12–4). Western imperialism, which established the current global hierarchy, was the product of the uneven spread of capitalism, creating gross differences in technology and productive power as well as exceptional appetites for resources, markets and investment outlets in the early capitalist developers. The resulting unprecedented military imbalance allowed Western imperialism to subjugate and plunder pre-capitalist societies to fuel Western capital accumulation and industrialisation. World systems theory identifies the chief agent in this: two world hegemons (first the UK, now the US) who incorporated the periphery (including the Middle East) into the world capitalist system, largely by military force but also by co-optation of local elites. The outcome is a global division of labour, with technologically advanced and capital-intensive production in the core and lower-wage, less skilled (initially primary product) production relegated to the periphery,

resulting in a wealth gap of historically unprecedented magnitude (Brewer 1990: 1–24, 42–56, 58–72, 161–224; Halliday 1994: 47–73; Rosenberg 1994: 91–122, 159–73).

The structure of hierarchy

The second contribution of structuralism to IR theory is its conceptualisation of the structure of the international system as a hierarchy divided between core and periphery. According to world systems theory, this structure is constituted of *both* a hierarchic economic division of labour and an unevenly globalised states system (Wallerstein 1979: 6). In this system, states may all be theoretically sovereign, but their grossly uneven capacities, mirroring the economic division of labour, translate into different specialised functions in the world system (Donnelly 2006). Most important, the role of the global *hegemon* is qualitatively different from other states: it spreads capitalism globally by opening up pre-capitalist or national capitalist economies and provides 'public goods' that guarantee the reproduction of the capitalist system such as a sound currency, financial liquidity and contract enforcement (Cox 1996: 106–11). Since relations of subordination invite rebellion, the hegemon also assumes a policing role in which, despite formal sovereignty, it lays down the law to subordinate states and selectively enforces global norms. As regards the Middle East, it ensures world access to cheap energy sources and disciplines 'rogue states', both of which are concentrated there, while preventing the rise of a regional hegemon (Lustick 1997) able to organise the region (and control its oil reserves) against the core. By contrast, the dependent states of the Middle East periphery are likely to act as transmission belts for the export of surplus to the core and for the inculcation of capitalist discipline in their populations (Cox 1996: 106, 154, 193).

The world hierarchy is, of course, not a bureaucratic chain of command in which the hegemon enjoys legitimate authority over periphery states; the latter are in principle sovereign and free to defy its demands (just as the worker is free not to sell his labour to the capitalist). Rather, it is the peculiar kind of hierarchy that emerges from anarchy (insecurity in the absence of law), namely a system of *clientalism* in which patron and core are in a position of highly asymmetric interdependence. Several writers, notably Galtung in his 'Structural Theory of Imperialism' (1971), explain the mechanisms that constitute this asymmetry. First, core states penetrate the periphery states by establishing/co-opting client elites/classes that *share interests* with the core; since these interests diverge from those of their own populations, costing them legitimacy and generating rebellion, client elites require the protective support of the hegemon. Second, periphery states are in a generally inferior bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the core. Economically, the core monopolises scarce means

of production (capital and technology, including military technology) while the periphery provides surplus unskilled labour and raw materials. Additionally, the periphery regime receives from its patron rent that enables it to become a domestic patron, clientelise and demobilise society, hence contain opposition within; this makes it more dependent for its survival on its external patron than on its population. Politically, periphery states are in the early stages of state formation, often suffering from incongruity between territory and identity, with legitimacy deficits and contested boundaries, hence facing double threats from both within and without, and bound to seek a patron-protector (Ayoob 1998). Third, economic links are structured vertically to the core at the expense of horizontal links among the periphery states, a fragmentation that sets them against each other, allowing divide and rule by the core, and deterring regional economic development. As such, client states need their patron far more than the patron, having numerous clients, needs any individual one of them (Hey 1995).

Once implanted by military force, this system is chiefly sustained by unequal economic power and patron–client relations, with military intervention by the hegemon only periodically required against the minority of states that challenge it (and which, usually isolated, can be picked off one-by-one). The two dimensions of the system, hierarchy and anarchy, normally reinforce each other: the hierarch (hegemon) unites the core (Volgy and Bailin's (2003) 'collective hegemony'), while maintaining the anarchy in the periphery (preventing a regional hegemon) that keeps weak states in need of a global patron. Given dependent states' unequal need for resources and protection, when their patron calls for political support or imposes rules of the game, the client is obliged to respond positively.

Nevertheless, the client has some leverage over the patron. Because the patron has no legitimate right to command sovereign states, the majority of client states must be given a modicum of satisfaction in order for the patron to readily discipline the recalcitrant minority. Most important, however, is that to the extent that patrons are competing for clients, the latter may extract benefits from a credible threat to change patrons. This is largely determined by global polarity: thus, during the Cold War some periphery states made the super-powers bid for their support and a few even used the patronage of the hegemon to advance themselves into the 'semi-periphery' of the world economy (becoming 'newly industrialised nations' — NICs), opportunities that have largely disappeared under unipolarity. Polarity is, thus, decisive in shaping the *degree of asymmetry* in the core-periphery hierarchy.

Change within hierarchy

Hierarchies are always contested and liable to change. In the neo-Gramscian version of structuralism, actors are acknowledged to make their world but

within structures of inequality constructed in the past, not in conditions of their own choosing; agents have very unequal abilities to affect structures, with hegemons possessed of vastly superior material resources. If a hierarchy is to be reproduced over the long term, sufficient concessions must be made to subordinates to enable its legitimisation by a hegemonic ideology (Cox 1996: 103; Laffey and Dean 2002: 90–107; Gill 2003: 15–65). Yet, driven by the expansive appetite of capitalism, the hegemon/s have created a system of unprecedented global inequality that enjoys only precarious consent in the periphery (Gill 2003: 66–72). This makes periphery states 'sites of contestation' since client elites lack legitimacy and are always vulnerable to rebellion (Cox 1996: 116). Still, the fragmentation of the periphery facilitates 'divide and rule' by the hegemon and revisionist agents can only overcome the resulting collective action problem if they are able to mobilise the deprived via a shared *identity/ideology*. The Marxist tradition expects proletarians to provide the shock troops of revolutionary change under the banner of socialism, but since the decline of this ideology, there is no global 'counter-hegemonic ideology' (Joseph 2008). The exception is the Middle East (Thompson 1970), which, uniquely rich in both grievances and in supra-state counter-hegemonic identities (Arabism, Islam), has always been an epicentre of resistance to the core, with aspirant regional hegemons periodically trying to use supra-state identities to unite the region against the global hierarchy (Halliday 1999: 1–26, 293–322). Opportunities for revisionist regimes are, however, decisively shaped by polarity at the global level: the bipolar power balance, checking the power projection of the hegemon in the region, facilitated such challenges, while under the current unipolar order in the region, resistance is increasingly located in trans-state identity movements whose prospects depend on a combination of asymmetric warfare capabilities and imperial overreach by the hegemon (Burbach and Tarbell 2004; Rogers 2008). Finally, however, structuralism would underline that the ability of revisionist actors to construct a durable alternative regional order depends on breaking the core-periphery system of economic dependency, thus allowing the construction of regional economic interdependences — material interests — congruent with regional identity.

In what follows, this structuralist paradigm is used to interpret the origins of hierarchy in the Middle East, its structure, agency within it and the ongoing contestation over it.

Imperialism and the remaking of the Middle East

A necessarily abbreviated overview of the remaking of the Middle East by Western imperialism is given here, drawing on the main themes in structuralist

narratives and examining the origins of hierarchy, the mechanisms by which it is enforced and their debilitating consequences for the region.

Origins of hierarchy in the Middle East

The incorporation of the Middle East as a periphery of the core, in which it became an exporter of primary products and an importer of manufactured goods and technology, is well documented by writers on the region (Amin 1978; Owen 1981; Issawi 1982; Bromley 1994). By the 1700s, the Ottoman Empire was in decline as the East–West trade routes on which its civilisation was built were lost to the West (Rosenberg 1994: 94–107). Western military encroachment became constant, beginning with Russian advances on its northern frontiers. Unequal treaties were imposed on the Ottomans and on Iran by the European powers through force and bribery of venal elites, allowing them to flood unprotected local markets with foreign manufactured imports. This precipitated indigenous industrial decline and unemployment, a shift of Middle East exports to raw materials, and a decline in the terms of trade. In Egypt, military defeat led to imposed tariff reductions ending Muhammad Ali's (1805–1848) industrialisation effort (Ayubi 1995: 87, 99) while under a successor, Ismail (1863–1870), Egypt became a plantation for Europe's textile industry. In the Ottoman domains, capitulations allowed foreign or foreign-protected minority merchants, exempted from local taxes and laws, to displace indigenous Muslim merchants, and they exported rather than reinvesting their profits in the region (Owen 1981: 3–9, 92; Issawi 1982: 138–55; Yapp 1987: 1–35; Bromley 1994: 46–85; Sayf 2004; Bridge and Bullen 2005: 188–92). Later came the export of Western capital to the region, first in loans to governments, then in investments in the infrastructure that tied the regional economy to the core (Adelson 1995). The Suez Canal, built by Egyptian labour and financed in good part by Egyptian funds, ended up in the possession of Europeans.

Regional efforts at 'defensive modernisation', beginning with the Ottoman Tanzimat (1839–1876), ultimately undermined economic autonomy. Ottoman reformers failed in part because, given their inability to tax the foreign-protected bourgeoisie, the costs of financing modernisation through high-interest foreign loans led to debt and Western control over public finances (1881). This funnelled tax collections into debt repayment to foreign creditors, a heavy drain on the economic base and investment capacity of the empire (Owen 1981: 57–8; Adelson 1995: 27–53); thus, 80 per cent of Syrian tax revenues went to Istanbul where at least a half of the budget was used for foreign debt service (Amin 1978; Fieldhouse 2006: 8–9). Similarly, in Egypt, peasants were squeezed to pay the debt to European financiers (Sutcliffe 2002) and when this sparked popular revolt, British occupation followed (1882).

As the region was incorporated into the new international division of labour, a 'peripheral, dependent type of capitalism [whose logic] emanated not from domestic forces … but from the metropole' was established. It consolidated 'old [agrarian] modes of production and the classes that corresponded to them' (Ayubi 1995: 92, 96): starting under the Ottoman land law of 1858 but consolidated under European rule, urban notables and tribal chiefs acquired private ownership of common land, turning into a large landed class, while formerly independent peasants were reduced to tenancy. Pre-capitalist relations of production — share-cropping on *latifundia* — required minimal investment and enabled the cheap reproduction of the labour force while incorporating it into the export market. A backward agrarian capitalism came to dominate regional social structures, retarding development. Yet more damaging were those cases — Palestine, Algeria and Libya — in which settler colonists drove indigenous peoples off their land.

In British-ruled Egypt, where incorporation into the world market went furthest, trade and banking were captured by foreign and minority entrepreneurs, a *comprador* class of import-exporters (Owen 1981: 290–2). The colonial power discouraged industrialisation and the landed oligarchy reinvested little of the surplus and exported much of it. The brief spurt of industrialisation in the region during World War II (WWII) was only possible because of the rupture of trade with the core economies. Everywhere the colonies were taxed to support their occupation, while public education and health were underfunded.

In Iran, Iraq and the Gulf, the prize was the exploitation of local oil reserves, the region's main potential source of capital, by Western firms to fuel industrialisation and military power in the West (Amin 1978). The 1914 conversion of the British navy to oil was a watershed in making the Middle East a permanent magnet for Western penetration (Halliday 2005: 263). Oil concessions were obtained in Iran partly owing to debt (1901) and, in Iraq, through World War I (WWI) conquest (Adelson 1995: 183). In the Gulf in the late 1800s, the British used gunboat diplomacy and co-optation to establish monopolistic treaty relations with a series of petty principalities, resulting in the concentration of many of the soon-discovered oil reserves in small low-population mini-states ruled by client regimes inevitably dependent on the West (Bromley 1991: 108; 1994: 108–12).

The economic peripherialisation of the Middle East was paralleled by European political-military occupation and the parcelling out of virtually the whole region, beginning with the French conquest of Algeria in 1830 and crowned by the post-WWI division among the victorious powers of the remaining domains of the Ottoman Empire. In this century-long process, regional actors were not simply passive, and from the outset local actors tried to attract external support in their local rivalries, beginning with the Ottoman plea for Western support against Muhammad Ali's invasion of Syria

(1840–1841) and early 20th century Hejazi and Saudi use of British support against the Ottomans (Brown 1984). However, while particular local actors achieved some advantage over rivals, the resulting increased external penetration meant a long-term loss of regional autonomy. Faced with superior military force, more and more local actors chose accommodation with imperial powers, for example the Hashemites in Jordan and Iraq after WWI. At the same time, elites were widely co-opted as imperial powers accorded them the lion's share of the national wealth — oil or land — as their private patrimony, giving them a stake in the imperial system. Minorities and tribes were regularly co-opted and armed, thereby alienating them from the majority and making them dependent on the imperial powers; the latter also relied on levies from older colonised regions (Senegalese or Indians) to subdue the Middle East — divide and rule on a global scale. Empire could not have been imposed without collaborators (Gallagher and Robinson 1953; Robinson 1972), for Britain and France wanted it on the cheap (Adelson 1995: 190–7) and where elites refused to collaborate the outcome could be different: thus, when the nationalist-fired remnants of the Ottoman armies under Mustafa Kemal made the potential cost of conquest too high, plans to carve up Anatolia had to be abandoned as the post-WWI British economy fell into crisis (Fromkin 1989: 427–34, 540–57). Across the region, periodic uprisings still had to be countered by artillery and air bombardment of cities, villages and tribes. It took 90,000 troops and 10,000 lives to suppress the Iraqi revolt of 1920, and 325,000 troops to suppress the Rif revolt in Morocco (Fromkin 1989: 449–54; Khalidi 2004: 1–36). Since nationalist resistance kept reviving, military force was repeatedly used to smash it or to reverse progress toward independence, including the 1941 deposing of Rashid Ali Gaylani in Iraq and of Reza Shah in Iran, the 1945 massacre at Setif in Algeria and the 1946 bombardment of Damascus.

The structure of hierarchy in the Middle East: fragmentation and dependence

By the end of a century of Western conquest, an indigenous universal empire had been replaced by a profoundly flawed Western-dominated states system that fragmented the region and would perpetuate its subordination long after formal independence. Most of the new states were inevitably weak (Halliday 2002). This was partly because many were small, such as the microstates of the Gulf, or because arbitrary boundary drawing, reflective of the interests and compromises of the imperial powers and in defiance of indigenous wishes, often issued in artificial states that could not command the identifications of their populations. The Arab state with the most significant material power assets, Iraq, was crippled by the most severe identity fragmentation as Kurds were thrown together with Sunni and Shia Arabs. The creation of new client elites in artificial states also resulted in legitimacy deficits that deterred the

democratisation that might have focused loyalty on the state. The most obvious exception and one of the few relatively strong states in the region was Turkey, where Ataturk, in fighting off imperialism, was able to secure borders for an independent state compatible with the idea of a Turkish nation and with enough legitimacy to eventually democratise.

Arbitrary boundary drawing also built conflict into the very fabric of the states system, with border conflicts integral to the most durable centres of war, notably between Israel and its neighbours. The creation of larger poorer states side by side with what would become fabulously rich mini-states also built power imbalances into the system; thus, the creation of Kuwait so as to block Iraq's access to the Gulf also meant drawing a line around oil wells and creating an artificially privileged population bound to excite the envy of its stronger neighbour. Irredentism was built into the regional system as arbitrary boundaries frustrated identities, notably Arab nationalism, where the single putative Arab nation was divided into many states, and Kurdistan, where an emergent nation was divided among four regional states. This was the very stuff of divide and rule by the core.

The flaws of the states system and economic peripherialisation reinforced each other (Halliday 2002). The borders of the states system shattered what had been a region-wide economy established under the Ottomans, which could otherwise have formed the basis of post-independence economic recovery, as happened in China and India where the pre-capitalist empires were preserved. On the contrary, the concentration of much of the oil wealth in tiny client states with no potential to be 'newly industrialised states' (NICs) meant that those countries exported capital surpluses to the West while larger states with the land and labour potential for diversified economies lacked capital (Alnasrawi 1991: 55–66, 191–3). Insecurity deterred regional investment and, over time, spurred the rise of national security states that, by the 1970s, dissipated revenues on arms purchases, obstructing the emergence of developmental states. However, without breaking out of economic dependency and launching national industrialisation, local states lacked the economic base of national power needed for real political independence and security.

The entrenchment of two vital and permanent Western interests in the region — oil and Israel — made it a magnet of continual post-colonial external intervention. Western powers did everything they could to prevent the region from taking command of its oil resources, beginning with the 1953 overthrow of Iran's Mossadeq and continuing with two wars (1990, 2003) against Iraq (Alnasrawi 1991: 18, 74, 198–206). The creation of Israel was a global anomaly: a colonial settler state established in the heart of the region at the expense of indigenous people was bound to be rejected, making its survival dependent on the West. Yet its unmatched network of strategic depth in the West made it

the dominant regional military power, allowing it to extend its colonisation at the expense of the Palestinians, who, a state-less people, became an intense source of irredentism, and to occupy the territory of neighbouring states, locking it into conflicts with them as well. Washington's support for this inflamed the region against the US, which, as a result, came to see Israeli military prowess as a 'strategic asset' defending its interests. Israel's neighbours became dependent either on the USSR for the arms to balance it or on the US as the only power able to restrain it and broker a peace settlement.

Despite formal independence after WWII, the core, therefore, continued to penetrate the region. Once direct European colonialism was dismantled, the Western hegemons attempted to organise a post-imperial treaty system, including the region-wide Baghdad Pact (1955), and later the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957), in order to preserve their military bases and influence. Many regional states, locked into intense security dilemmas with their neighbours, but unable to rely on themselves for defence, needed external patrons, either for direct protection and/or for arms supplies. In the period (1955–1990) when Western treaties and bases came to be seen as illegitimate in the Arab world, the hegemon relied instead on regional rivalries to build informal alliances, exploiting the cleavages between conservative monarchies and radical republics and between the non-Arab and Arab states (with the US having security ties with Israel, Turkey and Pahlavi Iran in the informal 'periphery pact' against the radicalising Arab core of the region). Saudi Arabia and Iran became the twin pillars of US security in the Gulf until the Islamic revolution (1978). This 'vacuum' was then filled after the first Iraq war (1990–1991) when in formal Western protectorates were re-established over the Arab Gulf and after the second Iraq war (2003) when a US treaty was imposed on Iraq itself. Parallel to alliance formation, sustaining Western hegemony over the region required military intervention on a regular basis: there were 11 military operations in 1956–1973 alone, despite bipolarity, and the US engaged in 17 military operations in the Middle East from 1985–1995. The Middle East experienced more interventions than any other region from 1946–1988 (Pearson and Baumann 1993–94).

Finally, the dependence of the Middle East on the core was sustained by the lack of a regional security community. The fragmentation of the regional economy retarded the complex interdependence that underlies security communities elsewhere. But equally important was the world hegemons' ability to prevent the 'organisation of the region' by a regional hegemon against the core. According to Lustick (1997), there are no Middle East great powers because no indigenous actor is allowed to expand by challenging artificial boundaries in the name of Pan-Arab empire or Islamic revolution. Indeed, interventions by the core powers to smash potential regional hegemons bracket the history of the modern Middle East, beginning with the great powers' defeat of

Muhammad Ali's attempted Egyptian empire (1840–1841) and repeated against Saddam's Iraq 150 years later. As such, the region lacks a core state that, as Huntington (1998: 174–9) argues, would be pivotal to the establishment of an autonomous region. Thus, global hierarchy and regional anarchy each reinforces the other.

Agency in the Middle East periphery

What are the consequences of the incorporation of the Middle East into the core-periphery system for the foreign policies of regional states? Arguably the effect is two-fold: both dependency and rebellion. This section examines, first, how far dependent states have agency and, second, why a few rebel but most acquiesce in their dependency.

Crippled agents: the foreign policy of the 'dependent state'

Because Westphalian sovereignty has its own independent logic at odds with clientalist hierarchy, even dependent states seek to defend their autonomy and security. What makes them different, however, is that they are more likely to sacrifice the first to the second; they pursue their own interests, but conceive them in a very narrow way — regime survival through the resources or protection of the patron. It is not that dependent regimes simply follow orders from their patron, since there is always some room for bargaining built into the structure of clientalism. But it is part of the deal that, when called upon, the client supports its patron, whatever regional interests must be sacrificed.

The interests sacrificed to keep core patronage are those that IR theory expects states to pursue when they enjoy 'normal' autonomy. Realism would expect the larger Middle Eastern states to seek regional hegemony and to balance against external intervention. While there is evidence of this, what is striking is its regular failure (Lustick 1997). For constructivists, states' identities shape their foreign policies (Barnett 1998; Telhami and Barnett 2002) and, given the counter-hegemonic identities — Arabism and Islam — that dominate the region, reflected in pervasive anti-imperialist public sentiment, the Arab states ought to group together against the 'other' — notably Israel and the hegemon. Yet, currently most Middle East states actually *contain rather than express* the dominant identities of their mass publics. Arab elites are widely seen as *caught* between the demands of the hegemon and domestic expectations that a proper Arab or Islamic foreign policy would defend regional autonomy and causes such as Palestine. At best they try to balance between these contrary demands, but the increasingly intrusive hegemon is making this ever more

difficult: a landmark was the Iraq war of 2003, when publics were uniformly against the war while every single Arab state except Syria acquiesced in it, some even allowing their territory to be used to prosecute it. Their dependent position in the international system clearly overrides the identity of their populations in shaping their policies. What is striking about Middle East states is that, inconsistent with realism and constructivism but perfectly compatible with structuralism, their modal behaviour is *bandwagoning* with the core.

What explains this 'unnatural' behaviour? For Moon (1995) a 'constrained consensus' between core and periphery elites issues from similar (Western) education, common economic interests and shared perceptions of threat from radical counter-elites. This fits the profile of many Middle Eastern state elites; thus, Alnasrawi (1991: 102–6) argues that the Arab oil producers export their capital to the West in part because their bankers and finance ministers learned their neo-liberal economics there. Rosenau's (1969) concept of a 'penetrated state', in which powerful foreigners participate through intensive face-to-face interactions in a weaker state's political process, is certainly so of the Middle East. There the US ambassador may act — as his British counterpart once used to do — as a virtual proconsul, enjoying direct privileged access to rulers who themselves regularly visit Washington. In particular, those that are directly dependent on their yearly US subsidy, for example Egypt's president and Jordan's king, must demonstrate to the US Congress both their loyalty to America and their benevolence toward Israel. In such venues, these leaders are subjected to influence from powerful foreign patrons that is more immediately compelling than the expectations of their own populaces.

At another level, Moon (1995) observes that the more a state is imposed from the outside, rather than an organic internal product, as is common in the Middle East, the more national interest as an explanation of foreign policy is problematic. Stephen David (1991) argues that in fragmented societies elites pursue not a *national* interest but a *regime* interest often at odds with the former. The main threat is not other states but internal opposition; hence, the state's foreign policy is designed to cope with it by *omni-balancing*, that is, aligning with a more remote, hence less threatening core power in order to get the resources/protection to deal with the greater threat from within. Harknett and VanDerBerg (1997) qualify this by observing that in the Middle East opposition to regimes often takes a trans-state form, with internal and regional external threats interlinked. Although David believes he is adapting realism to the states of the periphery, in fact 'omni-balancing' presupposes the incorporation of periphery states into a clientalist hierarchy.

Finally, in low legitimacy states, security has a powerful economic side, since keeping the masses acquiescent and supporters loyal depends on delivery of economic benefits. Because such a high proportion of economic resources in Middle East states derives from external sources, either hydrocarbon rents or

strategic aid, rather than internal taxation, foreign policy is inevitably more responsive to external powers and markets than to indigenous expectations. Escude (1998) believes that periphery states so depend on access to economic resources to which the hegemon is gatekeeper that few of them, apart from a handful of rebels, want to pay the economic cost of defying the hegemon. If, in a realist world, the Arab states would align together to balance Israel, the economic dependency of Egypt and Jordan on the US prevents this, leaving the relatively economically independent Syria as a sole balancer: dependency for the former states overrides both identity and security.

In summary, incentives for dependent states are structured by hierarchy such that what would otherwise be the driving forces of foreign policy — regional ambitions or indigenous identity — must often be sacrificed, constrained or repressed in deference to core patrons.

Revisionist *vs* status quo: explaining variations among periphery states

Built into hierarchic structures are, however, incentives to revolt as well as submit. The Middle East features *both* some of the world's most dependent states, small buffer or city states that are naturally *status quo* and prone to bandwagoning with the core, such as Jordan and Kuwait, and also a disproportionate number of the global minority of revisionist ('rogue' in Washington parlance) states — Libya, Iran, Iraq and Syria — that challenge external constraints. The weakness of regional states may incentivise 'omni-balancing' but some states have opted for 'reverse omni-balancing', appeasing internal opinion through anti-imperialist policies. Weak states may require a patron, but during the Cold War some took the risks of breaking with their former colonial masters and seeking protection with the emergent revisionist Soviet superpower, while others saw it as a threat. Clearly, the systemic hierarchy does not wholly determine precisely how states respond to it. So what determines whether a state challenges the systemic order or is content with its subordinate place in that order?

Social forces, state formation and foreign policy tangents

To understand this, structuralists examine the *balance of social forces* within the state and particularly the *social composition* of the ruling elite, with privileged groups expected to be satisfied with the *status quo* position of their state in the global hierarchy and dissatisfied elements to emerge from more plebeian strata. However, the struggle of social forces is itself shaped by state formation paths and the main initial differentiation in pathways in the Middle East was between regimes originating in imposition or co-optation from without (with satisfied groups dominant) and those arising out of revolution against this (bringing plebeian strata to power). Whether revolution takes

place is, in turn, intimately related to the extent of damage done by imperialism: where the struggle for independence was especially prolonged (Egypt), or where identity was frustrated by imperial boundary drawing (Syria) or economic resources (land, oil) appropriated by foreigners (Algeria), revolutions were more likely. Such differential state formation paths built *revisionist or status quo* foreign policy tangents into regimes that shaped differential responses to similar strategic situations.

A cursory comparison of Syria and Jordan exposes the importance of initially different state formation paths for foreign policy (Hinnebusch and Quilliam 2006). Both states were carved out of historic Syria (*bilad ash-sham*), their populations had similar Arab-Islamic identities and both were vulnerable to more powerful states; as such, they would be expected by constructivist and realist theories to behave similarly. Yet the contrary origins of their ruling regimes and the social forces incorporated into them shaped quite different foreign policies. Jordan was literally created by British boundary drawing for its Hashemite clients (1923) in a territory meant to serve as a buffer between Palestine under Zionist colonisation and the wider Arab-Islamic world. The incapacity of this impoverished society to support a state, hence the regime's extreme dependency on Western subsidies, made the Hashemites autonomous of domestic opinion and responsive to Western expectations in the conduct of foreign policy. Even in the era of Pan-Arabism, when elected nationalist politicians demanded a break with the West, a royal coup (1957) backed by tribal units of the army turned back the nationalist tide. The state was consolidated by the disproportionate recruitment of pre-nationalist Bedouin tribes into the army and the relative marginalisation of the nationalist-minded urban middle class and later the Palestinian majority. The regime's identity, that of a moderate buffer state, largely *contained* rather than *expressed* the identity of the state's majority population. Its foreign policy was naturally *status quo* bandwagoning with the West.

If the Jordanian regime was the beneficiary of the break-up of historic *bilad as-sham*, Syria was the victim, generating a deep-seated revisionism and Pan-Arab identification in its political culture. While Jordan's monarchy survived the Arab nationalist era, Syria's nationalist middle class infiltrated the army and mobilised the peasantry in overthrowing the old oligarchy (1963); the resulting Ba'thist regime disproportionately incorporated plebeian social forces with a revisionist nationalist orientation. Being threatened rather than protected by the West, the Ba'th was more dependent for survival on domestic legitimacy from a nationalist foreign policy; having a more diversified economy and more diversified external dependencies, including dense links with the East Bloc during the Cold War, Syria was enabled to defy the West as Jordan could not. Hence, the Syrian regime's Arab nationalist identity tended to *express* rather than *repress* popular identity in its foreign policy, which has

mixed radical revisionism and a more realist policy of balancing against (Western/Israeli) threats.

These contrary origins put Syria and Jordan on enduring divergent tangents and on opposite sides of the periodic conflicts in the region. While Syria was the target of Western-sponsored subversion in the 1950s, Jordan's monarchy was propped up by British intervention (1958) against Arab nationalist subversion. In the 1960s, Syria sponsored Palestinian militancy, while in 1970 Jordan's monarchy decisively repressed it and benefited from Israeli and US threats against Syria's attempt to intervene on the Palestinians' behalf (during 'Black September'). In the 1980s, King Hussein pursued peace diplomacy with Israel that excluded Syria, which did everything possible to upset such a settlement. In the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq war, King Hussein supported Iraq's effort to blunt Iran's export of Islamic revolution in the Arab world, while Syria aligned with revolutionary Iran and helped it foster Hizbollah in Lebanon.

Foreign policy tangents are not, of course, fixed indefinitely. Indeed, systemic pressures may reinforce or dilute a regime's original tangent; however, it takes a change in the social composition of elites to transform it. When dissatisfied plebeian elites seize power, foreign policy can be rapidly and durably transformed, as happened when revolutions turned Iraq (1958) and Iran (1979) from pillars into challengers of the Western-dominated regional order. But change can also happen incrementally; hence the *embourgeoisement* of initially radical elites tends to give them an increasing stake in the *status quo* over time, as happened in Egypt and Algeria, leading to foreign policy accommodation with the West.

The political economy roots of foreign policy

Underlying state formation and foreign policy tangents are deeper political economy factors. Marxist analysis expects periphery states to promote a transition to capitalism. The main issue is whether they can pursue national capitalist roads able to break out of the periphery and compatible with foreign policy autonomy, or whether the requisites of capitalist development push convergence, via integration into the world capitalist economy, toward foreign policy bandwagoning with the core. Ayubi (1995) sees the Middle East state as a function of 'articulated modes of production', hybrid formations typical of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist modes, which allow for considerable variation in how far regimes extend or constrain foreign capitalist penetration and, hence, variation in their foreign policy tangents.

One typical pathway was the rentier monarchy in which external patronage and oil revenues consolidated the rule of pre-capitalist tribal fractions around city-states or desert emirates. Ismail (1993) showed that Kuwait's formation

resulted from Britain's severing it from Iranian and Ottoman trade networks (1899), its natural economic hinterland; since development in Kuwait would only make sense in such a regional context, the proceeds of oil were either expended on imports, marginalising local productive forces, or invested abroad in the productivity of the core, with the dominant classes transformed into *compradors* — middlemen — with the capitalist world. Their interests attached to the core and their survival dependent on its security guarantees against neighbouring nationalist states, bandwagoning is the natural foreign policy behaviour of such regimes, although they attempt to disguise it from their populations.

In non-oil settled societies, the early independence period (1945–1954) was one of agrarian capitalist export economies under landed oligarchies, corresponding to a dependent form of foreign policy. The subsequent rise of radical military republics (1952–1970) reflected a stage when the landed oligarchy had lost national leadership but an industrial bourgeoisie had yet to emerge, leaving a leadership gap filled by military officers and intellectuals of petit bourgeois origin. Consolidating power through populist alliances with parts of the working and peasant classes and through 'overdevelopment' of the bureaucratic and military arms of the state, these 'Bonapartist' regimes (after Marx's (1991) analysis of Napoleon III) carried out 'passive' (Cox 1996: 128–30, referring to Gramsci) 'revolutions from above' (Trimberger 1978). Their balancing between domestic class forces was seen to correspond to external balancing between the superpowers during the Cold War.

Aware that an autonomous foreign policy was impossible without some measure of economic independence, such regimes all tried to dilute the dependency established under previous client oligarchies, notably through land reform and nationalisations of foreign trade. Through state-led import substitution industrialisation (ISI) they sought to break out of the economic peripheralisation suffered by primary product exporters. This option was made possible by Soviet aid and markets and/or by nationalising oil resources controlled by Western companies. Particularly where nationalist states assumed control of their own oil resources — Iraq, Iran, Libya, Algeria — they were able to sustain a nationalist foreign policy for some time.

But overcoming dependency is no easy thing, especially where such resources are lacking. In the Egyptian case, once the statist national economy reached a dead-end (1966–1970), a reviving Egyptian bourgeoisie sought reintegration into the world capitalist market, and once President Sadat found it would win him their support plus American aid and diplomatic help with Israel, he transformed Egypt's foreign policy (1974–1980) from a bulwark of anti-imperialism under Nasser to the gateway by which American influence came back into the Middle East. Under Sadat's successor, Mubarak (1980–2011), Egypt's dependence on US economic aid locked it into a

pro-American foreign policy at the expense of its Pan-Arab leadership and its autonomy; for example, dependence on the US forced Egypt to give way on making the renewal of its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty membership contingent on Israel's accession to the treaty. In short, transformations in the foreign policies of states correlated with changes in their economic position in the core-periphery system.

By the 1980s, all the Arab republics increasingly moved toward reintegration into the world market. Suffering from failures of capital accumulation, the exhaustion of import substitute industrialization (ISI), fiscal crisis, debt and the end of Soviet aid, they needed to revitalise private and foreign investment. They all embraced economic liberalisation and partial privatisation of state industry while the local bourgeoisie entered partnerships with transnational corporations (TNCs) and often exported capital through new local branches of Western banks, thereby restoring much of the old dependency. The social base of the state was transformed as a new alliance of the bureaucracy with foreign and private capitalists excluded popular forces. Authoritarian power was now used to enforce investor-friendly measures demanded by international financial institutions against the working public (e.g. reversing food subsidies, labour rights and land reform, etc.) and to protect new inequalities amidst growing class conflict and nativist reaction (from political Islam) to Western cultural invasion. The state was turned from a buffer against the world economy into Cox's (1996: 154) 'transmission belt'. Despite the rise of a new rich, no regional state (except perhaps Turkey) looked poised to break into the semi-periphery of 'newly industrialised states' (NICs).

This had inevitable foreign policy consequences. Both economic integration into the world capitalist market and growing domestic legitimacy deficits pressured all states toward 'omni-balancing' or bandwagoning with the West. This could be delayed by special factors — oil wealth, a nationally mobilised public, the institutionalisation of statist/populist interests, Western sanctions — as in Iraq, Iran and Syria. Indeed, it took full-scale US invasion to put an end to nationalist defiance in the former; but the material base of a nationalist foreign policy is precarious enough in the latter two states that it is, ironically, mostly American hostility that deters their reintegration into the world capitalist system.

The struggle over hierarchy

Having rebellion built into it, the core-periphery hierarchy is a focus of on-going contestation, and nowhere more than in the Middle East, where revisionist states periodically attempt to overturn or at least restructure it (while pulling themselves into the semi-periphery), and the world hegemons and their agents

seek to sustain it. In every decade of the first half century of formal 'independence' in the region (1950–2000), major challenges to the region's subordinate position in the core-periphery structure have been mounted: Nasserist Pan-Arabism from the 1950s, the Palestine Liberation Movement from the 1960s, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in the 1970s, Iran's Islamic revolution in the 1980s, Saddam's Iraq in the 1990s, the Bin Laden phenomenon in the 2000s. What is equally striking, however, is the regular defeat of these efforts: agents, whether movements or states, wielding ideas, however powerful, cannot prevail without overcoming material structural constraints. Explaining these struggles and their outcomes illustrates the power of structuralist analysis.

Two failed bids for regional autonomy

The rise and decline of Pan-Arabism

The Pan-Arab movement launched by Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser after the 1952 revolution, in concert with kindred trans-state movements in the other Arab states, aimed to roll back Western dominance in the region and create a relatively autonomous Arab system with Cairo at its centre. This struggle was conducted through a battle for public opinion over the Western-proposed Baghdad Pact (1954–1958) between Egypt, which saw it as neo-imperialism, and pro-Western Iraq. Nasser's Pan-Arab message mobilised the emerging new middle classes across the region, putting the narrow-based pro-Western oligarchies on the defensive. His survival of the 1956 Suez war, by which Britain and France sought to reverse his gains, followed by the 1958 revolution in pro-Western Iraq consolidated a Pan-Arab regime in the region whose norms delegitimised Western treaties and bases and dictated support for the Palestine cause and Arab unity (Gerges 1994: 21–40; Barnett 1998: 100–95).

Pan-Arabism depended, however, on a specific power balance, namely a temporary coincidence during the decade 1956–1967 of bipolarity at the global level (disunity in the core) combined with regional Egyptian hegemony overcoming anarchy at the regional level. As regards the global level, Nasserism was made possible by the patronage that the Soviet Union provided for nationalist states seeking to disengage from the West and by its countervailing power that checked the unrestrained projection of Western military capability into the region; without bipolarity, the Suez invasion would have overthrown Nasser just as earlier challengers like Iraq's Rashid Ali had been removed (Gerges 1994: 22–30, 67). The importance of bipolarity was immediately evident once it ended: without a Soviet check on its power, the US hegemon rapidly defeated Saddam Hussein's 1991 bid to make Iraq the Prussia of the Arab world.

At the regional level, Pan-Arabism depended on Egypt's temporary inter-Arab hegemony that kept the Arab states relatively united against imperialism. However, to endure, a regional 'hegemon' must enjoy *both* superior material resources and a legitimating ideology having universalistic appeal. Nasser's hegemonic power was essentially normative — his ability to mobilise the Arab street against rival regimes that defied his definition of the all-Arab interest — but it was still rooted in Egypt's material power as the largest Arab state with the biggest population, army and economy. Egypt could not sustain its ideological hegemony when the material balance shifted against it: its 1967 defeat by Israel shattered its army and enervated its economy while the growing wealth of the Gulf petro-monarchies soon made Cairo dependent on them (Telhami 1990: 96–7; Noble 1991: 65). In short, the brief autonomy of the regional system under Pan-Arabism was a function of temporary anomalies in the structure of the core-periphery system: disunity in the core and unity in the periphery.

At a deeper level, the global material hierarchy obstructed Pan-Arabism. Because the core-periphery economic structure remained intact, Pan-Arab identity lacked an underlying economic/material base. In Samir Amin's narrative (1978), the region-wide trade interdependence fostered under the Middle East's historic empires (and associated with universalistic Arab-Islamic identities), had been shattered by the West's post-Ottoman fragmentation of the regional market into state-bounded economies exporting primary products to the 'core'. This pulled the economic interests of dominant classes (exporting landlords, petro-shaikhs) out of correspondence with Arabism even as it was emerging as a dominant post-Ottoman mass identity. Ironically, the later efforts of Arab nationalist states to break their economic dependence on the West only issued in protected inward-looking economies and demolished the rudimentary Pan-Arab industrial bourgeoisie that might have developed a stake in regional markets. No more than 9 per cent of Arab foreign trade was with other Arab states in the 1950s–1960s. Thus, Pan-Arabism's ideological superstructure, corresponding to no Pan-Arab economy, lacked a material infrastructure (Alnasrawi 1991: 163). The incongruence between norms and material structure deepened in the 1970s as revenues from the oil boom consolidated separate rentier or semi-rentier states relatively autonomous of their publics and more immune to the influence of trans-state Pan-Arabism, while differentiating the material interests of the Arabs into rich and poor states.

The failure of OPEC

The 1970s through the 1990s saw a struggle increasingly centred on control of oil between the world hegemon and regional forces. A major watershed in this was the creation of the OPEC, a second attempt to restructure the

core-periphery relation. Because of a sharp tightening of the oil market (plus a bipolar world order), OPEC was able to engineer price rises and nationalisations of oil reserves that forced a big transfer of wealth to the Middle East. Through the oil embargo during the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Arabs, led by Saudi Arabia, were also able to force the US to try to broker a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had come to politicise the Arab-Western oil relation. For a while it was thought that political influence would follow riches, that Arab oil would mean Arab power.

Two classic structuralist studies by Alnasrawi (1991) and Bromley (1991: 124–62) explain why this did not happen: oil, like other primary commodities, only deepened dependency. It did not translate into Arab power because instead of petrodollars being invested in regional development, they were 'recycled' — invested in Western real estate, banks, massive arms purchases, imports and contracts brokered by middlemen, creating powerful interests linking the Arab oil producers to the core and detaching them from the Arab world: over 90 per cent of Arab foreign investment was funnelled outside the Arab world. The relation between the US and Saudi Arabia, the swing producer on the international oil market with a unique capacity to affect oil prices, actually deepened after the oil boom: enormously rich, but also strategically weak because it eschewed the creation of a citizen army for fear of a nationalist coup, the al-Saud recycled its surpluses through US banks and treasury deposits and in the massive purchase of expensive American arms in return for US protection against regional enemies. The 1973 oil embargo, rather than bringing the US to pressure Israel into a comprehensive evacuation of the occupied territories, ultimately led Washington to broker a separate Egyptian-Israeli peace (1980) that tilted the power balance in Israel's favour and which Saudi Arabia rejected by ending aid to Egypt. Under Reagan, America's pro-Israeli policies actually hardened. Yet Saudi Arabia, partly out of fear of revolutionary Iran, continued in the 1980s to pump such large amounts of oil at American behest that world oil prices collapsed, to the detriment of all of OPEC. Oil was by no means exempt from the boom and bust, typical of primary product commodity prices. And if Saudi Arabia had appeared briefly to be an emerging second Arab hegemon, it had been quickly captured by the global hegemon.

Across the Arab world, dependence on oil revenues — instead of taxes and investment — had fuelled a decade (1975–1985) of massive imports and overconsumption; but when oil prices collapsed in 1986, the result was debt and capital drain to the core, making the region vulnerable to structural adjustments and the conditionality terms of the World Bank and IMF (Alnasrawi 1991: 175–7, 184). Meanwhile, the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Iran–Iraq war sharply increased the insecurity and dependence of the Arab Gulf states on American protection. Through creeping naval intervention in

the Gulf during the Iran–Iraq war (reflagging Kuwaiti tankers in 1987), the US hegemon established a role in preserving oil supplies for Europe and Japan and protecting its local clients. At the end of the Iran–Iraq war, the Arab Gulf states continued over-pumping oil in return for American protection, deepening Iraq's post-war debt problems and leading to the invasion of Kuwait.

Re-invigoration of hierarchy: oil, US hegemony and the Iraq wars

In a bipolar world, structural limits on the power of the US hegemon made the Western core's management of the Middle East difficult, but the end of the Cold War represented a new opportunity for it to reinvigorate global hierarchy in the region. This section surveys the voluminous structuralist literature on the Iraq wars, showing their origins in and consequences for the struggle over hierarchy.

The US drive for undisputed hegemony over the Middle East was mounted in two wars against Iraq, a potential regional hegemon. These wars, according to Klare (2003) and Rupert and Soloman (2006: 120), were ultimately down to the 'driving thirst for the petroleum concentrated beneath areas of the world in which Muslims predominate …' . Indeed, control of oil is central to US global hegemony (Bromley 1991; Bina 1993; Kubursi and Mansur 1993). Oil is the pivotal strategic commodity, crucial to military power and to the main industries — autos, aircraft, fertilisers, petro-chemicals — of the energy-intensive world capitalist economy. Readily monopolised, it generates huge superprofits (30 per cent is normal) for US companies, which have funded the most powerful American political forces (grouped in the Republican Party). Before WWII, Washington sought control of Middle East oil resources by extracting shares from British firms in Iraq, Iran and Kuwait while mono-polising Saudi oil fields. During the Cold War, oil became the object of joint strategic planning by government and oil companies, and every US national security doctrine — Truman, Eisenhower, Nixon, Carter, Bush II — has focused on perceived threats to Western control of Middle East oil from the Soviet Union or local nationalism (Halliday 2005: 97–100).

The US used its control of Middle East oil to ensure cheap energy supplies for globalised world capitalism, reflective of the global reach of its TNCs, the interdependence of the world market and the emergence of a trans-state capitalist class (Van der Pijl 1998). This buttressed the credibility of Washington's claim to a global hegemony essential to the world capitalist economy, but it also gave the US structural power over other capitalist states that the US used to advance its competitive advantage (Burbach and Tarbell 2004: 58–60; Halliday 2005: 138–43; Petras and Veltmeyer 2005: 127–59; Stokes 2005). The US used the 1973 oil crisis to reassert its financial hegemony *vis-à-vis* other

capitalist economies by suborning Saudi elites to recycle their surpluses into US treasury bonds and to keep selling oil in dollars despite its dramatic drop in value, while soliciting massive Saudi and Iranian purchases of US weapons (Spiro 1999). The need to buy oil in dollars requires all states to earn them through access to the US market on Washington's terms and impels its competitors to invest dollar surpluses in US treasury bonds. The consequent influx of dollars, allowing the US to ignore financial constraints on its imperial ambitions and enabling US capital investment at lower costs, amounts to a virtual tax on America's economic competitors (Cox 1996: 287–92; Hudson 2003).

What complicates US control of oil, however, is its support for Israel's ambition to incorporate the 'Occupied Territories', which, in alienating Middle East opinion, politicises the oil relation and jeopardises alliances with client states such as Saudi Arabia. Balancing between Israel and the Arab oil states requires that the US appear to seek a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict — even as it funds the creeping Israeli colonisation of remaining Palestinian territory that obstructs such a resolution (Schwenninger 2003). This periodically inspires efforts by Arab nationalists to use oil as a weapon against the West. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was in part a manifestation of this dynamic.

Saddam Hussein's invasion was rooted in the structural liabilities built into Iraq's creation by imperialism. His formula for holding a fragmented artificial state together included a hard authoritarianism legitimised by oil-funded development and an Arab nationalist ideology that required action on behalf of Arab causes. Iraq's immediate vulnerability in 1990 was the debt accumulated in the war with Iran, exacerbated by low oil prices brought on by over-pumping in Kuwait and the UAE, which Saddam saw as economic warfare. Arab nationalist ideology viewed Kuwait as an artificial state carved out of Iraq's territory and denying it strategic access to the Gulf. Ideology also shaped Saddam's ambition, in the wake of his apparent victory over Iran, to become a new Nasser. Setting out to revive Arab nationalism, he demanded that the Arab states not allow foreign bases and that the oil monarchies share their wealth with poorer Arab states. Warning of the shift in the power balance against the Arabs resulting from the decline of the Soviet Union and Soviet Jewish emigration to Israel, he threatened to use non-conventional weapons against Israel should it attack an Arab state and proposed to use oil as a weapon to force a change in Washington's pro-Israel policy (Mufti 1996: 98–167, 194–230; Hinnebusch 2003: 205–12).

Saddam's invasion of Kuwait was meant both to solve his financial problems and to give potential material muscle to his Pan-Arab ideological challenge. Were Iraq to have retained Kuwaiti oil fields and remained in a position to intimidate Saudi Arabia, it could nullify Saudi Arabia's role as pro-Western

swing oil producer and give Saddam hegemony over 40 per cent of world oil reserves — at a time when American reserves had shrunk from 34 to 7 per cent of the global total. Iraq would still have had to sell its oil, and its dire need for revenue dictated that, in the short term, it would pump oil at levels likely to keep prices moderate. But unlike Saudi Arabia, which, by virtue of its security dependence on the US and investments in the Western economy, could be depended upon to moderate prices and recycle oil earnings through Western banks and through the purchase of Western arms, Iraq was not similarly dependent and was threatening to make its oil policy conditional on a favourable Western policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Were Iraq able to dictate *the terms on which the West received oil*, it would trap US politicians between the demands of the Israeli lobby and US consumers' appetite for cheap gasoline (Hinnebusch 2003).

There is no doubt that Washington welcomed a war with Iraq. Saddam's invasion was a threat to its interests and allies, including Israel and pro-Western Arab regimes and a violation of the Westphalian order with its artificial borders. But it was also an *opportunity* for the US to establish direct hegemony over the region and its oil that, from the time of OPEC and the nationalisation of Western oil companies, had to be exercised more indirectly, through client states. Because the invasion coincided with the USSR's withdrawal from global competition with the US, the risk of a superpower confrontation that would hitherto have restrained US intervention on such a massive scale was removed. War was also a chance to destroy Iraq as a regional power: Iraq was the prime example of what the Pentagon had identified as the main remaining post-Cold War opposition to US hegemony, Third World nationalist regimes. Saddam's offer of withdrawal from Kuwait in return for Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories exposed US double standards and it was believed that any sign of US weakness toward him would encourage challenges to US interests across the region. Even were Saddam to retreat from Kuwait, if his forces remained intact, he would be a threat needing constant containment and in a position to revive Arab nationalism; hence, Washington brushed aside Saddam's readiness to withdraw on the eve of the ground campaign. A low cost military victory through the unrestrained use of America's high-tech military power against Iraq would warn other challengers that, as Bush put it, *what we say goes*, banish the Vietnam syndrome that had constrained US involvement in conflicts abroad and justify a new post-Cold War mission for the US military-industrial complex. The US had long sought extensive military bases in the Gulf but had been rebuffed by regimes reluctant to violate the norms of Arab nationalism: Saddam's threat could be used to sweep aside their qualms. Finally, war was an opportunity to demonstrate the dependence of America's economic competitors on its hegemonic role in securing oil supplies and ensure that Gulf

petrodollars would continue to be primarily recycled through US institutions and serve US competitiveness; so successful was this that the US got its economic competitors (Germany, Japan) and clients (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait) to fund the war (Kubursi and Mansur 1993; Aarts 1994; Klare 1991; Hinnebusch 2003: 215–8; Kubursi 2006).

The war appeared to establish a *Pax Americana* in the Middle East. Iraq's destruction as a military power and its subsequent economic debilitation under sanctions eliminated its threat to oil, while the blow suffered by Arab nationalism allowed the norm against treaties and bases to be swept aside as the Gulf was made a virtual Western protectorate. America's unprecedented military presence in the Gulf allowed it to put the two major nationalist powers, Iraq and Iran, under 'dual containment' while the US-Saudi alliance was greatly strengthened. The potential to legitimise this massive US presence by successful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict appeared promising as Secretary Baker told the Israelis to 'give up the dream of greater Israel'. US brokerage of the Madrid peace process made Washington appear indispensable to peace in the region and all regional states started bandwagoning with it. Yet, *Pax Americana* ultimately failed and a mere decade later, the hegemon again went to war against Iraq.

The root cause of this failure was that America's neo-imperial presence in the region could not be legitimised and instead sparked a radicalised Islamic resistance. The Middle East was both the most Western-penetrated periphery region yet also the most ideologically resistant since in Islam it had a credible counter-hegemonic ideology (Cox 1996: 311; Halliday 2002; Gill 2003: 115). But in a period when unipolarity had reduced nearly all Middle East states to clients of the hegemon, resistance took the form of sub-state terrorism, the weapon of the weak: the most international terrorist incidents issued from the most penetrated region. Two aspects of US policy were particularly responsible for delegitimising its presence in the region. First, the breakdown of the peace process, clear by 2000, amidst continued Israeli colonisation of the Palestinian territories, drove an increasing wedge between the US and the Arabs who had been promised a peace settlement for their support of the US in the 1990 Gulf War; indeed, the George Bush Jr. administration eschewed a peace process that could only succeed by pressuring Israel to reverse its colonisation of occupied Palestinian lands. Second was the US use of its presence in Saudi Arabia to launch repeated attacks on Iraq and the near-genocidal sanctions by which it hoped to inflict so much punishment on the Iraqi people that they would revolt against Saddam; sanctions, however, only made people more dependent on his regime for daily survival and outraged Arab opinion. This combination of factors precipitated the 9/11 attack of al-Qaida against what it saw as an assault on Islam by a 'Zionist-Crusader alliance occupying Jerusalem and the land of the two holy

mosques' and starkly exposed the vulnerability of the US to terrorism from the Middle East.

The 2003 war on Iraq was the product of the hawkish coalition that George Bush's election brought to power, the Israeli-aligned neo-cons and the oil/arms men around Vice President Cheney and Defence Secretary Rumsfeld. They saw 9/11 as an *opportunity* to mobilise support for a war they had long advocated as the key to reasserting US global hegemony. The Middle East was the location both of world oil reserves essential to this hegemony and of the main resistance to it, and war on Iraq was seen as the key to control of the Middle East (Petras and Veltmeyer 2005: 186–204; Hinnebusch 2007: 220).

US oil import dependence was rising in an ever-tighter oil market with global production seemingly peaking, threatening to shift the balance of power to oil producers and making the world economy vulnerable to an oil shock (Campbell 1997; Morse and Jaffe 2001: 4). Iraq, with the world's second-largest oil reserves and with very low production costs, was a solution to this. As long as Saddam was in power, though, Iraqi oil remained off the market — unless the US were to lift the sanctions and risk that Saddam would again try to use oil for political advantage (Almond 2003; Klare 2003; Duffield 2005). What made action urgent was the breakdown of the *Pax Americana* established after the first (1990–1991) Iraq war (Kubursi 2006: 254–6). Iraq and Iran were gradually escaping from 'dual containment': the Iraq sanctions were being challenged in the Arab world and Saddam was selling future oil concessions to Russia, China and France; Western Europe was keen to engage Iran rather than isolate it; and while US sanctions on Iran, retained at the insistence of the Israeli lobby, excluded US companies from its oil fields, US rivals were penetrating them. The US was also dissatisfied with the constraints on its policy from its dependence on the Saudis, who started refusing to allow it to attack Iraq from bases in the kingdom (Rogers 2008: 36–41) and were intimating that their moderation of oil prices was contingent on a US resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The participation of Saudi citizens in the 9/11 attacks and in funding al-Qaida gave the neo-cons the opportunity to demonise the kingdom. Feeling that the US ignored its interests, Saudi Arabia sought to ease its total US security dependence by rapprochement with Iran and Iraq. US hegemony in the Middle East rested on its unique ability to balance special relationships with *both* Israel and Saudi Arabia, but its tilt toward the former was alienating the latter. In conquering Iraq, the US would acquire a new compliant swing producer, reducing its dependence on the Saudis, and give the US privileged access to Iraqi oil at the expense of its economic competitors and its emerging global rival, China (Royle 2002). The US wanted to establish the right to attack countries it deemed threats and Iraq, both weak and easily demonised, was an exemplary case to establish the precedent. America's unmatched military power would be unleashed to deliver

the 'shock and awe' expected to bring the submission of the region. The US
hawks were encouraged by the cost-free 2002 invasion of Afghanistan that had
allowed the US to establish military bases astride the pipelines and oil fields of
Central Asia and in Russia's backyard. An easy victory in Iraq followed by
images of Iraqis welcoming US troops as liberators would demoralise Arab/
Islamic opposition to US hegemony (Lynch 2003). Iraq would become an
alternative site for US military bases to operate without constraint, intimidate
remaining resistance from nationalist states like Syria and Iran and hence allow
imposition of a pro-Israeli peace settlement. The imposition of a liberal order
in Iraq would vanquish the region's counter-hegemonic ideologies (Hinnebusch
2007: 221–3; Rogers 2008: 1–3).

The war would also serve particular interests of the ruling coalition
(Hinnebusch 2007: 223–4). Conflict in the Middle East was known to lead to
higher oil prices, especially needed for high-cost Texas producers, to high oil
company profits and to renewed arms spending and sales; the direct US
ownership of oil, curtailed by the rise of OPEC, could be restored by the
privatisation of Iraqi oil (Bichler and Nitzan 2004; Burbach and Tarbell 2004:
155–7). The reconstruction of Iraq would mean very good pickings for security,
construction and oil subcontracting companies, such as Halliburton, associated
with the Bush inner circle (Pringle 2005). The neo-cons believed war would
advance Israel's policy of colonisation in the Occupied Territories. Since this
obstructed a peace settlement and endangered the Arab relations on which oil
access depended, their nightmare was that the US would subordinate Israel's
ambitions to appeasement of the Arab oil producers (as Bush Sr. had briefly
attempted). The seizure of Iraq's oil fields would allow access to Arab oil
without Arab alliances and remove remaining constraints on US commitment
to Israeli interests (Lind 2002; Beinin 2003; Toenjes 2003; Bamford 2004;
Burbach and Tarbell 2004: 96–100; Pieterse 2004: 17–29; Packer 2005; Petras
and Veltmeyer 2005: 33–4, 81–2, 191–5).

The Iraq war has profound implications for conceptualising world hierarchy.
It undermines the view of the US as a reluctant empire dutifully defending world
order (Ferguson 2004) or as head of a new kind of 'empire' based on economic
globalisation rather than conquest of territory (Hardt and Negri 2000). Iraq
suggests that globalisation and coercive empire go together (Pieterse 2004; Stokes
2005), that war is still an instrument for seizing valuable territories, dragging
periphery states into the world capitalist system and putting in place durable
mechanisms for the exploitation of their resources (Robinson 1972; Klare 2002,
2003; Howe 2003; Hinnebusch 2006b; Pieterse 2004: 31–60; Petras and Veltmeyer
2005: 1–51; Falk 2004). US empire is a global network of client regimes and
military bases (Johnson 2004) and Iraq has been forcibly incorporated into it.

Yet, the Middle East could still be the site where US hegemony founders.
In invading Iraq, the US squandered enormous 'soft power', seen in the

sharp decline of America's image in world opinion, jeopardising neo-Gramscian hegemony (Brzezinski 2003; Pieterse 2004: 26) and the unity of the collective core whose backing the US needs in order to dominate the periphery (Volgy and Bailin 2003). The US also shows symptoms of imperial overreach (Burbach and Tarbell 2004). Washington imagined an easy high-tech war (Pieterse 2004: 85–105), but it badly overstretched the US military (Finlan 2006). The US seeks empire on the cheap but spending on Iraq, comparable to that on the Vietnam war, is having a similarly destabilising effect on the world financial system (Arrighi and Silver 2001; Pieterse 2004: 4; Seabrooke 2004: 41; Beeson and Higgott 2005). The ultimate test will be whether the US can turn Iraq and Afghanistan into client states or whether they will be exemplars of its 'empire of chaos' — of its ability to overthrow regimes but not to reconstruct the resulting failed states (Todd 2003). It is likely that US military dominance in the Middle East will remain unlegitimised, generating blowback and chronic war (Betts 2002; Barber 2003; Jervis 2003; Mann 2003; Johnson 2004). Each episode of American involvement in the Middle East spreads hostility wider: what began over Israel/Palestine in the Arab heartland spread next to Iran, thereafter to Afghanistan and Pakistan and, with the Iraq war, to the wider Muslim world and the Muslim Diaspora in the West. The single most potent generator of 'terrorism' is foreign occupation (Munson 2006: 238–41): now, to the occupation of Palestine is added that of Afghanistan and Iraq, which, according to former CIA anti-terrorist expert Michael Scheuer (2004), is 'completing the radicalization of the Islamic world'. As Rupert and Soloman (2006: 122) put it: 'By pursuing an aggressive, neo-imperial policy in the Middle East, the US … politically strengthens Islamist radicals and courts tragedy of world-historical magnitude'. The high costs of empire will not necessarily constrain Washington, however; as Petras and Veltmeyer (2005: 70–87) argue, it is ordinary people that pay the cost while the US ruling class, reaping enormous benefits, has every incentive to persist. The US generates the conditions of periodic Middle East crises that inflict damage globally and which it then uses to justify its ever deeper intervention in the region. Thus, a declining hegemon turns malign, delivering not public goods but global losses (Hinnebusch 2006a).

Conclusion: the Middle East experience through structuralist lens

This article has tried to demonstrate the indispensable contribution of the structuralist paradigm of world hierarchy to understanding the Middle East, albeit 'upgraded' through incorporation from rival traditions of the variables of anarchy, polarity and identity.

First, structuralism exposes the *origins* of the regional system by making the concept of imperialism, so marginalised in other theories, pivotal. Uneven capitalist development allowed imperialism to overrun the region, creating a fragmented, economically peripherialised system of weak states suffering from identity deficits. Imperialism established a powerful Western surrogate, Israel, in the region and secured the region's oil resources through client regimes. In the process, it relegated a once-great civilisation to the bottom of the global hierarchy.

Second, structuralism sensitises us to the *roots* of the ongoing *instability* in the Middle East. This current order, imposed against indigenous resistance, through coercion and co-optation and in violation of regional identity, lacks (neo-Gramscian) hegemony in the region, hence is subject to regular challenge by counter-hegemonic movements. The pervasive conflict in the regional system is not, thus, the outcome of anarchy *per se*, as realism would argue, but the particularly flawed version of anarchy imposed by imperialism, together with the region's incorporation into a global hierarchy. Constructivism stresses the power of identity in the region but it takes structuralism to appreciate how its *frustration* by externally imposed material hierarchies gives it a *revisionist* content. Extraordinary external penetration together with the enduring power of regional supra/trans-state identity (Arabism, Islam) has proved to be a highly explosive combination, driving the periodic mobilisation of grievances and the rise of revisionist movements and states that challenge the core.

Third, while structuralism is often criticised for a determinism that neglects local agency, when upgraded, it strikes a better *balance between structure and agency* than its rivals do, while at the same time, a structuralist framework also upgrades the utility of their concepts. Thus, structuralism avoids the exaggerated voluntarism of constructivism in showing that the regional system is less the product of 'what [local] states make of it' or of their intersubjective understandings than an outcome of the superior material power of imperialism and (often failed) resistance to it. Incorporated into structuralism, realist insights acquire new explanatory power: thus the idea of anarchy alerts us to the pervasive insecurity in the region, but it takes structuralism to show how this is used to enforce a clientalist hierarchy. The realist variable of polarity sensitises us to variations in core-periphery structure, specifically, how a combination of global bipolarity and regional unipolarity opened temporary opportunities for revisionist movements and states in the era of Pan-Arabism. If constructivism exposes how revisionist actors used identity to overcome the collective action problem and mobilise resistance to the core, structuralist analysis of material hierarchy indicates why this ultimately failed to transform the core-periphery system.

Fourth, upgraded structuralism better enables us to understand the *foreign policy behaviour* of regional states. Thus, realists and constructivists arriving

from Mars would expect the Arab states to collectively balance, on security and identity grounds, respectively, against the shared threats from the West and Israel; that they instead bandwagon with the core is understandable within the context of a clientele system, a peculiar form of hierarchy that thrives amidst anarchy, and while the omni-balancing variant of realism suggests why periphery states bandwagon, it presupposes without acknowledging this global hierarchy.

Finally, structuralism best allows us to understand, as other theories cannot, that imperialism, manifested in the invasion of Iraq, is not an aberration but, rather, an apparently enduring outcome of global capitalism. The invasion exposes the persistence of military conquest, resource wars and the attempted constitution of client states, only a decade after such phenomena were declared to be obsolete both by 'end of history' liberalism (Fukayama 1992) and constructivist-like accounts of a coercion-free empire of globalisation (Hardt and Negri 2000).

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