Middle East War Proness

1946-92, 9 of 21 inter-state wars were in MENA

- 4 of the 5 in the 1980s and 1990s (if Afghanistan is included in "greater" ME). MENA is now *unique* in experiencing inter-state wars.

- also state wars against sub-state movements (such as the Israeli attacks on Hizbollah and Hamas)

- and proxy wars of intervention (e.g, in Yemen and Syria)

**IS THERE SOMETHING DISTINCTIVE ABOUT MENA?**
Explaining War: Waltz’s three levels of analysis

Approaches to explaining war

- classical realism: the power hunger of leaders.
- Liberalism: non-democratic → bellicose → states
- neo-realism: anarchy of the system

- Waltz combines three levels of analysis individual, state, and system (structure).
- Method: coding 19 wars according to state; structural and individual causes → Suggestive patterns?
I. State Level: Bellicose States from Democracy Deficit?

1) Authoritarian republics

bellicosity built in for three reasons:

a) often military regimes → no checks on leader + based on the military which advocates force as solution to threats → states raison d’etre is defense → war (there were 7 of them but 14 times authoritarian-military republics involved in the 19 wars).

b) fragmented/frustrated artificial states → lacking legitimacy from shared national identity (owing to incongruence between territory and identity), seek it through nationalist (irredentist) foreign policies → war. These are frequently also authoritarian military regimes,

only two fragmented republics -- Iraq/Syria → are involved in 8/19 wars. Iraq, the centre of three wars, aggressor in 2).
I. State Level: Bellicose States from Democracy Deficit?

- revolutionary/ideological movements/republics → revolutionary movements that either come to power or assume state attributes

- seek to export the revolution’s ideology

- have an ideological (black/white) view of the world;

- attract attacks by states threatened by export of revolutionary ideology

- *Islamic Iran involved in two war; Nasser’s revolutionary Egypt was attacked twice—Suez in 1956 and 1967; PLO, Hizbollah and Hamas were each involved in wars with Israel*

- altogether 5 are involved in 7/19 wars.

- Altogether, 9 Auth and revolutionary republics involved 17 times in the 19 wars: hence the most war prone in absolute terms
2. **Monarchies**, the other main form of authoritarian regime, less war prone.

- Legitimacy based on tradition, not nationalism, many are weak, also satisfied and depending on Western support, therefore status quo

- 7 monarchies involved in 10/19 wars; but in 2 cases (Jordan, Kuwait) were victims of aggression;

- Moroccon invasion of Western Sahara, the most aggressive war: is the most “republic like” monarchy (needing nationalist legitimacy).

- Saudi Arabia intervened twice in Yemen.
State Level: Bellicose States from Democracy Deficit?

- 3. **Democracies** are supposed to be more pacific in that checks and balances and public opinion constrain war proneness.

- Yet, although there are only 4 democracies in the region, they were involved in 12/19 wars. (+US involved in 2 wars) = 14/19 → relatively speaking, the **most war prone** states

- Two **semi-democracies** (Turkey and Lebanon might be expected to be more war prone but involved in only 3 wars

- while the one full regional democracy, Israel, involved in 7 regional wars
State Level: Bellicose States from Democracy Deficit?

- Turkey is less war prone than Israel because it is a status quo state (its borders satisfy national identity).

- Israel is revisionist.

- A settler state, it combines land/water hunger to absorb immigrants + dissatisfaction with initial borders = expansionary impulse.
State Level: Bellicose States from Democracy Deficit?

Conclusions:

1. Many MENA states are quite war-prone

2. Yet, democratic vs authoritarian distinctions, has limited explanatory power
   
   some authoritarian and democratic regimes are war prone, others not.
   
   the most democratic state is the most war-prone.

2. More important whether a state is revisionist
   
   which cuts across authoritarian-democratic divide

3. Why should there be so many revisionist states in MENA?
The Anarchic Structure of the International System

- For neo-realism the *anarchy* of states systems is the ultimate root of war. Since anarchy is universal and war unequally distributed, *kind* of anarchy must matters (as Wendt argues).

- A. MENA Regional System as Hobbesian Anarchy:

- From the flawed Construction of the MENA states system → generated high war propensity.
MENA’s Hobbesian-Oriented Anarchy:

1. **Irredentism**: built-into the system by arbitrary imperial boundary drawing:
   - leaving incongruence between identity/nation and state/territory, inspiring revisionist Pan-movements (B Miller)
   - disputed boundaries → dissatisfaction with borders, contested by states and trans-state movements → war
   - leaving two state-less peoples (Palestinians and Kurds) whose revisionism directly implicated in x wars
   - **Territorial disputes, mixed with irredentism: 10/19 wars; one of the single largest driver of war.**

Irredentism is unequally distributed across the system: the most irredentist states should be the most war-prone (Israel, Iraq, Syria)
MENA’s Hobbesian-Oriented Anarchy:

• 2) **Ideological heterogeneity**: lack shared norms/conflicting legitimacy principles (International Society approach);

• republican revolutions against British sponsored client monarchies in 1960s → 1960 Yemen war)

• Superceded by cleavage between secular and Islamist legitimation of republics, a factor in the Iran-Iraq War;

• Today by wars of Sunni vs Shia legitimimized regimes.

• Ideology was a factor in 7/19 wars.
MENA’s Hobbesian-Oriented Anarchy:

3. **Weak economic interdependencies** → lack of shared economic interests that would be damaged in war and that could counter the destabilizing factors and constrain war (Liberalism).

- imperial construction of the regional states system snapped cross regional trading links and re-oriented them into a core-periphery dependency system.

- reaction to dependency → state led import-substitute industrialization (tariffs) → prevents re-construction of regional trading links.
State Reactions to Insecurity of Hobbesian Anarchy:

Socialization of states into realist rules: those that violate realist rules suffer disasters in war and learn the hard way → realist rulers replace ideologues (e.g. Egypt and Syria after 1967)

- However, anarchy can stimulate two quite different kinds of realism,
  - defensive power balancing
  - offensive hegemony-seeking
- the distribution of these may explain war.
State Reactions to Hobbesian Anarchy:

- a. **defensive power balancing**: ought to deter war;
- however it can generate a *security dilemma* (all seeking security (e.g. via arms races), make all less secure (nervous) + high chance of misperception (exaggeration of threat) from insecurity → accidental/defensive war
- few MENA wars were mostly defensive (about security) (3/19); rather most seem driven by animosities/grievances and ambitions.
State Reactions to Hobbesian Anarchy:

- **b. Offensive Realism**: in a multi-polar system, insecurity leads the regional *great powers* to compete for hegemony.

- Typically, MENA hegemony-seekers normally seek regional leadership in the name of a revisionist Pan-ideology, such as Arabism or Islam (power).

- So, offensive realists stronger powers, often revisionist.

- Their bids for regional hegemony, *leading to war*, have been regular occurrences, notably by, *Iraq, Israel, Iran, Egypt* and Saudi Arabia.

- 10/19 wars involved rivalries over hegemony (power).
Occasions of War: Regional Power Imbalances

- Why do wars happen at particular times and places: the systemic distribution of power either facilitates or inhibits war (realism): 3 scenarios:

  - When a stable power balance exists no state can count on winning, hence, rationally, ought to avoid war
  
  - While if a state thinks the power balance is in its favour, it may see war as rational

  - Power transition theory: when a rising second rank power is closing the gap with a formerly dominant power ➔ may provoke a pre-emptive war by the top power (while it still has the advantage).
Occasions of War: Regional Power Imbalances

- In MENA, power imbalances are typical:

- the creation of small, weak states beside large/strong ones (Kuwait and Iraq)

- Pervasive arms races since regional states have exceptional access to revenues (foreign aid or oil) + patrons willing to provide arms

- internal state weakening inviting competitive intervention

- 10/19 wars facilitated by an obvious power imbalance. Two others had elements of power transition between rival hegemons (Egypt and Israel in 1967, Iran and Iraq in 1980)

- Conclusion: instability of the power balance is a pervasive war-enabling factor in MENA
Global Level Interventionism: Oil wars

- Conflicts in the Middle East spill out in global consequences--oil price instability, terrorism--

- and hence are magnets for a disproportionate amount of global level military intervention

- Centre-periphery resource wars are re-current (structuralism):
  - economically expansive core states → appetites for scarce resources → seek to secure resources in the periphery (Choucri, Klare);

- control of oil is pivotal for both regional and global hegemony; hence would-be regional and global hegemons collide over control of oil.

- ME is war prone because it’s the epicentre of world oil: 3/19 wars can be seen as oil wars (all involving Iraq and bringing in the US
The Individual (Leadership)

- Leadership war prone-ness traits (risk taking, ideological worldviews; lack of empathy; will to dominate)

- Variations in the road to power: in authoritarian republics where power was taken by force → winners/survivors would be aggressive or Machiavellian types, the lion (Saddam) or fox (Asad, Sadat).

- Variations within the Republics matter: cautious Asad vs. reckless Saddam
The Individual (Leadership)

- Leadership war proneness seems to have been an important factor in only 5 “wars of choice.”

- The two wars Saddam started; Iraq war started by GW Bush (Iraq) and Israeli attack on Egypt in Suez (replacement of Sharett by Ben Gurion was a condition of war) and Israel invasion of Lebanon (Begin/Sharon were hardliners).

- Only if conditions for and against war are balanced at the other two levels, will leadership war proneness make a difference.
Conclusions

- Middle Eastern War, most immediately, is driven from the second level, by *the abundance of revisionist states*.

  *revisionism needs explaining.*

- It is not a function of regime—democratic or authoritarian--type; but of the regional systems’ construction as a Hobbesian anarchy.

  Irredentism from the poor fit of state and identity; disputed boundaries; and the heterogeneity of regime legitimacy principles→drive conflict

- and there are few trans-state economic interests to mute them.
Conclusions

• These factors generate pervasive security dilemmas and offensive realist struggles over hegemony.

• Exacerbating regional instability is the struggle over oil resources between regional and global hegemons.

• But why a particular war erupts at a particular time depends on factors at the first and third level.
  • The power balance may deter or enable war.
  • If the other levels are permissive, having a risk taker or ideologue in power may trigger war.