

INTRODUCTION

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This Special Issue of Perceptions is devoted to the Middle East. The Middle East, which has been witnessing wars, conflicts and instability for decades, has attracted special attention especially since the 9/11 and the ‘War on Terror’. The Iraqi War has changed the dynamics of the region dramatically, unleashing new forces and creating new alliances as well as deepening the cleavages and animosities in the region at large. At a time when these developments are taking place in our southern neighbors, this issue of Perceptions is timely as well as necessary in bringing together scholars of the field who take different developments and aspect of the region in their analyses.

In his pioneering contribution, “**The American Invasion of Iraq: Causes and Consequences,**” *Raymond Hinnebusch* examines the American invasion of Iraq by bringing together three levels of analysis: US global grand strategy; the US strategic position in the Middle East; and the interests of Bush's ruling coalition. Hinnebusch underlines the fact that under the Bush administration, and particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11, there is a deviation from the traditional US foreign policy, which viewed hegemony as being rooted in consent derived from multilateral consultation, and limited by international law and institutions, to a strategy of hegemony based on the use of American's exceptional military capabilities. Hinnebusch examines the real motives behind the war through the lens of its strategic situation in the Middle East and its hegemony over the oil market. In his contention, the Bush administration estimated that conquering Iraq, would restore the structural power deriving from oil hegemony by ending dependence on Saudi Arabia as well as achieving privileged access to Iraqi oil at the expense of its economic competitors in Europe and Asia. However, according to Hinnebusch the articulated US national interests as such cannot wholly explain the war and why the collateral risks were accepted. Thus, Hinnebusch asserts that the special

interests of the ruling coalition (neo-cons) played a decisive role in engaging the US a war with Iraq. The article makes a thorough analysis of the characteristics of this ruling coalition for foreign-policy making. Hinnebusch points the devastating consequences of the War as the deconstruction of Iraq and the radical empowerment in the Middle East. He analyzes that the reconstruction of the Iraq proceeded in a flawed way creating a failed state. The US policies of relying on the Kurds against the Arabs and the Shia against the Sunnis and the institutionalization of ethnic/sectarian politics in the ruling bodies reinforced sectarian divisions. Hinnebusch analyzes that as a result of the prolonged instability in Iraq, Iran has empowered and gained political leverage through the "Shiite axis." Moreover, the US pressure and retarded domestic reform in Syria, strengthened the regime's nationalist credentials and pushed Syria into the arms of Iran. Hinnebusch powerfully argues that international community is beginning to perceive a hegemon that declares it will not be constrained by international institutions or the opinions of allies. Hence, Hinnebusch claims that the longer-term costs of the war for US hegemony appear to be significant where Bush has seriously eroded the alliance system upon which America's hegemonic leadership rests.

In the article **“Iran’s Politics and Regional Relations Post-détente,”** *Anoushiravan Ehteshami* asserts that in understanding Iran’s policies one must first recognize the domestic backdrop as well as the regional realities in which they take form. Ehteshami emphasizes that under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran have entered a new era of post-détente in both its domestic politics and foreign relations. Ehteshami further points to the fact Ahmadinejad’s policy pronouncements have unsettled nerves at home and abroad, and have again raised suspicions of Iran’s motives and strategic objectives in the region. Through his analysis of the past few decades, Ehteshami maintains that by 1988 military and political developments in the region had forced a reassessment of the rejectionist strategy of the republic that had guided its policies since 1980. This re-orientation phase, which is characterized by the transition from radicalism to accommodation started in earnest in June 1988 and lasted until August 1990, by which time we see the end of the transition to pragmatism and the establishment of the pragmatist line in Iran’s foreign policy. Under the subtitle “Khatami’s détente” Ehteshami analyzes that from the outset Khatami’s foreign policy very strongly reinforced the non-ideological

aspects of foreign policy. End of détente was marked with both the electoral victory of the neoconservatives in Majlis in 2004 and followed by the election of Ahmadinejad. Thus, for the neoconservatives an accommodationist line was dangerously close to appeasement in international affairs, something that they had vowed never to allow. Slowly but surely, on several fronts Iran's accommodationist line on regional matters began to shift, displaying a somewhat harder position on matters of concern. Ehteshami explains that the conflict in Lebanon illustrated an altogether new dimension to Iran's regional role in the rather tense circumstances. By virtue of where it stood in this conflict, Tehran was always going to make political substantial capital from the war. Furthermore, in analyzing the Iranian regional policies beyond Lebanon, Ehteshami points to the many public initiatives of President Ahmadinejad as evidences of a hardening line in Tehran. According to Ehteshami, his pronouncements made about Israel in October 2005, his position with regard to the EU3 negotiations over Iran's nuclear activities since August 2005, and his administration's slowly changing policies towards Iraq and the Persian Gulf more broadly, provide concrete examples of the newly emerging trends.

The article "**Security, Politics and Constitution: Developments in The New Iraq, 2003-2006**" by *Gökhan Çetinsaya* analyzes the developments in Iraq after March 2003, main characteristics of current situation and the various factors that shape Iraq's today. These factors are discussed under three main categories: security, politics and constitution. The article begins with an extended discussion on the security situation in Iraq. Here, the mistakes made during the invasion of Iraq and Iraq's internal dynamics, which caused an insoluble crisis are delineated. Çetinsaya then describes the four different groups of the insurgents. Moreover, the article displays the four stages, through which resistance has gone through. Çetinsaya asserts that the question of security in Iraq is entangled in the following vicious circle whereas it is not possible to end insurgency with the current or forthcoming army; and unless insurgency is over, it will not be possible to establish stability. In the section concerned with the domestic political affairs in Iraq, Çetinsaya argues that holding the elections, despite all the shortcomings, irregularities and delays, is a big step for Iraq's transition to a post-conflict period. Yet, he also adds that the elections have been disappointing, to say the least, for those political parties that do not

pursue an ethnic and/or sectarian politics. The last two elections, the referendum and other developments all demonstrate that ethnic-sectarian politics will remain a main determining factor in Iraq's future. Çetinsaya asserts that it is almost impossible to see the people of Iraq united under the umbrella of 'Iraq-Arab Nationalism.' Çetinsaya claims that the New Iraqi Constitution has many contradictions and was drafted under pressure rather than through mutual agreement. He stresses the fact that there is too much ambiguity on the key issues pertaining to the organization of the new Iraqi political system. These key issues should have been clarified and secured in the new constitution rather than being left to the simple majority of the parliament. Such a constitution, in his analysis, might produce a reverse effect and increase violence.

In the article “**Turkey’s Security Culture and Policy towards Iraq**”, *Meliha Benli Altunışık* analyzes Turkey’s relations with the Middle East in general and Iraq in particular from a security culture perspective. Altunışık bases her article on Turkey’s security culture towards the Middle East that was shaped by four dominant strategic culture components: a pro-status quo stance, tradition of *realpolitik*, non-involvement, the experience of great power rivalry and foreign occupation as a result of the Sevres Treaty, which Turkey fought against. Accordingly, these four components determine how Turkey responded to the developments in Iraq since 1991, in an environment of uncertainty and ambiguity, although the strategic sub-cultures that have existed outside of this general framework are also underlined. Altunışık makes an overview of developments in Turkey’s relations with Iraq by first looking at the period from 1991 to 2003. She underlines that Ankara’s perspective on Iraq was mainly limited to northern Iraq and the power vacuum created there during this period mainly due to PKK’s presence. Turkey’s support for the US policy in Iraq, that was at odds with the status quo in this country, throughout the 1990s is presented as a factor that complicated Turkey’s policy. Later the author analyzes the process leading to the 2003 war in Iraq and the post-2003 situation. The debate in Turkey before the war and later the rejection of 1 March Motion and its larger consequences are analyzed within this context. The arguments of different groups, for and against the Motion, are discussed. Altunışık underlines that since 1990s, Turkey has established ‘red lines’ in its Iraqi policy and threatened to use force if they were violated. These red lines were the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq; a threat to the

safety of the Turkmen population and a change in the status of Kerkuk. Since 2003, these lines are being challenged and the Turkish policy has been to tone down its rhetoric rather than embarking on military intervention, leading many groups to challenge this approach. According to Altunışık, two main lines of criticism have become pronounced, those of the nationalists that are calling for a tougher policy, including military action, to safeguard Turkey's interests and those of the liberals that advocate a more cooperative approach towards Iraq, especially with its Kurds for more stability, good relations with the EU and the US. The author places the Justice and Development Party government's stance in between these two positions, highlighting that there has been an emphasis on political and economic cooperation with the Iraqi actors in recent years as well as a reliance on diplomatic means. In the conclusion, Altunışık looks at different factors that could affect Turkey's Iraqi policy in the short and medium term. Accordingly, what is needed in the short term is to disentangle the Iraqi issue from Turkey's domestic politics for a more relevant foreign policy strategy and tools. In the medium term, cooperation with Iraq and its neighbours is seen as crucial for reducing regional security uncertainties and building a limited multilateral security regime.

In the article, "**Turkey as a Third Party in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Assessment and Reflections**", *Esra Çuhadar Gürkaynak* analyses the extent of Turkey's role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and presents alternative strategies for Turkey from a perspective of third party role in international conflicts. What kind of a third party role is more suitable for Turkey is the main question which the author seeks to answer. The article draws a theoretical framework that looks at the strategies, modes and activity of third parties, as well as the rewards for them in getting involved in conflicts. The author goes on by looking at the stage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the roles of third parties and their activities in the conflict since the Camp David negotiations in 2000, mainly from a 'contingency approach'. An analysis of the US role is provided and the changes between the Clinton and the Bush administrations in approaching the conflict is analysed. The role of the Quartet and several Arab initiatives are discussed within this framework. The author underlines that since the second Intifada, there is a more pronounced role for Turkey to play in the conflict as well as willingness on the side of the policy-makers, however the nature of the mediation remains ambiguous and discusses the

reasons for this ambiguity. While arguing that rather than power mediation, a facilitator role is seen as more suitable for Turkey, the author also looks at some of the recent developments that limited Turkey's role in this capacity. Çuhadar Gürkaynak also underlines the recent Turkish involvement in the region reflecting a structural prevention strategy, focusing especially on the initiative undertaken by the Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges in Gaza. The author concludes by suggesting that facilitative mediation and structural prevention are appropriate strategies for Turkey to play in the conflict rather than a power politics strategy of third party involvement.

In the article “**The Lebanese War of 2006: Reasons and Consequences**”, *Özlem Tür* analyzes the dynamics of the 33-Day War between Israel and Lebanon that was followed by Hizballah's kidnapping of two Israeli soldiers in the internationally recognized borders on 12 July 2006. The author, first looks at the Lebanese politics prior to 2006 developments. She underlines how the Lebanese sovereignty has been challenged during the civil war with the occupation of foreign forces – Syria and Israel – and later the creation of Hizballah, especially with its external supporters. Later she looks at the Lebanese politics after the Israeli withdrawal of 2000 and focuses on the debate on the future of Syrian presence in the country and Hizballah's authority in south Lebanon. The article discusses the emergence of two groups in Lebanon, especially after Rafik Hariri's assassination, diverging on Syria's role in the country. According to the author, Hizballah's kidnapping of the soldiers came at a critical time when the region was going through a juncture; therefore unlike the 2000 kidnappings of Hizballah that has resulted with prisoners exchange, this time the kidnappings were followed by a devastating war. The author looks at the dynamics of the war, the UN Security Council Resolution 1701 that stopped the war and the declarations of victory by both sides, with their own domestic agendas, as well as the regional dynamics.

The article “**Russia: Back to the Middle East**” by *Zeynep Dağı* examines Russia's return to the Middle East in the light of its involvement in the Palestinian dispute after Hamas's electoral victory and in the recent Lebanon War. According to Dağı, during the Cold War the Soviet Union

had always been attached to the oil reserves in the region and sea lines. Dağı then makes brief accounts of the policies towards the Middle East under Gorbachev and Yeltsin administrations. Dağı analyzes that Russia pursued a ‘low-intensified’ regional policy in the 1990s yet tried to be especially effective on three areas: keeping an eye on the “near abroad”, maintaining its presence in the peace process, and holding on its share in the arms sales. Yet, in line with the main theme of the article, Dağı argues that the Russian attempt to return to the Middle East seems to be a strategic response to the increasing influence of the USA in Russia’s neighborhood. Hence, reestablishing its traditional influence in the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus and resolving its immediate economic problems Russia under the leadership of Putin has started to claim a more assertive role in the Middle East. Russia has not only improved its economic relations with the countries in the region but has also been trying with success to establish better political relations. Under the subtitle "The Hamas Crisis and Russia," Dağı asserts that while Russia’s support to Hamas improved its relations with the Arab Middle East, it caused tension in its relations with the US, the EU as well as Israel. As regards to the recent Lebanon War, Russia’s declaration that it would veto any resolution, brought to the Security Council by the US or France, which was not approved by Lebanon shaped the outcome of the war, and brought Russia to the forefront of Middle East politics. Dağı’s overall conclusion is that Russia’s attempts to reestablish its “traditional role” in the Middle East is welcomed by regional actors as a balancing move against the domination of the USA and unilateralism of Israel. Thus, Hamas’ electoral victory and the Lebanon war have provided the Russians with perfect opportunity to make inroads into the minds and hearts of the Arabs by adopting more pro-Arab policies.

In her contribution **“Politics of Water Resources in the Jordan, Nile and Tigris-Euphrates: Three River Basins, Three Narratives,”** *Aysegül Kibaroglu* provides an overview of the politics of the water resources in the three main transboundary river basins of the Middle East with specific references to the major historical episodes in these geographies. The article begins with analyses of the causes of water scarcity. Distinct types of water scarcities are discussed in order to explain the underlying causes of water crises in the three basins. Next, the politics of water resources in these pivotal river basins are dealt with by focusing on

the events in the first half of the 20th century. Here, the “colonial legacies” in the Nile and the Jordan are discussed along with the harmonious water relations observed in the Tigris-Euphrates. The article describes the rising of the disputes over transboundary waters mainly due to the uncoordinated nature of the water development projects in the second half of the 20th century. Kibaroglu analyzes that with the end of the Cold War, the political climate became more conducive for cooperation in these basins. One can observe shifting of alliances, enhanced dialogue and contacts in the realms of low and high politics. However, the scope, duration, inclusiveness of these cooperative water regimes varies from basin to basin. In this context, the article scrutinizes the Nile Basin Initiative as the comprehensive and promising cooperative scheme bringing together for the first time in history all of the ten riparians with the aim to achieve equitable utilization of waters and socio-economic development of the region. The historical episode of the Middle East Peace Process is deemed still worthwhile to discuss with particular emphasis on the water clauses of the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Jordan and the Interim Agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Moreover, Kibaroglu points to the political rapprochement between Turkey and Syria since late 1990s, which have facilitated building up inter-governmental and scientific networks, acting in the water-related development fields.