

Regional Integration in the Middle East: The Role of East Asian Actors

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Names, Theories & Key Concepts:

- Leon Lindberg... David Mitrany... Ernest Haas... Karl Deutsch
- Functionalism
- Neo Functionalism
- Security Community
- Spill-over
- Sense of Community

Potentials for Regional Integration in the Middle East:

There Exists a relative degree of similarities there:

- Religion: Double Edge sword!!!
- Culture: Positive
- and more importantly GEOGRAPHY: HARD FACT

Neighborhood and **Meaningful Geographical Proximity**

Challenges:

Internal Factors:

- Historical differences and gaps
- Ethnic and Sectarian variations,(Sunni vs Shia, and Arab, Persian, Turk, Kurd...)
- Absence of political will
- Deep mistrust,
- Huge and chronic Misunderstandings,

Challenges:

- Sharp, deep and meaningful difference between people and ruling authorities in terms of their view of the region, their preferences, their priorities, (nations vs. states) it was not like this in EU and ASEAN....there the views of nations and governments were and are identical or very close(maybe this due to lack of real democratic government here)

Challenges:

- Destructive & Negative Rivalry among some Big Actors in the region and Desire to become dominant and hegemon actor in the region
- Lack of experience in collective and group working
- Lack of complementary economies
- Lack of necessary structures , the absence of supranational institutions
- Intervention by outside players (**External Factors**)

External Factor:

- Past: Colonial and postcolonial Legacies
- Present: Preventing alliance-making or unity or integration among nations in the region so that they CANNOT challenge the dominance or influence or intervention by big powers
- Regional interest vs Big Powers, interest...

East vs. West

- While western powers, role seems to be Negative (preventive & blocking) Putting obstacles in the process of regional integration, the Eastern Factor seems to be Positive and to some extent Supportive
- The Eastern Players :
States: China, Japan, South Korea...
Regional Organizations: ASEAN, SCO,...

Eastern Players and Middle East:

- Positive Image
- No colonial history in this region, (no crusades!!)
- No Hegemonic goals (right or wrong this is the perception there)
- Seen as Balancers (with regard to the west)
- Symbol of growth and development
- Eastern Actors are seen as “one of us...not others”
- Almost neutral in all conflicts in the region(Arab-Israel conflict, Iran-Iraq war, etc.)
- Kind of sympathy towards Palestinian issue
- Willing to invest in all countries in the region
- Willing and need to import Oil & Gas from region

Eastern Players and Middle East:

- Less conflicts and more cooperation in the Middle East region means:

More GAINS for Eastern Players because:

- Regional Integration can bring:

- Less conflicts  More Cooperation  More Stability,
 more long term opportunities  More GAINS (Mutual GAIN)

Important Point:

- Regional Integration in West Asia (Middle East) can pave the way for a broader integration in the Greater Asian Continent combining: East Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia in the long term (in next 2-5 decades)
- This can lead to creation a kind of Asian Union in Continental Level comparing to that of European Union

This notion while looks very far away and idealistic, yet has elements of reality in itself. It reflects in some ways the way that Chinese are talking about New Great Silk Road Project.

“New Silk Road” Strategy:

- A mid-to-long term plan to build transport infrastructure through Eurasia, the Middle East, and Europe. China-Middle East interdependence will go beyond energy trade, extending to significant levels of commodity trade and business development (Chaoling Feng)
- Maybe it is time for Moving from Non-intervention policy to positive involvement policy!!!(A requirement of becoming a Global Player rather than merely a regional one)
- Playing this role for China means a tendency to show more interests in Political and Security issues in the region besides economic ones.

Other Player:

- Talking about Japan:

Japanese dilemma of dependency on US and Middle East nations expectation of independent role!!

- Talking about South Korea:

Moving from passive policy(lack of interests) to relative engagement(not yet fully active policy!!)

- Talking about ASEAN:

Possibility of taking ASEAN-China relations as a model for GCC-Iran?!!

Also ASEAN as a role model for regional integration in the Middle East

THANK YOU