THIS ISSUE: China and the Middle East

- China’s One Belt, One Road initiative
- From ‘economy only’ to ‘keeper of international order’
- China’s participation in Middle East security affairs
- Following in American footsteps?
- China ‘East of Suez’
- China’s contradictory policy towards Israel
- Cultural encounters along the Silk Roads
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China’s relations with the Middle East have evolved over a thousand years. Historically, the land-based and maritime Silk Roads provided the context for significant economic and cultural interchanges between peoples residing in large swathes of land from the Pacific to Central Asia and the Middle East. The re-emergence of China as a world power has revived interest in this topic, which is what this issue is devoted to.

A powerful force behind China’s new approach is the ‘One Belt, One Road’ (or the Belt and Road) initiative. Unveiled by President Xi Jinping in 2013, this is an ambitious drive to expand the region’s infrastructure to boost economic relations along the old Silk Roads. In Insight, Sara Hsu argues that despite the risks involved, this initiative is likely to be a win-win proposition. China’s promise of non-interference and funding for development projects is attractive at a time when MENA economies are either reeling from low oil prices or caught up in uncertainty after the Arab uprisings.

But does the flag follow trade here too or not? Growing economic interests in the region inevitably have geo-strategic implications. This is what the next three contributions address. Neil Quilliam predicts China will find it necessary to change its relationship with MENA from transactional to strategic. By contrast, Degang Sun maintains that such a transformation is already under way as China is no longer a ‘bystander’ but a ‘stakeholder’ in the region. Michael Singh addresses the same issue from a different perspective: increasing competition among great powers and a shift in the US defence policy could result in a power vacuum increasing the regional stakes for China in the long run.

The implications of such a transformation on specific regions and countries are of equal fascination. John W. Garver contrasts China’s approaches to regional politics in the Middle East with the South Asian-Indian Ocean regions. In the latter, China actively outmanoeuvres and encircles the Indian ‘tiger’, whereas in the former she exploits the advantages of ‘sitting on the mountain and watching the tigers fight’. Yitzhak Shichor underscores such pragmatism in China’s contradictory policy towards Israel: consistently supporting Palestinians through official UN channels, yet cooperating extensively with Israel in other fields (security, culture, science and technology, etc).

The last two pieces focus on cultural dimensions. Wen-chin Ouyang examines the encounters along the Silk Roads looking at how substantial two-way movements in people and objects over years brought with them everlasting influences in languages, stories, cuisines, music, visual sensibilities and cultural practices. The final piece by Xue Qingguo provides a rare insight into challenges of the translation of Arabic literature into Chinese over distinct phases, arguing that despite an established presence, efforts for translation of Arabic literature in China remain limited and suffer from many specific problems and difficulties.

Whatever one’s verdict on the transformation of the old into new Silk Road aspirations, we are indeed living in interesting times! We hope this issue – produced in collaboration with SOAS’s China Institute – will contribute to that interest.
China’s One Belt, One Road initiative

China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) programme has been welcomed in the Middle East. OBOR’s land-based and maritime silk roads cross both over and through the region. The land-based road passes through Istanbul and Tehran, as well as through Gwadar, while the maritime road goes through the Mediterranean and Red Seas and into the Gulf of Aden.

While China is an unlikely ally to Saudi Arabia, Iran and Syria – they are often in political and ideological disagreement – China’s secret strategy is neutrality and, more importantly, money. Chinese money and resources are making a difference across the region: in Iran, in which China is constructing the Tehran-Isfahan high-speed railway; in Turkey, which is the middle corridor of the OBOR project and in which China is constructing the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad; as well as in Egypt, with the Suez Economic and Trade Cooperation Zone; in Oman, in the construction of Duqm; and in the potential reconstruction of Syria. It is hoped that the large influx of Chinese foreign direct investment will spur economic growth through enhanced industrial production and trade.

China’s aims for OBOR are so ambitious that it has sought to integrate the programme with other countries’ medium-term development plans. For example, OBOR is considered an important part of Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 and Jordan’s Vision 2025. Saudi Arabia’s plan is poised to diversify its economy away from oil. Jordan’s Vision 2025 is more complex, encompassing over 400 policies and including lofty aims such as strengthening institutions and sustainability. Both plans underscore the aims of boosting both GDP and human capital.

Chinese foreign direct investment welcome

In a region that often struggles ideologically against the influence of the United States, China’s promise of non-interference and funding for important development projects is very attractive. Despite the concerns of states like Saudi Arabia that are opposed to...
China’s strengthening of Iran through the OBOR programme, the region, which is attempting to build up infrastructure, appears mostly glad to receive Chinese capital. In countries like Oman, Chinese investment may amount to more than half of all foreign direct investment (FDI); in the region, China accounts for almost a third of FDI. A period of low oil prices has led to slower growth in the oil-producing economies of the area, and, as a result, such nations experienced increasing budget and trade deficits. For countries like Algeria, which derives 90 per cent of its income from oil exports, lower oil prices translate directly into much leaner times. What is more, countries that do not produce oil often export labour to oil-producing nations, so the knock-on effects spread lower growth to the rest of the country. Unemployment is a big issue in the region. Additional funds, especially for projects that can help the Middle East gain a wider base for economic growth, can help the region resist oil price volatility. This is another major reason that China’s investment from OBOR is so welcome.

China gains from the investment as well

In exchange for its participation in building up infrastructure in the Middle East, China obtains valuable outlets for employment of its construction firms with a potential for a long-run return on investment, with the hope of building up new export markets. This is particularly beneficial to Chinese firms since the Asian nation is seeing an overall slowdown in economic growth that has led to lower rates of fixed asset investment (read: infrastructure). As real estate and fixed asset investment in China have wound down, obtaining new sources of growth has been a key focus for the Chinese government. President Xi appears to have two major policy aims in this regard – building up domestic consumption and promoting the OBOR plan.

China also gains the ability to enhance security through economic development in the volatile region. The region is essential to Chinese investment in energy and infrastructure, and is viewed as an important crossroads between Asia and Europe. The security of this region can help to stabilise Xinjiang, home to Uyghur separatists that China views as a threat to security and an important node on China’s belt and road. To the extent that China can reduce the potential for terrorist training of the Uyghurs in Syria and Iraq, it can boast some success. China is also using the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) to increase military and counterterrorism cooperation in the Middle East, linking with the observer states of Afghanistan and Iran and dialogue partner Turkey. Economic involvement through OBOR, coupled with intergovernmental cooperation established through the SCO, work to combat terrorism in the area.

Success is not guaranteed. China will have to regularly assess its risks and re-evaluate its position in OBOR projects

Still, risks exist

The beneficial nature of the OBOR project doesn’t imply that China’s plans for infrastructure development in the Middle East are without risk. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, security risks in the Middle East are highest in Egypt, while most Middle Eastern countries present a higher credit risk than the average OBOR country, with Syria at the top of the list. Currency risk is also high in many Middle Eastern nations. In addition, China lacks any strong policy orientation in the region, as China remains wary of taking sides. As a result, success is not guaranteed.

China will have to regularly assess its risks and re-evaluate its position in OBOR projects. I have written elsewhere about China’s general lack of due diligence in determining the viability of projects. Returns are expected to be paid out over the long term, and some of these returns may end up being negative. The projects themselves may not generate sufficient profit, or security risks could forestall their success. Who absorbs the losses depends on who is holding the debt or equity in each project. In some cases, Chinese state-owned banks hold policy bonds, and if these experience losses the Chinese financial system will take a hit. If foreign investors hold the debt or equity, they will stand to lose.

Indeed, the IMF’s Managing Director Christine Lagarde has warned that OBOR projects should be carefully selected, as there is a risk of driving up debt. The main concern is that the large scale funding that goes into infrastructure investment will leave developing countries in a poor financial situation, possibly with little to show for it. To prevent this, China must guard against encouraging overspending in invested countries.

For the Middle East region, OBOR could certainly provide a boost. If risks halt construction, they are unlikely to have the intended effect, and will present yet another obstacle that the region has to endure. Truly, the project is ambitious in scope, and a realistic assessment of the overall gains from its diverse manifestations in each invested country won’t be possible until five or ten years down the line. Although at present, the project appears to promise a win-win situation for both the Middle East and for China, whether OBOR will be the most successful undertaking in history or the biggest failure has yet to be seen.

Sara Hsu is Associate Professor of Economics at the State University of New York at New Paltz. She has published over six books, including one on the topic of Chinese informal finance entitled Informal Finance in China and a Chinese-language book on Chinese shadow banking, in addition to fifteen journal articles on the Chinese economy and financial sector. She also writes about current events in the Chinese economy in Forbes, The Diplomat, the Nikkei Asian Review, East Asia Forum, China Brief and China World.
Neil Quilliam outlines why it is necessary for China to change the nature of its relationship with MENA from transactional to strategic

From ‘economy only’ to ‘keeper of international order’

To date, the relationship between China and the states of the Middle East has been largely transactional based on meeting China’s growing energy demand and Beijing’s entry into lucrative markets in the highly populous centres of Iran and Egypt, and the high-tech capitals of the Gulf Arab states. Meanwhile, Gulf Arab states have sought to invest in downstream ventures in China, as a means of developing a value chain for their hydrocarbon exports. Despite considerable effort by Gulf Arab leaders to cultivate and deepen relations, China had, until recently, kept them at arm’s length.

Three key factors will transform the nature of the relationship between China and the MENA region from transactional to strategic – and downgrade US relations with the region from strategic to transactional. These three factors are: China’s growing energy demand and MENA oil producers’ growing need for fossil fuel intensive markets; the impact of slow US disengagement from the region and China’s increasing need for stability; and Gulf Arab leaders’ long-term search for a new security arrangement.

The strategic importance of the MENA region to China’s development is clear. At present, China imports 49 per cent of its crude oil and 21 per cent of oil products from the region; and 37 per cent of the region’s oil exports are destined for China, amounting to nearly $123 billion in 2016, while imports from the region are valued at $87.5 billion. China has made a number of significant upstream investments in Iraq and Iran, whilst Qatari and Saudi investors have invested in downstream operations in China as a means of developing a value chain that ties the long-term economic interests of the countries together. Despite China’s efforts to diversify the provenance of its natural resources, the MENA region generally and the Gulf region especially, The strategic importance of the MENA region to China’s development is clear. At present, China imports 49 per cent of its crude oil and 21 per cent of oil products from the region...
China’s goal to acquire resources from the MENA region will require transforming the nature of its relationship from transactional to strategic

...including regional competitors Iran and Saudi Arabia, will grow in importance as the country’s domestic demand grows. Commensurately, increasing US production of shale oil and gas will continue to displace Middle Eastern oil into the markets of North America and Europe, thus creating a virtuous cycle between China and MENA.

The relationship between the US and its allies in the region has been strategic, predicated upon strong military, economic and energy relations: in simple terms, energy for security. Though, given the close ties between militaries, the provision of secondary and tertiary education to Arab elites in the US and the close bonds between government agencies (including the NSA, CIA and State Department and their counterparts), the relationship has been much stronger than that. However, former US President Obama’s pivot to Asia, determination to reach a nuclear deal with Iran and seeming disengagement from the region, as evidenced in his interview with The Atlantic in April 2016, severely undermined the confidence that leaders in the region placed in the US as security provider.

In response Gulf Arab leaders increased the diplomatic traffic with Beijing, accruing a number of high profile visits with King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain (September 2013), former Saudi Crown Prince and now King Salman Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (March 2014), and Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad of Qatar (November 2014). President Sisi of Egypt visited China in December 2014 and August 2017, while President Xi paid visits to Saudi Arabia and Egypt in January 2016.

Although Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed welcomed the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency in 2016 and his early commitment to help ‘push back’ against expanding Iranian influence (notably in Syria, Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon), they continue to worry about long-term US engagement in the region in the post-Trump era.

There are two main beneficiaries to US withdrawal from the region – be it real or imagined: Russia and China. With its limited resources Russia can only seize opportunities as and when they appear. While the US slowly disengages, the doors and sea-lanes are opening for a strategic partner to enter. Russia has capitalised on this by revitalising relations with old and new allies. It has inserted itself into the conflict in Syria and, in so doing, has extended its influence beyond Syria into Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Libya. In supporting and underpinning the Assad regime, Putin has sought to persuade the Gulf Arab states, especially, that he is the region’s most reliable security partner.

Though China has made a clear effort to diversify its energy sources, recognising the vulnerability of depending upon a region beset with long-standing conflicts (Israel-Palestine, rivalries like that between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a new order that aligns Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Israel against Turkey, Qatar, Syria and Russia), China needs MENA. The ‘economy only’ approach has, until now, allowed China to navigate the choppy waters of the Gulf and neither choose between Saudi Arabia and Iran nor engage in the thorny issue of the Palestine question. Nevertheless, given four key developments including a diminishing security role played by the US in the region; the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA); the emergence of new leadership amongst Gulf Arab states intent on re-ordering the region; and the arteries of China’s One Belt, One Road (OBOR) project coalescing in the maritime waters of the Gulf mean that Beijing will have to step up its political, diplomatic and military engagement. Indeed, President Xi vowed in his 2018 New Year’s speech that China would be ‘keeper of international order’.

However one chooses to characterise China’s OBOR project – economic or strategic – it is clear that the goal to acquire resources from the MENA region, which is critical to the country’s development, will require transforming the nature of its relationship from transactional to strategic. This will not only demand re-thinking relations with rulers in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iraq and Egypt, but also a significant investment in advancing those relations by cultivating deeper political, social, economic and military links.

Whilst Iran and Syria may welcome the ongoing US exit from the region and Russia’s bid to fill its place, the leaders in Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Israel will open the door to China’s presence and seek to ‘thicken’ ties beyond the business deal. The challenge for China, however, will be how to navigate the move into the region without compromising its quest to acquire the region’s natural resources or being drawn into the region’s conflicts.
From bystander to stakeholder?
China’s participation in Middle East security affairs

In the first three decades since its founding, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), demonised as a ‘troublemaker’, was excluded from the international community; first it was a target of sanctions and containment by the West and then later by the Soviet bloc. During this period China perceived the Middle East as a battlefield between the capitalist hegemon (the US) and the socialist hegemon (the Soviet Union). Interference in the internal affairs of weak countries was interpreted as a way to control the fate of the developing world. But for China the Middle East was regarded as a graveyard for hegemons, and as such outside powers’ imperialistic ambitions were doomed to fail.

Since its reform and opening-up policy was initiated in late 1970s, China shifted its diplomatic focus from exporting the ‘Communist revolution’ to enhancing its economic development, but remained somewhat neutral in Middle East conflicts. In 1979, the PRC established diplomatic relations with the US – while Iran broke off diplomatic relations with the latter. China sought a balanced policy between Iran and the US on the one hand, and between Iran and Iraq on the other hand. In the UN Security Council Resolution vote condemning Iran’s kidnapping of US hostages, China abstained to avoid offending both ‘revolutionary’ Iran and ‘hegemonic’ America. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s seeking commercial benefits while shelving political entanglement was a cornerstone of China’s Middle East policy.

By contrast, in the 21st century, particularly since Xi Jinping became President in 2013, China has established a prominent economic presence in areas ranging from infrastructure to energy investments. As of 2017, China was the largest trading partner of Iran and ten Arab countries, the second largest trading partner of the League of Arab Nations as a whole, and the third largest trading partner of Israel and Turkey respectively. Over 50 per cent of China’s imported oil is from the Middle East.

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looking and marching westward, and the Middle East is regarded as the converging point of the ‘Belt’ and the ‘Road’. At the call of the 'Initiative', approximately one million Chinese businessmen and students have flooded into the Middle East. Dubai hosts about 300,000 Chinese expatriates, and Chinese tourists have more than tripled recently. With the increase of its commercial interests and political pride, it’s impossible for Beijing to stick to its traditional ‘free-riding’ policy; nor can she shy away from participating in Middle East security affairs.

To promote its industrial cooperation with Middle East countries, and to protect its overseas investments and nationals, China has intensified its security cooperation with the UN, the great powers, and partners in the Middle East through inter-agency coordination. First, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has intensified its mediation diplomacy in recent years, involving itself in discussions about Sudan, South Sudan, the Iranian nuclear issue, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and Syria. China was the predominant peace broker between Sudan and South Sudan, and between the Sudanese government and the rebel groups, represented by the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM). China was active within the ‘6+1’ framework on the Iranian nuclear issue, and contributed to the conclusion of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2015.

In late 2017, China launched a tripartite dialogue mechanism with Palestine and Israel based in Beijing to give impetus to the peace process. In the face of the Syrian crisis, China has refrained from military involvement, but in March 2016 China nominated Ambassador Xie Xiaoyan as a special envoy who carried out shuttle diplomacy for the Syrian conflict and de-escalation through multilateral mechanisms like Geneva Talk and the Astana Conference.

Second, China's Ministry of Defence attempts to play an active role in Middle East security affairs as well. This can be classified into two categories: long-term and ad hoc military involvement. The former seeks relatively stable and long-term objectives, such as the counter-piracy patrols in Somali waters that began in 2008; the building of China's first overseas logistics base in Djibouti in 2017; and various UN peacekeeping operations in the Middle East. In addition, China has pursued ad hoc security policies in the Middle East to pursue relatively short-term and dynamic goals. These include military-training programmes; the deployment of security contractors for key Chinese investment projects; joint military rehearsals with the US, the EU, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia; and the dispatch of military vessels for the evacuation of overseas Chinese from the war-torn countries of Libya, Egypt, Syria and Yemen. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy convoy fleets held two joint anti-piracy drills with the US in 2012 and 2013, and one with EU in 2014. Chinese warships participated in a joint military drill with Russian warships in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015 as well. In 2013, a PLA Navy missile frigate joined Danish, Norwegian and Russian frigates to escort chemical weapons from the Syrian port of Latakia to Italy for destruction, a UN mission.

China's participation in Middle East security affairs aims to protect Beijing's economic practical interests on the one hand, and to acquire her great power status on the other hand. China and the Middle East are interdependent in their development strategies, such as China's 'Belt and Road Initiative', Egypt's 'Economic Revitalization Plan', Saudi's 'Vision 2030', Turkey's 'Vision 2023', Iran's '6th Five-Year Plan', and Israel's 'Red-Med Railway', etc. In the foreseeable future, China, India, Japan, South Korea and other Asian countries will be the major importers of Middle East oil, and arguably the Middle East is even more important to Asia than to the West from an economic point of view.

So far, China has been cautious in case it might be perceived as a geopolitical challenger to the established powers. It therefore adheres to a ‘zero-enemy’, ‘soft military presence’ and ‘nonalignment’ policy, maintaining a subtle balance between Russia and the West, between Iran and Saudi Arabia, between Israel and Palestine, and between moderate and radical Middle East blocs.

As a newcomer to the Middle East, China will inevitably encounter ‘growing pains’ similar to those encountered by the US after the end of WWII. It is unrealistic to reap economic benefits while turning a deaf ear to Middle East conflicts. With the increase of China's economic presence in the Middle East, China's ability and willingness to participate in regional security governance will continue to grow, albeit in a prudent manner. China is so far discreet in using military might for anti-terror missions or engaging in agent wars in the Middle East, but she will eventually become the 'third force' after Russia and the West in the volatile and multi-polar Middle East.

With the increase of China’s economic presence in the Middle East, China’s ability and willingness to participate in regional security governance will continue to grow
Following in American footsteps?

The US National Defense Strategy, issued in January 2018 by Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis, begins with a brief sentence whose implications for American policy are nevertheless profound. ‘Inter-state strategic competition, not terrorism’, it asserts, ‘is now the primary concern in US national security.’ Given that the United States has been squarely focussed on terrorism since September 11, 2001, and has fought two major wars and numerous smaller engagements in large part to combat it, the shift described is significant.

The precise meaning of this shift for US policy in the Middle East is not explained in the National Defense Strategy, nor in the more broadly focussed National Security Strategy promulgated by the White House. At first blush, the pivot would seem to imply a diminished focus on the Middle East. The region is certainly at the centre of any policy of counter-terrorism, but is not home to any global powers and has not for some decades been a major theatre of great-power competition.

Yet there are signs that this may be changing. The most visible sign of this change is the Russian intervention in Syria, which since 2015 has not only heralded the rekindling of Moscow’s ambition to be a major regional player, but has brought US and Russian forces into uncomfortably close proximity. Yet Russia’s aspirations are ultimately constrained by the limits of its financial resources and diplomatic influence.

China’s mounting involvement in the Middle East has been less ostentatious than Russia’s, yet is likely to be more significant in the long run. As China’s economy has grown, so have its economic interests in the Middle East, which for Beijing is a source of energy and investment, as well as a destination for Chinese capital and workers.

Following the well-trodden pattern of emerging powers, Chinese diplomats and soldiers have followed in the wake of its merchants. Beijing has dispatched naval forces to protect trade routes and to evacuate citizens caught amid regional strife, as well as special envoys for Syria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and other issues to ensure China’s place at the diplomatic table. American disillusionment and disengagement from the region and the resulting vacuum in international leadership has arguably increased both the urgency and appeal of these activities for Chinese leaders.

Chinese and American interests in the

Overlapping interests and common desire to foster regional stability have not resulted in any strategic convergence between the US and China
Middle East are strikingly similar. The states of the Persian Gulf supply China with a significant portion of its imported oil and natural gas, a dependency that is likely to grow in coming years. The United States, in contrast, has become increasingly self-sufficient with respect to its energy supply; however, global energy prices and thus the global economy remain susceptible to shocks originating in the region, and US allies in Asia and elsewhere are critically dependent on Middle Eastern supplies. Likewise, both the United States and China have been the victim of terrorist attacks directed or inspired by groups based in the Middle East and have sought to address the problem at its source. For the United States, this has meant a campaign of counter-terrorism operations alongside diplomatic and economic pressure targeting states that sponsor terrorist groups. Beijing for its part has sought cooperation with the Syrian government regarding foreign fighters from its Uyghur minority.

These overlapping interests and a common desire to foster regional stability have not, however, resulted in any strategic convergence between the US and China. Gone are the days of Chinese support for guerrilla movements like Yasser Arafat's PLO, yet wide gaps remain in the American and Chinese approaches to the region. While the US has intervened proactively in the region, both militarily and politically to bolster friendly governments, promote democratic and pro-market reform, and counter threats to American interests, Beijing has striven to secure smooth diplomatic relations with just about all governments of the region, even those otherwise ostracised by the community of nations. This tendency, combined with a reflexive opposition to the assertion of American power in global affairs, has given China a broad set of shallow relationships, and has positioned it, intentionally or not, as the defender of regimes such as that of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad.

Yet just as the United States’ strategy is shifting, so too is China’s. As its economic and political profile in the region has grown, China has tried harder to exercise leadership – convening diplomatic conferences on issues like Syria and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and has increasingly taken sides in the Middle East’s disputes. As elsewhere, it has also fostered deep economic ties and embedded itself in the region’s critical infrastructure. Beijing’s main ally is shaping up to be Iran, which not only offers potential access by land to the region’s energy supplies, but is the only state on the Gulf littoral not locked into a security relationship with Washington.

Thus far, American concern regarding China-Iran cooperation has focussed on the threats posed by the latter – Chinese assistance for Iran’s nuclear and missile programme, for example. But with an increasing focus on inter-state strategic competition, it is possible that this concern will grow to encompass the ways in which Iran facilitates Chinese efforts to out-compete the United States globally. This, in turn, feeds into the American perception that there exists a global bloc of revisionist states determined to weaken the US-led international order.

How US policy in the Middle East will shift as a result of mounting global great power competition remains uncertain. American fatigue with the Middle East and competing priorities elsewhere might tempt US policymakers to continue to disengage from the region, leaving regional powers to shoulder greater burdens and external actors to seize further opportunities. Amid increasing great power rivalry, however, concerns about ceding strategic ground to China and others may grow to outweigh any stratagem of burden-shifting.

In practice, the scepticism regarding open-ended nation-building enterprises in the Middle East will likely continue, and Washington’s military focus in the region may shift toward ensuring that no other power can exclude the US from the region’s congested airspace and sea lanes. At the same time, the US is likely to promote the involvement of friendly external powers such as India, Japan, and the EU in the region, and seek to pull US regional allies closer and improve their resilience to economic and political subversion. Particularly key in this regard will be Turkey, of great interest to US rivals by virtue of its geographic position and the prospect that strained US-Turkish ties could rupture NATO.

Of course, the interests the US and China share in the Middle East give rise not only to the prospect of conflict but also cooperation. Neither party relishes the prospect of assuming the region’s burdens alone, or of it becoming a theatre of great power struggle. Yet cooperation will depend not only on identifying common threats and opportunities in the Middle East, but conceiving inter-state strategic competition in a manner that is not strictly zero sum. If the two sides can do so, then US and Chinese shared interests in the Middle East can become a source of relief from bilateral tensions in Asia, rather than an extension of them.
John W. Garver explains the differences in China’s approach to regional politics in the Middle East and the South Asian-Indian Ocean regions.

China ‘East of Suez’

Comparison of China’s policies in the South Asian-Indian Ocean region with its policies in the Middle East yields some interesting conclusions. In the South Asian-Indian Ocean region (SA-IOR), China is deeply involved in core strategic issues; it is willing to take sides and support weaker countries against an ambitious regional power – India. In the Middle East, on the other hand, China deliberately sidesteps involvement in conflicts among regional powers, pursuing, instead, omnidirectional cooperation. Understanding the differences in China’s interests and strategic calculations in the SA-IOR and the Middle East will become increasingly important as China and India grow in power and ambition. If and when the day arrives when America opts to withdraw from ‘East of Suez’, it may be important for Middle East governments to understand the differences in Chinese eyes between SA-IOR and the Middle East.

In the SA-IOR, China confronts a strong and ambitious rival – India – which views with deep apprehension China’s rapidly growing security role in ‘its’ (India’s) region. One of the long-standing strategic cleavages of the South Asian region is between India and Pakistan, and China is squarely aligned with India’s nemesis, Pakistan. China’s mammoth $60 billion investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor with its oceanic terminus at Gwadar, is at the very centre of Xi Jinping’s Belt and Road Initiative. The intensifying competition between China and India for security, influence and status across the SA-IOR is perhaps the defining characteristic of that region. Beijing’s long-term strategic objective in the SA-IOR is securing recognition of China’s supremacy by countries of the region as a necessary ‘first stop’ on China’s rise as a global power.

China’s Middle East policies offer a stark contrast. In that region, Beijing has avoided deep strategic and military involvement. China enjoys good relations with Shi’i power Iran and with Sunni powers Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Egypt is an old and valued ‘friend’ of China – as is Iran, first under the Pahlavi Shah and then the Islamic Republic. Saudi Arabia became a ‘good friend’ of China (via US good offices!) after Iraqi oil exports collapsed following the 1991 and 2003 wars. Saudi Arabia quickly became one of China’s leading oil suppliers. Before

The intensifying competition between China and India for security, influence and status across the South Asian-Indian Ocean region is perhaps the defining characteristic of that region.
that point, Beijing enjoyed good ties with deadly rivals Iran and Iraq. China enjoys warm and valued relations with Israel, and with the Arab and Persian nemeses of that state. Beijing has courted esteem in Muslim countries by supporting the Palestinians, but is also deemed by Israel an acceptable participant in UN peacekeeping forces. China has even forged friendly ties with Turkey, long estranged from China because of Ankara’s empathy for China’s long-suffering Turkic population of Xinjiang.

In the Middle East China has never sought regional pre-eminence for itself. Prior to 1972, Beijing damned America’s putative quest for ‘hegemony’ over the Middle East. Then, for the next 20 years, Beijing condemned Moscow’s quest for dominance in the Middle East, before reverting to condemnation of United States policies after the demise of the USSR. But propaganda and rhetoric aside, Beijing was remarkably pragmatic in working with US ‘hegemony’ in the Middle East. Time and again Beijing chose not to oppose US efforts. Frequently Beijing bartered Chinese support, or at least non-opposition of some US policies, for concessions in policy areas of greater importance to Beijing. Time and again Beijing sidestepped Iranian invitations to jointly oppose Washington. In the chaotic aftermath of Washington’s 2003 regime change in Iraq, Beijing proved more willing to cooperate with the US than many of Washington’s old European allies. In South Asia, on the other hand, China’s policy behaviour more substantially matched its condemnation of Indian ‘hegemony’. As early as the 1960s Mao Zedong’s disdain for Jawaharlal Nehru’s ‘hegemony’ was a phrase frequently heard in Beijing when discussing that region with Chinese specialists. The role of religion in Middle Eastern politics and governance, for example, is difficult to understand within the Confucian tradition of purely secular rule. The greatest blunder of China’s Middle Eastern policies was, perhaps, its close embrace of the Shah’s rule even as his regime was crumbling around him in 1978. Beijing was able to reconstruct the Sino-Iranian relation within a few years, but such a potentially embarrassing miscalculation could be deadly for a leader with less political capital than Deng Xiaoping.

Beijing is also aware that powers stronger than China – namely the US and Russia – seek to determine events in the Middle East. Those other powers also have security and geopolitical interests that are weightier than China’s narrow interests, which are primarily economic. Energy supply and expanded trade with the Middle East are, of course, important for economic development; but the most important factor for China’s development has been (and will remain for the next several decades) a benevolent US attitude. China’s leaders recognise that the United States is, for better or worse, the leader of a global coalition of capitalist democracies which, collectively, largely determine international flows of merchandise, commodities, capital and technology. The strategic brilliance of Deng Xiaoping was to recognise this and use China’s strategic alignment with the Middle East from its SA-IOR policy to exert Chinese power and influence waxes across the SA-IOR, Beijing views New Delhi’s efforts to counter, contain or abort Chinese advances as hostile efforts to contain China. From Beijing’s perspective, China must defend itself and its interests against a hostile India. No such ‘anti-China’ power exists in the Middle East.

A second factor distinguishing China’s Middle East from its SA-IOR policy is a deep sense of strategic caution regarding the former. Chinese analysts view the Middle East as deeply complex and perhaps unfathomable. The Middle East is ‘the graveyard of empires’ is a phrase frequently heard in Beijing when discussing that region with Chinese specialists. The role of religion in Middle Eastern politics and governance, for example, is difficult to understand within the Confucian tradition of purely secular rule. The greatest blunder of China’s Middle Eastern policies was, perhaps, its close embrace of the Shah’s rule even as his regime was crumbling around him in 1978. Beijing was able to reconstruct the Sino-Iranian relation within a few years, but such a potentially embarrassing miscalculation could be deadly for a leader with less political capital than Deng Xiaoping.

If China vigorously challenged US efforts in the Middle East, it could spoil the favourable Sino-US macro climate. If Washington concluded that China was a ‘peer competitor’ with the United States in a region as strategically important to the United States as the energy rich Middle East, US support for China’s development might wither.

Stated allegorically, in the Middle East China exploits the advantage of ‘sitting on the mountain and watching the tigers fight’ while pursuing friendly ties with all the tigers. In the SA-IOR China outmanoeuvres and encircles the Indian ‘tiger’ while building a position of power and influence that will ultimately compel the erstwhile Indian tiger to kowtow to China’s supremacy.

If China vigorously challenged US efforts in the Middle East, it could spoil the favourable Sino-US macro climate.
China’s contradictory policy towards Israel

Mr. Yitzhak Shichor on the evolution of China’s relationship with Israel, from the founding of the People’s Republic of China to the present day.

Supported by most of its 47 members, including China, the United Nations Council for Human Rights (UNCHR) adopted five resolutions against Israel on 23 March 2018. This is not exceptional: the UNCHR, and China, never vote for Israel. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel on 24 January 1992 – and certainly before – Beijing consistently associates with Israel’s adversaries in international organisations, especially the United Nations and its Security Council. At the same time, China cooperates with Israel extensively in realms such as security and counter-terrorism, trade and investments, infrastructures (ports, tunnels and railroads), culture, tourism, science and technology, higher education, agriculture, water technology, innovation etc. How can these seemingly contradictory policies be reconciled?

After its inauguration in 1949, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) considered Israel a potential friend: Israel had just won independence from British imperialism, was ruled by a socialist labour party and gained Soviet political as well as military support. On 9 January 1950, Israel became the first Middle Eastern country (and the 7th in the non-communist world) to recognise the PRC, which simultaneously condemned the Arabs’ continued ‘submission’ to Western colonialism and orthodox Islam and their hostility to communism and the Soviet Union. While exploring the formation of diplomatic relations with Israel, however, Beijing discerned the combined global and regional weight of the Arab and Muslim countries, now regarded as ‘friends’. Israel, now associated with the US, became a ‘foe’.

Yet, while Beijing publicly criticised Israel, sometimes harshly, implicit indications of interest in Israel appeared – notably in China’s military and its defence industrial establishment, which were watching Israel’s accomplishments. This interest may have started as early as 1956, when Israel collaborated with two great powers, the UK and France, in their offensive against Egypt. But the turning point was likely to have been the 1967 War, when Israel swiftly destroyed the overwhelmingly Soviet-made arms and air forces of a number of Arab countries. Facing challenges from similar Soviet weapons, Beijing became interested in Israel’s military experience and capabilities and simultaneously decided to improve relations with the US.

Israel’s association with the US now...
Böhring claims to play a role in settling the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict by putting forward occasional ‘Peace Proposals’ and sending ‘special envoys’ to the Middle East… However, these are more a ‘showoff’, a pretension that no side is taking seriously.

became an asset. Beijing not only appreciated Israel’s vote for China’s admission to the United Nations (and as a permanent member of its Security Council), but, even more so, Israel’s perceived role in checking Soviet ‘expansionism’ in the Middle East. Beijing, however, rejected diplomatic relations insisting on three preconditions: the complete Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, including East Jerusalem; the formation of an independent Palestinian state; and the discontinuation of Israel’s ‘aggressive policy’ in the Middle East. Public condemnation of Israel continued.

Nonetheless, by the late 1970s Beijing – aware of its military inferiority vis-à-vis the Soviets – had come to the conclusion that the only country in the world that could help was Israel. One of the most experienced – if not the most – in fighting Soviet weapons, Israel had also over the years captured huge quantities of Soviet arms, many brand new. Technologically upgraded, these weapons were now superior to the original Soviet ones, an advantage no other country could offer. Moreover, unlike the US and Western Europe, which were explicitly warned by Moscow not to ‘play the China card’, Israel was relatively immune to Soviet pressure because Moscow had cut off diplomatic relations in 1967. Furthermore, Israel was not bound by Western regulations, which prohibited arms sales to communist countries, China included. Consequently, in early 1979 a high-level Israeli military delegation visited China clandestinely. This meeting led to a series of agreements that promoted China’s defence modernisation. Gradually, in the 1980s China allowed unofficial relations with Israel in tourism, agriculture, science and technology and even political meetings, primarily during the UN General Assembly annual sessions.

Publicly China continued to condemn Israel and support the Arabs and the Palestinians. This duality gave the impression that Israel was unworthy as a diplomatic partner, yet very much worthy as a military supplier. For how long could Israel and China live with this arrangement? In truth, not long. But the arrangement provided the conceptual foundations for China’s diplomatic relations with Israel. Following Egypt’s 1979 peace treaty with Israel and the low-key Middle Eastern response to China’s unofficial relations with Israel, it was about time to make these relations official.

This was accomplished on 24 January 1992, although none of Beijing’s preconditions had been met. In the meantime, the two agreed to pursue mutual benefits while sidestepping political obstacles. Indeed, over the last 25 years, Sino-Israeli relations have witnessed dramatic progress given Israel’s small size and huge problems. Israel’s trade turnover with China is about the same as China’s trade turnover with Egypt (which is ten times as big as Israel). There are considerable Chinese investments in Israeli companies and infrastructure. Bilateral tourism is booming as well as the exchange of students and academics. However, this rosy picture of Sino-Israeli relations is clouded by politics. Beijing has never voted for Israel in any international organisation, least of all in the UN Security Council and the UNCHR. It continues to condemn Israel’s ‘aggression’ and support the Palestinians and anti-Israel countries.

How could China’s contradictory policies towards Israel be reconciled? How could China, an associate of the Palestinians, maintain and expand relations with Israel while the Palestinians are allegedly still oppressed and persecuted? How could Israel maintain relations with a China that is consistently and evidently opposed to its policies? There are no official answers to these questions but there are unofficial explanations. For one, Beijing considers international organisations, like the UN, its Security Council and especially the UNHRC, impotent: their ‘resolutions’ are practically meaningless and seldom implemented. Voting against Israel in these organisations reflects China’s genuine identification with the Arabs and the Palestinians yet hardly harms Israel. In addition, Beijing can support anti-Israel UN Security Council resolutions knowing, often in advance, that the US will cast its veto power, thereby blocking them. As such, China is no different from many other countries which regularly support the Palestinians and the Arabs and still maintain good and diversified relations with Israel. Finally, Beijing claims to play a role in settling the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict by putting forward occasional ‘Peace Proposals’ and sending ‘special envoys’ to the Middle East. Many ‘experts’ believe that these are indications of greater Chinese political activism in the Middle East. However, these are more a ‘showoff’, a pretension that no side is taking seriously. Beijing is not considered a partner to a settlement, nor does it really want to become one, which means taking sides. China does not want to take sides. It prefers to eat the cake and have it too.

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Islam in China is but one of the stories of cultural encounters along the Silk Roads in the past and at present. It gives us a glimpse into the historical relations between China and the Middle East and, more broadly, the frenetic movement of people and things between Asia and Europe, by land from the Pacific to the Middle East via Central Asia and the Middle East, or by sea to the Mediterranean through the South Seas, Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. Merchants and their agents, artisans and craftsmen, singers and musicians, sailors and adventurers, itinerant Sufis, monks, scholars and storytellers, and coolies and slaves travelled around the world along a complex network of trade routes, meeting in Chang’an (Xi’an today), Dunhuang, Kashgar and Guangzhou in China; Tashkent, Samarkand and Isfahan in Central Asia and Iran; Bursa, Izmir, and Constantinople in Turkey; Aleppo in Syria; Tyre in Lebanon; Venice and Rome in Italy; Madras, Goa, and Mumbai in India; Malacca in Malaysia; Pasai in Indonesia; Muscat in Oman; Basra in Iraq; Aden in Yemen; and Suez in Egypt. Generations of Arab and Persian Muslims travelled to China and settled down in Silk Road cities. Turkic Muslims from Central Asia conscripted into the Mongol Army in the 13th and 14th centuries similarly migrated to different parts of China. Many moved East from their homelands in the West and made their home in China’s political and financial capitals, joining earlier Muslim communities in Beijing, Nanjing, Shanghai and Guangzhou.

These Middle Eastern Muslims brought with them their languages, stories, cuisines, music, visual sensibilities and a whole set of cultural practices, which have become an integral part of the fabric of multilingual and multicultural China as well as Chinese Diaspora. Ibn Battuta (1304-1368 or 69), a near contemporary of Marco Polo (1254-1324), who travelled into China by sea and departed by land, describes in his voluminous travel accounts, *Tuhfat al-nuzzar fi gharā’ib al-āmsar wa-aḥdā’ib al-aṣfar* (‘A gift to those who contemplate the wonder of cities and marvels of travelling’), Chinese cities he had visited as ‘identical’ to cities in the Islamic lands.

The City of China (*Madinat al-Sin*), in which ‘The Tale of the Hunchback’ in *The Thousand and One Nights* is set, sounds more similar to medieval Baghdad than Yuan capital of Khanbaliq or Dadu.

Using religion as an identity marker, *Wen-chin Ouyang* sketches the historical movement of people, objects and ideas from the Middle East to China.

### Cultural encounters along the Silk Roads

*Chinese plates adopted ‘Islamic’ floral motifs. Photograph by PHGCOM*
The King of China looks, sounds and behaves more like Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid than a Mongol Khan, and the citizens of his city include Christians, Jews and Muslims but not Buddhists or Daoists. In the 15th-century manuscript of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the ‘City of China’ is identified as Kashgar, one of the westernmost cities of China, located near the border with Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan and Tajikistan, whose population today is around 81 per cent Muslim Uyghurs and 18 per cent Han Chinese. As a strategically important city on the Silk Road, it has been ruled successively by Chinese, Mongol, Manchu, Tibetan and Turkic empires. Said to be a perfect ‘Islamic’ city even today, Kashgar may very well be the type of ‘Chinese’ city to which both Ibn Battuta and ‘The Hunchback’s Tale’ refer.

‘Syrian’ Christian artisans are known to have contributed to the Buddhist paintings in the Dunhuang caves even before Tang Dynasty (618-907). Dunhuang, like Kashgar, is another ancient Silk Road city with a two thousand year history. Kaifeng Jews are a well-known small Chinese Jewish community rumoured to have existed since the Tang times.

Religion is one of the most obvious identity markers that allow us to track the movement of people around the world. It is manifested in language, dress, cuisine and a set of social habits and cultural practices. Smatterings of Arabic and Persian in Huihui speak, dietary habits that exclude pork, women’s hijab and men’s taqiyah, and congregating at mosques for Jum’ah or Eid prayers, continue to distinguish Muslims of Arab and Persian descent from Han Chinese, even though after centuries of living in close proximity and intermarriage no one can rely on physical features, personal behaviour or even language to tell them apart. Outside these religious markers, however, traces of cultural encounters can be diffused and rather difficult to detect. This is perhaps why the historical presence of the Chinese in the Middle East has been harder to see and pinpoint. Today there are numerous stories of Chinese women who marry Middle Eastern men and migrate with their husbands to Algeria, Egypt, Lebanon and the Emirates, but they seem to have completely disappeared into the Middle Eastern cultural landscapes. The Chinese diaspora in the Middle East live an inconspicuous life, it seems, unlike their counterparts in the Americas, Europe and South East Asia, where their presence is marked by Chinatown’s. When the contours of a ‘Chinatown’ began to emerge in Algiers in 2006, the excitement went viral (Google ‘Chinatown in Algiers’).

The re-emergence of China in the 21st century as a world-class superpower has turned attention yet again to its place and role in international politics and finance. Chinese people, objects and ideas have travelled to the Middle East along the Silk Roads for thousands of years, long before the recently declared ‘One Belt, One Road’ vision through which China’s political establishment proposes to reconnect the old Silk Road countries through its ambitious global development strategy. They seem to have been so seamlessly integrated into the fabric of daily life that few people think twice about where they came from and brought them. However, they are everywhere, even in the visual arts and literary writings. *The Book of Change, Yi Jing* in Chinese, is on the must-read list of a great number of Arab intellectuals and artists. Chinese visual aesthetics underpin the abstract paintings of Iraqi Rafa Al-Nasiri (1940-2013), who pursued further studies at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing (1959-1963) upon his graduation from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad. The history of silk’s travel around the world starting in China saturates the fabric of Hoda Barakat’s (b. 1952) writing in her novel of war-torn Beirut, *The Tiller of Waters*. Objects, such as silk, blue and white ceramic, and jade, to name but three familiar examples, have tales to tell about cultural encounters between China and the Middle East beyond the scope of current museum exhibitions and the British Library’s International Dunhuang Project. There is no time like the present to recover these stories.

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Chinese people, objects and ideas have travelled to the Middle East along the Silk Roads for thousands of years, long before the recently declared ‘One Belt, One Road’ vision.
The translation of Arabic literature into Chinese can be broken down into four distinct phases. Xue Qingguo explains

Arabic literature translation in China

Sino-Arab relations date back some two thousand years, to when these two peoples were first linked by the famous Silk Road. Ancient writings of Chinese explorers and traders contain much information about the Arabs but it is generally confined to reports about their customs and traditions that neglected their spiritual and intellectual attainments. Arabic literature, however, remained quite unknown in China up until the late 19th century, when the first Arabic religious-literary work, Mohammed Sharafuddin al-Bousiri’s Al-Burda (‘The Prophet’s Cloak’), was translated into Chinese thanks to the Muslim scholar Ma Dexing, who brought the text with him back to China from Egypt and quickly set about translating it with the assistance of a student. Unfortunately, Dexing died before the task was completed. It was left to two of his students to render the verse into classical, metrical Chinese verse. The translation was published in 1896 alongside the original Arabic text.

The period between the publication of Al-Burda and the foundation of the People’s Republic in 1949 can be regarded as phase one of the translation of Arabic literature in China. This phase is characterised by a noticeable lack of intensive efforts to translate Arabic literary works, principally due to language barriers (knowledge of Arabic among Chinese scholars was limited) and the fact that such scholars as there were specialised in religious affairs. Thus, Muslim scholars had translated books related to Islam and Arab Islamic civilisation directly from the Arabic, but literary translations of Arabic works generally made their way into Chinese via other languages. For example, from 1900, a number of excerpts from The Thousand and One Nights that had been taken from English and Japanese were published, but the first translation from Arabic only appeared in 1941 when the Muslim Arabist Na Xun published a five-volume work containing the majority of the tales from the Nights.

Alongside The Thousand and One Nights, Chinese readers had begun to encounter contemporary Arabic literature in the form of works by Gibran Kahlil Gibran. The famous author Mao Dun translated five prose excerpts from Gibran’s English-language work The Forerunner and published them in a literary magazine in 1923. In 1931, celebrated author Bing Xin published her translation of The Prophet, writing in her introduction: ‘I am passionate about the supreme Oriental wisdom and extraordinary poetic language of this little volume.’ Her translation was received very well in China and remains in print to this day.

The period from the foundation of...
Once China joined the World Intellectual Property Organization in the mid-1990s the rate of translation slowed, as publishers were now required to obtain authors’ permission before translating and publishing their work in China.

The People’s Republic up until the so-called Cultural Revolution constitutes the second phase of Arabic literary translation, one that coincided with an era in which the world was rocked by calls for national independence and liberation. It was only natural that a recently-liberated China should stand in solidarity with nations struggling for their own freedom. As part of this effort, a number of poetry collections containing patriotic and revolutionary verses by poets like Abul Qasim al-Shabi, Abdel Wahhab al-Bayati and others were translated into Chinese alongside ‘realist’ short story collections by authors from Egypt, Syria and Lebanon. It was during this period, too, that Taha Hussein’s *The Days* and Ibn Muqaffa’a *Kalila and Dimna* were translated into Chinese.

In 1966 the Cultural Revolution began. It persisted for a decade and was a catastrophe in the fullest sense of the word; the travails of Arabic literature during this period were but a microcosm of the social, economic and cultural collapse suffered by the country as a whole. During this period translations from Arabic ceased completely.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, and as China entered a period of reform and opening up to the world in the early 1980s, Arabic literary translation entered a third phase, one that could be regarded as its golden era and which lasted into the mid-1990s. In slightly less than twenty years, some 150 literary works were translated, including novels, short stories and selections of poetry and prose, with Egyptian and Lebanese authors in particular enjoying a considerable presence in Chinese.

Naguib Mahfouz headed the list, with approximately 20 of his works translated into Chinese including the *Cairo Trilogy* and *Children of Our Alley*, followed by Ihsan Abdel Quddous, Tawfiq al-Hakim, Youssef al-Sebai, Yusef Idris, Abdel Rahman al-Sharqawi and others. From Lebanon came the complete works of Kahlil Gibran (in four separate translations), in addition to numerous selections of his poetic and prose writings, plus translations of the works of Mikhail Nuaima, Jurji Zeidan and others.

Various works from other countries in the MENA region were also translated, including many major figures in modern Arabic literature such as Abul Qasim al-Shabi, Ghassan Kanafani, Hanna Mina, Abdelhamid Ben Hedouga, Abdel Majid Ben Jelloun, Taher Ben Jelloun, Ahmed Ibrahim al-Fagih, Tayeb al-Salih, Souad al-Sabah, Laila al-Othman and Nawal al-Saadawi.

Once China joined the World Intellectual Property Organization in the mid-1990s the rate of translation slowed, as publishers were now required to obtain authors’ permission before translating and publishing their work in China, which in turn compelled publishers to take financial returns into consideration when selecting titles. A fourth phase thus began, a settled phase which has seen, since the start of the new millennium, the publication of approximately 30 translations – of novels, short story collections and poetry – including 14 novels from the Arab Writers’ Union list of the best 105 Arabic language novels, published in a five volume work entitled *Selections from Arabic Novels*. Three selections from the poetry of Adonis have been published as well as one selection of his prose, another selection from the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, two novels by Gamal al-Ghitani and various other novels and short stories by contemporary Arab authors.

From this overview of translations of Arabic literary works into Chinese we can see that Arabic literature has an established presence in China. However, translation efforts remain severely limited and suffer from specific problems and difficulties. First of all, classical works of Arabic literature that have been translated into Chinese can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Secondly, very few poetic and dramatic works have been translated and those that have been tend to focus on certain areas of the Arab world – while literature from the Gulf and Western North Africa is underrepresented. Thirdly, the standard of translation is, generally speaking, unsatisfactory; this is, in all likelihood, one of the main reasons why Arabic literature has not gained a stronger foothold in China. With most titles (with the exception of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the work of Gibran, some novels by Naguib Mahfouz and the poetry of Adonis and Mahmoud Darwish) printed in small numbers, their readership is limited to researchers, students and specialists in foreign literature.

A longer version of this article first appeared in *Banipal 50 – Prison Writing* (Summer 2014): 196-206.

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Psycho-nationalism: Global Thought, Iranian Imaginations

By Arshin Adib-Moghaddam

Cambridge University Press, December 2017, £19.99

Reviewed by Tara Povey

The first chapter of Arshin Adib-Moghaddam’s new book contains the line ‘the flag and the hymn, it seems are celebrating a surprising comeback’ (p.13) – an accurate and evocative summary of our contemporary era that is increasingly witness to vociferous nationalism. Psycho-nationalism: Global Thought, Iranian Imaginations is a timely and important critique of nationalism as an emotive and destructive force in global thought and politics. The book is a significant contribution to comparative history, Iranian and Middle East studies and studies of nationalism. The research utilises the works of significant intellectuals, artists and politicians in diverse contexts, times and places and is informed by interviews undertaken in Iran and with second and third generation Iranians living outside the country.

Many schools of thought have sought to explain the endurance and appeal of the nation-state through theories of hegemony and coercion and/or bio-power and surveillance. This book develops these analyses by highlighting the emotional appeal of nationalism in which the nation is ‘routinely represented almost like an irresistible muse, a siren song with distinctly emotional undertones’ (p. 1). The author argues that psycho-nationalism is more than simply a political ideology as it targets both our minds and emotions. At once, it presents us with the comforting myth of belonging but is, in actuality, an exclusionary discourse which fosters intolerance and hate towards those who do not belong to it.

Psycho-nationalism is therefore conceptualised as intrinsically linked to the interests of the state. Indeed, Adib-Moghaddam argues that despite many predictions of its demise, the nation-state continues to be a ‘major factor in the lives of its citizens around the world’ (p. 2). But importantly psycho-nationalism transcends the official institutions and trappings of government; it can be traced in the realms of popular culture, the media and social media and linked to racism, classism and hetero-sexism. However the nation-state is the primary focus for psycho-nationalism, which links the idea of the nation with powerful emotions such as love, honour and pride (p. 25).

Another important contribution of the book is its challenge to Eurocentric accounts of nationalism. By presenting an analysis of Iran as a ‘historic nation’ in a comparative and global context, Adib-Moghaddam goes beyond the construction of a binary model in which Western nationalisms are seen as progressive civic nationalisms and Eastern nationalisms are characterised as either derivative or reactionary. This de-centring of Eurocentric accounts of the emergence of nationalism sheds light on the nature and allure of psycho-nationalism and reveals its similar workings in different contexts and places. The book demonstrates this through its analysis of the works of significant authors such as Ferdowsi and Ibn Khaldoun as evidence of the ways in which Iranian or Arab (or Indian, German, Italian or British) culture is imbued with cosmopolitan, global thought. The book goes on to show the ways in which the work of these figures is, in later periods, co-opted by exclusionary psycho-nationalisms – in, for example, the Pahlavi monarchy’s racist Persianism. In this way the author demonstrates that what are seen as cultural artefacts of a nation’s supposedly coherent past are in fact evidence of the ways in which ideas and texts travel and gain new meanings ‘in response to political necessity and/or ideological expediency’ (p. 36).

Although psycho-nationalism is presented as a powerful tool in the hands of states and an attempt to ‘surrender citizens out of free will’ (p.11), Adib-Moghaddam is keen to point out that as an exclusionary discourse it fosters resistance to its own precepts, arguing that just as ‘where there is bio-power there is resistance, where there is psycho-nationalism, there is opposition’ (p. 11). This work thus illuminates and challenges psycho-nationalism – explaining both the allure of the nation-state and its failure to live up to its false promises. Most crucially it gives readers the tools to understand the perils of ‘self-confining identities’ in order to help reclaim our many historical and ‘subversive translocalities’ (p. 156).

Tara Povey is a Lecturer in the history of the modern Middle East at Goldsmiths, University of London and author of Social Movements in Egypt and Iran (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
China’s Early Mosques

By Nancy Shatzman Steinhardt

What happens when a monotheistic, foreign religion needs a space in which to worship in China, a civilisation with a building tradition that has been largely unchanged for several millennia? The story of this extraordinary convergence begins in the 7th century and continues under the Chinese rule of Song and Ming, and the non-Chinese rule of the Mongols and Manchus, each with a different political and religious agenda. The author shows that mosques, and ultimately Islam, have survived in China because the Chinese architectural system, though often unchanging, is adaptable: it can accommodate the religious requirements of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and Islam.

April 2018, Edinburgh University Press, £35.00

An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba

Edited by Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha

In 2018, Palestinians mark the 70th anniversary of the Nakba, when over 750,000 people were uprooted and forced to flee their homes in the early days of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unearthing an unparalleled body of rich oral testimony, An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba tells the story of this event through the voices of the Palestinians who lived it, uncovering remarkable new insights both into Palestinian experiences of the Nakba and into the wider dynamics of the ongoing conflict. Drawing together Palestinian accounts from 1948 with those of the present day, the book confronts the idea of the Nakba as an event consigned to the past, instead revealing it to be an ongoing process aimed at the erasure of Palestinian memory and history.

May 2018, Zed Books, £65.00

Persian Gulf Command: A History of the Second World War in Iran and Iraq

By Ashley Jackson

Contending that Iran and Iraq were more important to the Allied forces’ war operations than has ever been acknowledged, historian Ashley Jackson investigates the grand strategy of the Allies and their operations in the region and the continuing legacy of Western intervention in the Middle East. Iran and Iraq served as the first WWII theatre in which the US, the UK and the USSR fought alongside each other. Jackson charts the intense Allied military activity in Iran and Iraq and reveals how deeply the war impacted common people's lives. He also provides revelations about the true nature of Anglo-American relations in the region, the beginnings of the Cold War, and the continuing corrosive legacy of Western influence in these lands.

June 2018, Yale University Press, £25.00
Hamas Contained: 
The Rise and Pacification of Palestinian Resistance

By Tareq Baconi

Hamas rules Gaza and the lives of the two million Palestinians who live there. Demonised in media and policy debates, various accusations and critical assumptions have been used to justify extreme military action against Hamas. The reality of Hamas is, of course, far more complex. Neither a democratic political party nor a terrorist group, Hamas is a multifaceted liberation organisation, one rooted in the nationalist claims of the Palestinian people. *Hamas Contained* offers the first history of the group on its own terms. Drawing on interviews with organisation leaders, as well as publications from the group, Tareq Baconi maps Hamas’s thirty-year transition from fringe military resistance towards governance.

*May 2018, Stanford University Press, £22.99*

Authority and Identity in Medieval Islamic Historiography: 
Persian Histories from the Peripheries

By Mimi Hanaoka

Intriguing dreams, improbable myths, fanciful genealogies and suspect etymologies. These were all key elements of the historical texts composed by scholars and bureaucrats on the peripheries of Islamic empires between the 10th and 15th centuries. But how are historians to interpret such narratives? And what can these more literary histories tell us about the people who wrote them and the times in which they lived? By paying attention to the purpose and intention behind a text’s creation, Mimi Hanaoka highlights the preoccupation with authority to rule and legitimacy within disparate regional, provincial, ethnic, sectarian, ideological and professional communities. Reading these texts in such a way transforms the literary patterns of these fantastic histories into rich sources of information about identity, rhetoric, authority, legitimacy, and centre-periphery relations.

*April 2018, Cambridge University Press, £29.99*

Digital Middle East: 
State and Society in the Information Age

Edited Mohamed Zayani

In recent years, the Middle East’s information and communications landscape has changed dramatically. Increasingly, states, businesses and citizens are capitalising on the opportunities offered by new information technologies, the fast pace of digitisation, and enhanced connectivity. *Digital Middle East* sheds a critical light on the continuing changes closely intertwined with the adoption of information and communication technologies in the region. Drawing on case studies from throughout the Middle East, the contributors explore how these digital transformations are playing out in the social, cultural, political and economic spheres, exposing the various disjunctions and discordances that have marked the advent of the digital Middle East.

*April 2018, Hurst, £25.00*
**Events in London**

The Events and organisations listed below are not necessarily endorsed or supported by The Middle East in London. The accompanying texts and images are based primarily on information provided by the organisers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the compilers or publishers. While every possible effort is made to ascertain the accuracy of these listings, readers are advised to seek confirmation of all events using the contact details provided for each event.

Submitting entries and updates: please send all updates and submissions for entries related to future events via e-mail to mepub@soas.ac.uk

<table>
<thead>
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<th>JUNE EVENTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Saturday 2 June</strong></td>
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| **Monday 4 June** |

| **Wednesday 6 June** |
| 7:00 pm | **Nubian/Egyptian Frame Drum Workshop** (Workshop) Organised by: The Mosaic Rooms. With percussionist and specialist in Arabic drumming, Tim Garside. Discover how the frame drum was traditionally used and learn the basic techniques and rhythms. Tickets: £10. The Mosaic Rooms, A.M. Qattan Foundation, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W https://mosaicrooms.org |

| **Thursday 7 June** |
| 4:00 pm | **Batrawy in the 3rd** |

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**TRAIN TO TEACH ARABIC**

SOAS, University of London, Language Centre is pleased to offer its renowned programme of professional development leading to a post-graduate qualification (Certificate and Diploma levels) in teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language. These awards have contributed substantially to the professionalising of Arabic teaching in the UK and elsewhere and to the recognition of the expertise of teachers of Arabic.

**New Arabic Teacher Training Programme**

Starting 8 October 2018. 8-10-18 to 28-6-19 - Full-Time (2/3 days attendance per week).

SOAS, University of London, is the only place that trains teachers of Arabic in the latest communicative methods that enable learners to use the language effectively right from Beginners level. Our fees for these University of London accredited programmes are very reasonable and we have had excellent feedback, both from trainees and from their subsequent employers. For more information contact:

- The Programme Convenor, Ilham Salimane
  Email: is23@soas.ac.uk
  Telephone: +44 (0)20 7898 4870
  or
- The Programme Administrator, Romany Luckock
  Email: rl27@soas.ac.uk
  Telephone: +44(0)20 7898 4595
  or
- Follow the link:
  http://www.soas.ac.uk/languagecentre/languages/arabic/postgraduate-certificate-diploma-in-teaching-arabic-as-a-foreign-language.html

We also run full-time accredited Certificate and Diploma courses in Arabic language which are highly valued by students and widely recognised by employers in the UK and overseas. Details from this link: https://www.soas.ac.uk/languagecentre/languages/arabic/diploma-in-communicative-arabic/
Millennium BC Jordan and the Concept of City in the Southern Levant (Lecture) Lorenzo Nigro (La Sapienza University Roma). Organised by: The Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) and Department of Middle East, BM. AGM Lecture. Nigro looks at the definition of ‘urbanisation’ and ‘city’, and how (if at all) we can recognise these concepts in the archaeological record in the 3rd millennium BC in the southern Levant. Admission free. Pre-registration T 020 7323 8181 W www.britishmuseum.org BP Lecture Theatre, Clore Education Centre, BM. T 020 7935 5379 E ExecSec@PEF.org.uk W www.pef.org.uk / www.britishmuseum.org

6:30 pm | In Memoriam: Faleh A. Jabar (1946–2018) Organised by: LSE Middle East Centre. Memorial honouring the late Faleh A. Jabar and his notable contribution to the study of Iraq and the wider Middle East. This event also marks the launch of his MEC paper ‘From Identity Shaw Library, LSE. Free. Pre-registration required.

Friday 8 June

1:15 pm | The past is present: becoming Egyptian in the 20th Century (Gallery Talk) Hussein Omar (University of Oxford). Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 3, BM. T 020 7323 8000 E info@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Tuesday 12 June

1:15 pm | Persia after Alexander the Great: Decline or Revival? (Gallery Talk) Vesta Curtis (BM). Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 68, BM. T 020 7323 8000 E info@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Wednesday 13 June

5.15 pm | Remarkable New Discoveries of Iron Age Remains Around Rustaq on the Batinah Coast of Oman (Lecture) Derek Kennet (University of Durham). Organised by: British Foundation for the Study of Arabia (BDSA). Beatrice de Cardi Lecture following the Society’s AGM. Admission free. Lecture Theatre G6, Ground Floor, Institute of Archaeology, UCL, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H OPY. E contact@thebfsa.org W www.thebfsa.org

7:00 pm | Late Ottoman New Media: Journal Reading and Visuality During the Hamidian Era (1876-1909) (Lecture) Ahmet Ersoy (Boğaziçi University, Istanbul and Koç University, Istanbul). Organised by: Islamic Art Circle at SOAS. Chair: Scott Redford (SOAS). Admission free. Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS. T 07714087480 E rosalindhaddon@gmail.com W www.soas.ac.uk/art/islac/

8:00 pm | Malaria in Palestine (Lecture) Organised by: Spiro Ark and Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue. The first successful national malaria-eradication campaign anywhere in the world took place in Palestine in 1921/2. Lecture by Anton Alexander, a retired solicitor, who in 2009, began to take an interest in malaria in Palestine when he first discovered that Petah Tikvah had been abandoned some 130 years ago on account of malaria. Tickets: £10. Pre-registration required. Hampstead Garden Suburb Synagogue, Norrice Lea, London N2 0RE. T 020 7794 4655 W www.spiroark.org

Tuesday 18 June


Monday 18 June


Wednesday 20 June

6:30 pm | The Showing of Two Films about the Migration of Bakhtiari Tribes by Antony Wynn (Documentary) Organised by: Oriental Rug and Textile Society, UK. Screening of two films, the first Grass is a silent film made in 1925 by three Americans who made their way across Turkey and Iraq to meet the Bakhtiari in their winter quarters and follow them and their flocks to their summer pastures. The second film People of the Wind was made by the late Shusha Guppy in 1976, following the same route with descendants of the same people showing what had changed and what had stayed the same. Tickets: £7 non-members/£5 students. Membership of one year for 11 events at £20. The Church Hall Conference Room, St James Church, 197 Piccadilly, London W1J 9LL. E membership. orts@gmail.com W www.orientalrugandtextilesociety.org.uk

7:30 pm | Towards a New Divan: A Celebration of East and West through Music and Poetry (Performance) Organised by: Tafahum and Gingko and supported by Amal - A Said Foundation Project. A unique celebration of two centuries of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's West-Eastern Divan featuring the world premiere of a new musical

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- Enrol on a flexible, inter-disciplinary study programme

For further details, please contact:
Dr Adam Hanieh
E: ah92@soas.ac.uk
www.soas.ac.uk

Thursday 21 June

5:45 pm | Palaces and Water in the Early Alhambra (Lecture) Anna McSweeney (University of Sussex). Organised by: MBI Al Jaber Foundation. Lecture by McSweeney on the Partal Palace in the Alhambra, one of the earliest and most neglected palaces of the Alhambra, in which she reveals the Partal as part of a long tradition of water pavilions in the Islamic palace architecture of the western Mediterranean. Part of the MBI Al Jaber Lecture Series. Admission free. Pre-registration required. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. E info@mbifoundation.com W www.mbifoundation.com

6:00 pm | Rap Beyond Resistance: Staging Power in Contemporary Morocco (Talk) Cristina Moreno-Almeida (King’s College College). Talk to mark the publication of Moreno-Almeida’s book, Rap Beyond Resistance: Staging Power in Contemporary Morocco in which she argues for a new way of looking at cultural resistance in the Arabic-speaking world that goes beyond secular liberal ideas of resistance. Chair: Shakuntala Banaji (LSE). Admission free. Pre-registration required. MBI Al Jaber Seminar Room, London Middle East Institute, SOAS, MBI Al Jaber Building, 21 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EA. E info@mbifoundation.com W www.mbifoundation.com

Saturday 23 June

11:00 am | Digital Workshop: Egyptian Photo Booth Organised by: BM. Admission free. Samsung Centre, BM. T 020 7323 8000 E info@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

1:15 pm | Ancient Connections: Egyptians and Nubians (Gallery Talk) George Hart (independent speaker). Organised by: BM. Admission free. Room 65, BM. T 020 7323 8000 E info@britishmuseum.org W www.britishmuseum.org

Monday 25 June

6:00 pm | Fresh Light on Cleopatra (Lecture) Sarah Pearce (University of Southampton). Preceded by the Society’s AGM at 5:00pm. Organised by: Anglo Israel Archaeological Society jointly with the Institute of Archaeology, UCL. Admission free. Lecture Theatre G6, Ground Floor, Institute of Archaeology, UCL, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY. T 020 8349 5754 E secretary@aias.org.uk W www.aias.org.uk

6:30 pm | Middle Eastern Maqam Ensemble (Five-Day Workshop: Monday 25 - Friday 29 June) Organised by: Department of Music, School of Arts, SOAS. Bring your instrument (any!) and learn...
to play Middle Eastern music, based on the melodic concept of maqam. For fluent players on any instrument including vocals. The course is led by Louai Alhenawi, a Syrian-born performer, teacher and composer. Tickets: £115/£95 conc. Pre-registration required. T 020 7794 4500 E musicevents@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/music/summermusicschool/

**Wednesday 27 June**

7:30 pm | **Knock Knock** (Performance) Organised by: Spiro Ark and Central Synagogue London. Play by Niv Petel about the effects of National Service on everyday life and an IDF soldier’s mother. As a liaison officer for the army, Ilana, a single mother, supports families who’ve lost their sons and daughters to the wars. But when the time comes for her own only son to wear the army uniform, she faces a life-changing dilemma. Tickets: £10. Pre-booking required. Central Synagogue, 36-40 Hallam Street, London W1T 6NW. T 020 7794 4655 W www.knockknockplay.co.uk / www.spiroark.org

**Thursday 28 June**

9:00 am | **Re-Imagining Cultural Histories of the Middle East and North Africa** (Conference) Organised by: Communication and Media Research Institute (CAMRI), University of Westminster, Centre for Global Media & Communications, SOAS, Goldsmiths, University of London and Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House. Keynote Speaker: Ella Shohat (New York University). Celebrating 10 years of the Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication. A one-day conference bringing together cultural and art historians, anthropologists, political scientists as well as media and cultural studies scholars. Admission free. Pre-registration required W www.eventbrite.co.uk

**Friday 29 June**

1:00 pm | **Friday Lunch: Jamal and Alaa** (Performance) Traditional Syrian and Arabic folk songs from Jamal and Alaa. The duo have performed together since they met as part of the Sussex Syrian Community Group in January 2017. Together with Best Foot Music, they have released a 7-inch vinyl record and digital download, with all funds from sales going to the Sussex Syrian Community Hardship Fund. Part of Friday Lunch. Admission free. Central Bar Foyer, Level 2, Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX. T 020 3879 9555 W www.southbankcentre.co.uk

5:30 pm | **Friday Tonic: Suna Alan** (Performance) Kurdish folk songs from Suna Alan, a Kurdish Alevi singer and journalist based in London. Although her main focus is Kurdish folk songs from the four regions of Kurdistan, namely Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey, her repertoire also includes Armenian, Greek, Sephardic and Turkish songs. Part of Women in Music at Southbank Centre. Admission free. Central Bar Foyer, Level 2, Royal Festival Hall, Southbank Centre, Belvedere Road, London SE1 8XX. T 020 3879 9555 W www.southbankcentre.co.uk

**Saturday 30 June**

11:00 am | **Middle Eastern Percussion: Darbuka** (Two-Day Workshop: Saturday 30 June - Sunday 1 July) Organised by: Department of Music, School of Arts, SOAS. The darbuka, a hand-drum common throughout the Arab cultural sphere, originated from the Middle East around 2000 years ago. The course will introduce basic playing techniques & essential rhythms. Beginners welcome. With Louai Alhenawi, a Syrian-born performer, teacher and composer. Tickets: £115/£95 conc. Pre-registration required. T 020 7898 4500 E musicevents@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/music/summermusicschool/

University of Westminster, 309 Regent Street, London W1B 2UW. E A.Kavada@westminster.ac.uk W www.westminster.ac.uk/camri

**EVENTS OUTSIDE LONDON**

**Thursday 7 June**

5:00 pm | **Annual George Antonius Memorial Lecture** Moncef Marzouki (Former President of Tunisia, 2011-2014). Organised by: Middle East Centre, Oxford. Admission free. Investcorp Lecture Theatre, St Antony’s College, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF. T 01865 284780 E mec@sant.ox.ac.uk W http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre

**Wednesday 13 June**

2:00 pm | **The Question of Judeo-Arabic: Nation, Partition, and the Linguistic Imaginary** (Lecture) Ella Shohat (New York University). Organised by: Stanley Lewis chair of Israeli Studies, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies and the Middle East Centre at St Antony’s College. Comments by Yuval Evri. Part of a Celebration of Professor Ella Shohat. Admission free. Pre-registration required W https://bit.ly/2qHJLz Investcorp Lecture Theatre, St Antony’s College, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF. T 01865 284780 E mec@sant.ox.ac.uk W http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre

**Wednesday 13 June**

5:00 pm | **On the Arab Palestine, and Other Displacements** (Book Launch) Jacqueline Rose (Birkbeck), Kfir Cohen (Van Leer Jerusalem Institute), Moshe Behar (University of Manchester), Hakem Al-Rustom (Michigan), Ella Shohat (New York University). Organised by: Stanley Lewis chair of Israeli Studies, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies and the Middle East Centre at St Antony’s College. Admission free. Pre-registration required W https://bit.ly/2qHJLz Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF. T 01865 284780 E mec@sant.ox.ac.uk W http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre

Hamed Abdalla, Revolution (Thowra), 1968. Mixed media on canvas. Image courtesy the Hamed Abdalla Family Estate. ARABÉCÉDAIRE. (see Exhibitions, p. 30)
Thursday 14 June

2:30 pm | Memory, Memoirs, and History (Workshop) Ella Shohat and Avi Shlaim. Organised by: Stanley Lewis chair of Israeli Studies, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies and the Middle East Centre at St Antony’s College. Admission free. Pre-registration required W https://bit.ly/2qJHJLz

Middle East Centre, St Antony’s College, 68 Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6JF .

E mec@sant.ox.ac.uk

W http://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/middle-east-centre

Thursday 12 July

Until 19 July | Naila and the Uprising (Film) In 1987, when a nationwide uprising breaks out, a woman in Gaza must make a choice between love, family and freedom. Undaunted, she embraces all three, joining a clandestine network of women that together force the world to recognize the Palestinian right to self-determination. Preview screening followed by a Q&A with the film’s executive producer Suhad Babaa on Thursday 12 July. Tickets: Preview screening: £12.50/£10 conc./Daily Screenings: £9/£7 conc. Bertha DocHouse, inside Curzon Bloomsbury, Brunswick Centre, London WC1N 1AW. E info@dochouse.org W http://dochouse.org/

JULY EVENTS

Wednesday 11 July

7:30 pm | Naseer Shamma’s Quartet: Spirits (Performance) Organised by: Barbican in association with MARSM. Instrumentalists from Iraq, Pakistan and Spain come together for a performance of oud, tabla and sitar. Naseer Shamma, one of the world’s pre-eminent oud players and composers and recently named a UNESCO Artist for Peace is joined by three distinguished players from around the world, each experts in their respective musical traditions. Tickets: £25-£35. Barbican Hall, Barbican Centre, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS. T 020 7638 8891 E tickets@barbican.org.uk W www.barbican.org.uk

EXHIBITIONS

Until 9 June | Fahrettin Örenli:

New Middle East titles from I.B. TAURIS PUBLISHERS

The New Sultan
Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey
Soner Cagaptay
£17.99 | Out Now | HB | 9781784538262

‘Nobody tells Erdogan’s story better’
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Destroying a Nation
The Civil War in Syria
Nikolaos van Dam
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‘A sophisticated, yet accessible and readable analysis of a highly complex situation’
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‘Terrific and timely... a key resource for anyone fighting for justice in the region’
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For 30% off all titles visit www.ibtauris.com and enter code MIDEMAG* until 30th July 2018

Friday 20 July

10:00 am | Displaying Egypt (Two-Day Colloquium: Thursday 19 - Friday 20 July) See above event listing for details.

Friday 20 July

10:00 am | Displaying Egypt (Two-Day Colloquium: Thursday 19 - Friday 20 July) See above event listing for details.
Money without Nationality
Series of works across drawing, painting, sculpture, photography and poetry by the Turkish-Dutch artist, Fahrettin Orenli, which examine the psychological and physical aspects of cities as living organic structures, perceiving them as control towers for the distribution of mass information. Orenli investigates how humanity has blinkered itself in the process and got lost inside man-made nature. Admission free. Pi Artworks London, 55 Eastcastle Street, London W1W 8EG. T 020 7637 8403 E london@piartworks.com W www.piartworks.com

Until 16 June | The Pop Art Exodus A show displaying a collection of politically themed digital prints produced by the Lebanese visual artist Mohammad Z. Bassoumi. The exhibition has been put together as a symbolic gesture to commemorate the 70th anniversary of Nakba Day, the day following the announcement of Israeli Declaration of Independence in 1948. Admission free. P21 Gallery, 21-27 Chalton Street, London NW1 1JD. T 020 7312 6190 E info@p21.org.uk W http://p21.gallery

Until 23 June | ARABÉCÉDAIRE Solo exhibition dedicated to the Egyptian modernist painter Hamed Abdalla (1917-1985). Abdalla’s work centred on his development of what he called the ‘creative word’, written words expressed in paint, blending abstraction and human forms. This exhibition will focus on six resonant words to examine the development of Abdalla’s visual language and political ideas. Part of a special programme of exhibitions, celebrating the tenth anniversary of The Mosaic Rooms. Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, A.M. Qattan Foundation, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7242 7367 W www.mosaicrooms.org

Friday 6 July
Until 15 September | What do you mean, here we are? Retrospective of the Townhouse Gallery in Cairo, Egypt, founded in 1998 and one of the first independent art spaces in Cairo. Through a series of visual, video material and sound art as well as pamphlets, catalogues and ephemera, this exhibition tells the story of Townhouse’s evolution from a modest start in the backstreets of downtown Cairo to its emergence at the centre of the regional contemporary art scene. Admission free. The Mosaic Rooms, A.M. Qattan Foundation, Tower House, 226 Cromwell Road, London SW5 0SW. T 020 7370 9990 E info@mosaicrooms.org W https://mosaicrooms.org

Towards a New Divan: A Celebration of East and West through Music and Poetry (see Wednesday 20 June event listing, p. 25)

Saturday 7 July

Until 28 July | Rachid Koraïchi Koraïchi’s sculptural explorations extend across an impressive range of different media, with his installations including ceramics, textiles, various metals and painted work on silk, paper or canvas. In his new series of work, entitled Les osties bleues - a reference to Sacramental bread - Koraïchi explores our connections to the earth as a source of life, and further explores the ethereal qualities of blue. At the core of these works is the earth: the terracotta for the ceramics and the cotton for the canvas. Admission free. October Gallery, 24 Old Gloucester Street London WC1N 3AL. T 020 7242 7367 W www.octobergallery.co.uk

Thursday 28 June

Until 25 November | Jameel Prize 5 The Jameel Prize is an international award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition. The eight finalists in this fifth edition have connections with countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Iraq and the USA. Their varied practices range from architecture and painting to fashion design and multi-media installation. This variety will show the richness of Islamic tradition as a source for contemporary creativity, which in turn will show how the Islamic past can be relevant to our own times. Admission free. The Porter Gallery, V&A, Cromwell Road, London SW7 2RL. T 020 7942 7887 W visiting.modern@vam.ac.uk E contact@vam.ac.uk W vam.ac.uk/jameelprize

Until 23 June | ARABÉCÉDAIRE Series of portraits, taken between 1975 and 1977, that document sex workers from the former red light district, Shahr-e No, in Tehran, Iran where Golestam witnessed ‘the social, financial, hygienic, behavioural and psychological problems that exist in everyday society … magnified.’ Exhibition on for twelve months. Tickets: See contact details below. Boiler House Level 2 West, Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1 9TG. T 020 7887 8888 E visiting.modern@tate.org.uk W www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/

Ongoing | Music, Faith and Diplomacy Along the Silk Road The selection of objects from displayed are from SOAS’s own collections and include an array of manuscripts which illustrate the cultural exchanges involved across parts of Asia and musical instruments celebrating the musical contacts between the Middle East and the West that date back to the arrival of Arab culture in eighth-century Spain. Admission free. The Porter Gallery, Brunel Gallery, SOAS. T 020 7898 4023/4026 E gallery@soas.ac.uk W www.soas.ac.uk/gallery/

Thursday 21 June

Until 28 July | Me, Myself and I: Relocate the Multi-Layered Identity Exhibition of works by Fatemeh Takht Keshian. Her practice combines drawing, painting, collage and video to articulate her identity and perceptions as an Iranian woman. Her current project includes drawing into re-cycled second-hand books. These texts, filled as they are with their previous owners’ dreams and ideas, are overlaid with her dreams, nightmares and life experiences. Admission free. The Alexandria Library, 247 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 5 LW. E zellijarts@gmail.com W www.zellijarts.com

Until 2 September | Ibrahim El-Salahi El-Salahi is a pioneer of African and Arab Modernism. This solo exhibition of his works presents early works on paper never before shown, as well as the distinctive multi-panel paintings, such as the lively Flamenco Dancers, 2012. It also features new work, such as meditative drawings that El-Salahi has made on envelopes and medicine packets when suffering from physical pain. Admission free. Ashmolean Museum, Beaumont Street, Oxford OX1 2PH. T 01865 278000 W www.ashmolean.org

Ongoing | Kaveh Golestan Series of portraits, taken between 1975 and 1977, that document sex workers from the former red light district, Shahr-e No, in Tehran, Iran where Golestam witnessed ‘the social, financial, hygienic, behavioural and psychological problems that exist in everyday society … magnified.’ Exhibition on for twelve months. Tickets: See contact details below. Boiler House Level 2 West, Tate Modern, Bankside, London SE1 9TG. T 020 7887 8888 E visiting.modern@tate.org.uk W www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/

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Towards a New Divan: A Celebration of East and West through Music and Poetry (see Wednesday 20 June event listing, p. 25)

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Towards a New Divan: A Celebration of East and West through Music and Poetry (see Wednesday 20 June event listing, p. 25)
An intensive five-week programme which includes a choice of two courses: a language one (Persian or Arabic, the latter at two levels) and another on the 'Government and Politics of the Middle East' or 'Culture and Society in the Middle East'.

Beginners Persian (Level 1)
This is an introductory course which aims to give the students a reasonable grounding in the basics of Persian grammar and syntax as well as to enable them to understand simple and frequently used expressions related to basic language use. They will be able to hold uncomplicated conversations on topics such as personal and family information, shopping, hobbies, employment as well as simple and direct exchanges of information related to familiar topics. By the end of the course they will also progress to read simple short texts.

Beginners Arabic (Level 1)
This is an introductory course in Modern Standard Arabic. It teaches students the Arabic script and provides basic grounding in Arabic grammar and syntax. On completing the course, students should be able to read, write, listen to and understand simple Arabic sentences and passages. This course is for complete beginners and does not require any prior knowledge or study of Arabic.

Beginners Arabic (Level 2)
This course is a continuation of Beginners Arabic Level 1. It completes the coverage of the grammar and syntax of Modern Standard Arabic and trains students in reading, comprehending and writing with the help of a dictionary more complex Arabic sentences and passages.

To qualify for entry into this course, students should have already completed at least one introductory course in Arabic.

Government and Politics of the Middle East
This course provides an introduction to the politics of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It gives on a country by country basis, an overview of the major political issues and developments in the region since the end of the First World War and addresses key themes in the study of contemporary Middle East politics, including: the role of the military, social and economic development, political Islam, and the recent uprisings (the 'Arab Spring').

Culture and Society in the Middle East
This course examines the major cultural patterns and institutions of the MENA region. It is taught through a study of some lively topics such as religious and ethnic diversity, impact of the West, stereotyping, the role of tradition, education (traditional and modern), family structure and value, gender politics, media, life in city, town and village, labour and labour migration, the Palestinian refugee problem and Arab exile communities, culinary cultures, music and media, etc.

Timetable
Courses are taught Mon-Thu each week. Language courses are taught in the morning (10am-1pm) and the Politics and Culture Courses are taught in two slots in the afternoon (2:00-3:20 and 3:40-5:00pm).

FEES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session (5 weeks)</th>
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<tr>
<td>18 June-19 July 2018 (two courses) (one course)</td>
<td>£2,700</td>
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