



Dialogues in Arab Politics

By Michael N. Barnett

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For decades, Arab states and societies have been involved in an ongoing conflict over the goals and norms of Arabism. In this comprehensive study, Michael Barnett explores the relationships between Arab identity, the meaning of Arabism, and desired regional order in the Middle East from 1920 to the present, focusing on Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia. Barnett examines the state system in four distinct time frames: the mandate period to the establishment of the League of Arab States in 1945; 1945 through the Baghdad Pact of 1955; the Suez War through the 1967 war; and 1967 through the Gulf War. Within each of these time frames, the Arab states' relationship to unification, the West, and confrontation with Zionism are addressed.

Does Arab unity depend on excluding Western influences? Can an Arab state be at once Islamic and democratic? Why can't the Arab states agree on a common government? Barnett argues that the Arab states' symbolic and strategic interactions were responsible for the alterations in the norms of Arabism, and ultimately, the fragmentation that currently defines the region.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is an interesting and valuable contribution to the debate about the nature of Arab politics." -- A.M. Ansari, CMEIS, University of Durham, "Journal of Islamic Studies"

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Review

This book offers a very different view from standard accounts of how to think about Arab politics and, by extension, how to think about international relations generally. Barnett argues that the international relations of the Middle East were not formed by the interests that each country and leader brought to the table. Rather, they developed out of conversations these leaders held over several decades and the symbols that arose out of these conversations. *Dialogues in Arab Politics* opens a new window into the dynamics of the international relations of the Middle East and gives us new insights into thinking about other forms of international relations as well.

(Joel S. Migdal, University of Washington)

Contrary to most analysts, who rely on classic balance-of-power explanations for Middle East international outcomes, Barnett argues that inter-Arab politics can best be understood as a constantly evolving conflict to define what Arabism means and how those meanings inform definitions of self-interest. No one interested in the international relations of the region can afford to ignore this book.

(Gregory Gause, University of Vermont)

About the Author

Michael N. Barnett is professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

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