The international relations of the Middle East have long been dominated by uncertainty and conflict. External intervention, interstate war, political upheaval and interethnic violence are compounded by the vagaries of oil prices and the claims of military, nationalist and religious movements. The purpose of this book is to set this region and its conflicts in context, providing on the one hand a historical introduction to its character and problems, and on the other a reasoned analysis of its politics. In an engagement with both the study of the Middle East and the theoretical analysis of international relations, the author, who is one of the best known and most authoritative scholars writing on the region today, offers a compelling and original interpretation. Written in a clear, accessible and interactive style, the book is designed for students, policymakers and the general reader.

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The Contemporary Middle East 4

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Any introduction of this kind must hint at, but cannot do justice to, the influence and friendship of those who have over the years (in my case, for forty) sought to encourage, correct and inform the author. Three constituencies of people have been particularly important for me. In the first place, friends and comrades from the region itself. Secondly those, be they academics, journalists or general writers, who, while often of different, sometimes very different, orientation to the author, were my teachers and who served to inspire, and contest with me, the study of the region. I may not have accepted, or now accept, their conclusions, but I certainly have remembered their questions. Finally, and in an ongoing community of critique, interaction, theoretical debate and the rushed but treasured, exchange of political jokes from the region, the specialists and academics with whom I have worked over the years. This third category includes MERIP in Washington, the Gulf Committee and the Middle East Study Group in London, many colleagues in British and other western, including Russian, universities, and journalists, from the region and without. A special word of praise and thanks too to LSE’s neighbours at Bush House in the Aldwych, London, for my colleagues of the BBC World Service in English, and the Arabic, Turkish and Persian services. They have been objects of entrapment and vilification by those with power, and universally admired and respected throughout the region: these, not the spokesmen of governments, the munafiqin of east and west, and the pedlars of supposedly holy texts and ancient entitlements, nor, in academe, the traders of epistemological trickery and cargo cults, are the real heroes of the dialogue of peoples, of civilisations, and indeed of the construction of a saner, more informed and more peaceful, world.

In all cases it would be odd, a disappointment indeed, if there had been complete agreement between us, but without interaction with these colleagues no insight would ever have been achieved. I have been privileged to know them, now over four decades, and to discuss the shared interests that we face. Against all of this background, I claim little originality, but...
rather partnership in an ongoing, and internationalist, endeavour. I stand, in the best sense of intellectual and academic continuity, on the shoulders of these people, as well as amidst a never-ending milieu of information, disputation and good humour.

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In writing a book of this kind there are also many contemporary colleagues and friends to whom I owe appreciation and gratitude. To the readers of the manuscript in whole or in part – Louise Fawcett, George Lawson, Roger Owen, Eugene Rogan, David Styan – I express warm thanks for their criticism and careful reading. Eugene Rogan, of St Antony’s College Oxford, and Marigold Acland, of CUP, were the ideal commissioning editors, patient but insistent. In production, Alison Powell and Carol Fellingham Webb were the most supportive and efficacious of allies. At LSE, my colleagues the late Philip Windsor, one of the most economical and wisest of observers, and Katerina Dalacoura, who brings to the teaching of our students at LSE the political acumen for which her people have been known for more than two thousand years, and a sensibility for the variant idioms, conceits and cultures of the Mediterranean. To the veterans of IR 419, now ‘The International Relations of the Middle East’, quondam ‘The Middle East and the Great Powers’, drawn from east and west, from diasporas emigrant and homeward-looking, and onto whom, in future years, the responsibility of understanding this region will pass, I express my thanks for their stimulation, questions, reading suggestions and, not least, pertinent regional anecdotes. My Departmental Convenors, Michael Yahuda and Margot
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The past four decades were years of high hopes, and bitter moments, or revolution, counter-revolution, war and political violence. The Middle East specialists of my generation lived, and argued, through these times. It is now for others to take this analysis, and some of theoretical perspective and ‘complex solidarity’, into the times to come: the least one can say is that, on the basis of the information we have, and the most basic historic sense, the next decades will be at least as momentous, and intellectually challenging, as those now past. The advice of the late Maxime Rodinson, *al-murshid al-akbar*, ‘the greatest guide’, quoted by way of conclusion to this book, at the end of chapter 10, should serve us all.