

**HANDBOOK OF US-MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS:  
FORMATIVE FACTORS AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

**R.E.Looney (ed.)**  
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With increased involvement of the United States in the Middle East and military deployments in the area, the international relations scholarship focusing at the relations between the two regions sprung recently. There has been no shortage of publications of scholars of all calibres offering different point of views and varying assessments. Yet, besides Michael Oren's historical *Power, Faith and Fantasy* (WW Norton, 2007), there has been a surprising lack of comprehensive publications which could serve as quick references for scholars, professionals and journalists alike. *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations* by editor Robert E.Looney from Routledge attempted to fill this gap.

The edited volume consists of thirty-six chapters written by authors who are professors, professionals, think-tank researchers, graduate students or independent scholars. Most of them have professionally been linked to the region for an extended period of time; others have dealt with the relevant issues in US policy over a longer period of time. Most of the authors are Arab, and none of them is currently based at an Israeli institution or has received a degree there.

Divided into three parts, the volume offers firstly introduction to the setting, followed by perceptions and finished by nineteen country studies. The first part focusing on the setting discusses topical issues in the US-Middle Eastern relations. Highly welcome is an introductory chapter on relevant international theories, followed by a chapter on issues other than Iraq in the US Middle Eastern policy. Contributors in the subsequent chapters treat all important aspects of the current Middle East, including globalization, war, proliferation, oil, energy security, Islamic groups, or the peace process. Especially the chapter on proliferation in the Gulf and Middle East by James A. Russell and the chapter on policy puzzles posed by various Islamist groups by Heather S. Gregg are very refreshing and bring about new insights into the matter. On the other hand, the chapter on peace process by Stephen Zunes offers a surprisingly one-sided view and pinpoints (implicitly) Israel and the US as being responsible for the failure of the peace process.

The second part on perceptions is the shortest one and begins with a chapter

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on “Arab Street” which leads to a conclusion about the uselessness of such a concept. This chapter also features a chapter on Palestinian view of the peace process, which contains also statements such as “the real function of the ‘peace process’ has been to shelter Israel from the threat of peace”. The part continues by chapters on US-Jordan relations, which is surprisingly not included in the chapter on country studies (which features another chapter on Jordan). The part concludes by a chapter on Pakistan’s perceptions of the US Middle East policy which offers basic introduction into the US-Pakistan relations as well as Pakistan-Middle East relations.

The third chapter offers the richest material, individual country studies of all countries of the region from Morocco to Iran. Surprisingly, there is no chapter on Israel or Palestinian territories, unless we consider Leon Hadar’s contribution on ‘the collapse of the neoconservative-led US-Israeli hegemonic project’ as an Israel country study. To much of the reader’s surprise, the volume contains also chapters on bilateral relations with countries such as Qatar, Bahrain or Oman, which are deeply under-studied in the current international studies scholarship. Contributions in this chapter do not follow any uniform pattern and thus differ in temporal and topical scope, structure and contents. Some of the chapters offer truly exemplary material – such as Michael Collins Dunn’s chapter on US-Egypt relations or David W. Lesch’s chapter on US-Syrian relationship.

The book’s greatest aspiration was to provide a unique reference for US-Middle East relations. This goal was fulfilled only partially. While many chapters can be truly considered authoritative, others simply fall behind this expectation. The style of the chapters differs as well – some offer scholarly work, others feature journalistic narrative and there are some which resemble more policy papers. There is also differing approach to the topics, some offering neutral assessment whereas others advocate a certain policy position. On the top of it, some of the authors simply mistake the relations with the Middle East with relations with Islam, doing the same mistake as some of the neo-conservative commentators and pundits. Unforgivable is a lack of a chapter on US-Israel relationship, also due to the fact that Israel is the largest recipient of the US aid in the region and its main ally in the Middle East. A chapter on US relations with Palestinians (beyond the peace process) would be also of help.

Overall, many of the chapters of the book are excellent. Some of the chapters which are however of lower quality make the result rather puzzling. Which is, in the end, surprising for a three-hundred dollar book.

