



Introduction

On a hot and heady evening in June 2013, thousands of Egyptian Islamists packed Cairo International Stadium for a ‘Support for Syria’ rally organised by the Muslim Brotherhood. Senior Muslim Brother and then Egyptian president Muhammad Mursi entered the stadium to the chants of a charged crowd, who threw him the Syrian opposition and Egyptian flags to carry, and vowed to defeat Syrian president Bashar al-Asad. As the audience recited songs of religious victory, Salafi clerics took to the stage, calling on young Egyptians to travel to Syria and wage ‘holy war’ against the Syrian army. Mursi followed with the thrilling announcement that Egypt was to cut all ties with the Syrian regime, close Syria’s embassy in Cairo, and withdraw the Egyptian envoy from Damascus. He pledged Egypt’s ‘material and moral support’ to the opposition, and urged the imposition of a no-fly zone over Syria. In this, he intended to coordinate with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, he said, with whom he had worked in the past in pursuit of a resolution to the conflict.

Indeed Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had been the first to intervene in Syria: after the failure of early talks with al-Asad, he had cut ties with Damascus in September 2011, and imposed an arms embargo. His decision came after a high-profile ‘Arab Spring tour’ starting in Egypt, where he had denounced the Syrian leader and proposed that Turkey and Egypt form an ‘axis of democracy’ in the post-uprisings era. Already that summer, the Turkish government had quickly provided a political home to the Syrian opposition and quietly opened the border to aid its fighters, whose largest element came from the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. Even though their political projects hail from different traditions, Erdoğan’s behaviour reflected the ideological affinity and flourishing business ties between the Brotherhood and the Turkish Milli Görüş (‘National Outlook’) movements. It also betrayed his intention to seize the role of regional leader, which had long eluded non-Arab powers in the Middle East. Erdoğan believed

that his devout Sunni credentials set him apart, and that he could recast the Ottoman imperial space as a kind of twenty-first-century Islamic commonwealth, with Turkey at the helm.

Both Mursi's and Erdoğan's actions had chimed with the United States' and European Union's moves to lobby for sanctions on Syria at the United Nations. By December 2012, Washington and Brussels had recognised a new outfit for the Syrian opposition, the Islamist-dominated Syrian National Coalition, based in Cairo, as well as its Supreme Military Council, launched in Antalya. This Turkish–Egyptian coordination over Syria lasted until June 2013, when the Egyptian military dramatically unseated Mursi, and moved to repair ties with Damascus.

Sixty years earlier, in a very different international scene, Syria was again the arena for Turkey and Egypt's regional activism, this time in a confrontation. After the Second World War, anticolonial movements were gaining momentum across Asia and Africa, while the two superpowers looked to spread their influence eastwards. Turkey's leadership, the Democrat Party government, was consumed by hostility to the Soviet Union. In the mid-1950s, it began accusing its Syrian counterpart of turning communist, and sought American assistance in thwarting this with a show of force. Meanwhile Egypt's Free Officers, having overthrown the monarchy, emphasised the sovereign choice of Arab states after liberation from colonialism. When Turkey mobilised troops to the Syrian border, Moscow and Washington signalled their support for each side, while Egypt sent troops to the port of Latakia in response. The standoff became known as the Syrian Crisis of 1957 and was one of the moments at which the superpowers nearly came to blows.

This tension had been brewing ever since Turkey had begun encouraging its neighbours to join pro-Western regional alliances. Indeed it had been the Turkish diplomats who first pursued the Western bloc, rather than the reverse. The Democrats tenaciously sought and secured membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1952, institutionalising Turkey's Western choice. The corollary of this orientation had long been a foreign policy distant from Turkey's Middle East neighbours. Yet the Democrats played an uncharacteristically activist role in promoting the ill-fated Baghdad Pact of 1955. Meanwhile, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser had been suspicious of such Western-sponsored defence pacts from the first, viewing them as attempts by former and emerging imperialist powers to secure their

bases in Egypt. He rebuffed Anglo-American overtures on regional defence, striving to remain independent of both superpower blocs. Consequently, when the Baghdad Pact was signed, Nasser rallied for its containment, and for an Arab alternative. Turkey and Egypt now stood on opposing sides of a regional and superpower struggle.

This book takes the puzzle of this divergence as its entry point into the political imaginaries and frays of the 1950s, the decade which cemented Turkey's enduring position in the Western bloc and Egypt's global reputation as an Arab leader. It asks the question why: given that modern Turkey and Egypt emerged from a shared geographical, historical and cultural space, why did their foreign policy stances diverge so much in the 1950s? As their engagement in the region continues, what can this tell us about trends in the foreign policy of each country since, and about the place of this historical legacy in contemporary foreign policy debates?

The foreign policy practices of Turkey and Egypt are often analysed within realist frameworks of international relations theory, either as responses to superpower rivalry and mutual insecurity in the Cold War, or else as adventurous pursuits of regional hegemony.¹ From this perspective, Turkey is presented as reactive, seeking to balance against threats in the international system, such as the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Egypt is cast as expansionist, even imperialist, in its policies towards the Arab world. In both readings, states are depicted as calculating their national interest based on material factors – military and economic capacity – and as acting rationally to maximise these. Given that Turkey and Egypt would not have looked dissimilar on a realist balance sheet in 1950 – the sizes of their militaries and rates of economic growth were close² – this leaves their different alliance choices unexplained. Meanwhile, foreign policy analyses that incorporate the role of identity and domestic politics tend to present them as instrumentalised. For example, pan-Arabism is routinely treated as a tool of

¹ Pinar Bilgin, 'Securing Turkey through Western Oriented Foreign Policy', *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 40, 2009, pp. 107–8.

² See Roger Owen and Şevket Pamuk, *A History of Middle East Economies in the Twentieth Century*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1998. Turkey and Egypt have been described as 'the two most populous, oil-poor, labour-surplus economies of the region, with roughly comparable levels of development': Çağlar Keyder and Ayşe Öncü, 'Introduction', in Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Keyder and Öncü eds., *Developmentalism and Beyond: Society and Politics in Egypt and Turkey*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1994, p. 1.

legitimation, employed strategically by Egyptian political elites. Such analysis does not bring us closer to understanding the drive behind the foreign policy itself.

This book presents a rereading of Turkey's and Egypt's foreign policies in the 1950s in light of each leadership's nation making project. The two countries' divergent international stances were accompanied by national programmes with substantially different priorities and methods. These programmes would involve a host of engagements with the international field, just as they demanded these in its domestic counterpart. On one hand, leaders formed their nationalist commitments in a context shaped by international affairs, and on the other, they could only pursue these commitments in a dynamic with international interlocutors. The latter could either agree or refuse to recognise their nation's sovereignty, to deem legitimate their narratives of national belonging, and to enable their pledges on national progress. Turkish and Egyptian leaderships thus sought to intervene in and instrumentalise the international field in the realisation of their nationalist commitments, on behalf of a constituency that they considered themselves to represent.

The clashes of the 1950s may therefore be read not as *realpolitik*, but as a series of manoeuvres in two larger quests to fashion a sovereign, united and modern nation, by leaders who were politicised in different ways against the backdrop of war, imperialism and underdevelopment. This effort would occur through the crafting of new political vocabularies, but crucially also through action and movement in resistance to these pressures in the international field. A central argument of this work is therefore that foreign policy is a site for political leaders' discursive creativity and activism in realising their nationalist commitments and aspirations.

These commitments cannot be reduced to a matter of identity. Instead, it is productive to mine the empirical record for the other values or symbols that might be articulated with identity, such as anticolonial solidarity, social justice or dignity, as well as the other ideologies that nationalism may 'inhabit', and that might 'fill out' the gaps in its broad framework, such as socialism or free market liberalism.³ It then becomes possible to accept the constructivist argument

³ Anthony Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History*, Cambridge: Polity, 2001, p. 24.

that ‘identity has a constitutive and not a causal standing in the positivist sense’, but to add to it further concepts drawn from a historically informed study of the nationalist movements in question.⁴ This fuller conceptualisation of identity and its agents offers a ‘thicker’ explanation of particular policy outcomes.

My focus throughout is on the creative agency of local actors, who sought to direct momentous social change, while confronting legacies of imperial decline and colonial encroachment, as well as the pressures of superpower politics and limited resources. I compare the ways in which they responded to these challenges – the histories that they selected or silenced, the narratives and practices that they modified or adopted – in order to construct their own national presents and futures. The aim here is to contribute to the erosion of the Cold War lens in scholarly literature, which has long privileged the superpowers’ conflict and neglected other actors, and to point to the ways in which similarly reductionist tropes, from ‘globalisation’ to the ‘War on Terror’, have been foisted on to subsequent complex regional dynamics. In all these cases, much is revealed by beginning with local archives, and using them to disturb such conventions.

Theoretical Approaches: Foreign Policy Analysis and the Identity Debate

This study enters a debate that connects the fields of international relations theory, comparative politics and area studies, responding to developments as well as unexplored avenues in all three. In this section, I interrogate the ways in which questions of national identity and nationalist aspirations have been addressed in international relations theory, and develop the two principal arguments regarding foreign policy and nationalist commitments that guide the analysis of the Turkish and Egyptian cases.

Broadly speaking, the setting here is the complex and young debate on identity and foreign policy between the realist and constructivist schools. A recent essay evaluating the field of foreign policy analysis urged scholars to pursue two particular theoretical directions in the

⁴ Cf. Telhami and Barnett, ‘Introduction: Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East’, in S. Telhami and M. Barnett eds., *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, Ithaca, N.Y.; London: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 18. See also Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: a Cultural Genealogy*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 7.

future: '(1) returning to being more comparative in nature, and (2) developing a connection between constructivist research on identity and ideas and previous work'.⁵ Through an interdisciplinary approach, this study will follow both of these tracks. It offers a qualitative comparison using historical sources, and brings together constructivist research on identity with similar perspectives on nationalism.

Neorealist and Liberal Conventions

The foreign policies of Turkey and Egypt have often been analysed according to neorealist frameworks, which view identity as epiphenomenal. For example, in his examination of Middle East security dynamics, Stephen Walt accords priority to what he terms 'objective threats' confronting, and hence motivating, state actors.⁶ In this type of account, a threatening Soviet bloc is presented as propelling Turkey into the Western bloc, in pursuit of urgent support and military aid. The narrative turns on the 1945–6 Soviet overtures to acquire a military presence in Turkey and to redraw their joint borders.⁷ Foreign policy scholars read realist calculations into Turkey's drive for a close alignment with the United States against this backdrop of Soviet machinations.⁸ Yet it could be countered that the change in Soviet posture

⁵ Juliet Kaarbo, 'Foreign Policy Analysis in the Twenty-First Century: Back to Comparison, Forward to Identity and Ideas', in 'Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20: A Symposium', *International Studies Review*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2003, pp. 156–7.

⁶ See discussion in Steve Niva, 'Contested Sovereignities and Postcolonial Insecurities in the Middle East', in J. Weldes, M. Laffey, H. Gusterson and R. Duvall eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 149.

⁷ See Erel Tellal, '1945–1960: Turkey in the Orbit of the Western Bloc – Relations with the USSR', in B. Oran ed., *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1919–2006: Facts and Analyses with Documents*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010, p. 300; Doğan Avcıoğlu, *Türkiye'nin Düzeni: Dün, Bugün, Yarın* ('Turkey's System: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow'), Yenışehir, Ankara: Bilgi Yayınevi, 1969, p. 262.

⁸ See William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774–2000*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 117–8; Malcolm Yapp, 'Soviet Relations with the Countries of the Northern Tier' in Adeed I. Dawisha and Karen Dawisha eds., *The Soviet Union in the Middle East: Policies and Perspectives*, London: Heinemann, for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1981, p. 32; Alexei Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to Pragmatism*, Reading: Ithaca Press, 1993, p. 17; Ekavi Athanassopoulou, *Turkey: Anglo-American Security Interests, 1945–1952: the First Enlargement of NATO*, London: Frank Cass, 1999, pp. 45–6; Tellal, '1945–1960: Turkey in the Orbit of the Western Bloc', pp. 302–3.

following Premier Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 did not generate a shift in Turkey's alignment. Instead, Turkey's stance, including its resistance to new Premier Nikita Khrushchev's peace offensive, arose from the practice of a Turkish nationalism articulated with European self-identification.

Security calculations are also conventionally accorded primacy in understanding the positions adopted by Egypt's leaders. With this emphasis on materialist calculations of power, Egypt would be expected to have gone the way of Iraq in the 1950s, and chosen to tie its development prospects to British tutelage by welcoming a joint security pact. Neorealists fall short of offering a persuasive explanation of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's decision to defy Britain and France instead, and to nationalise the Suez Canal Company in 1956. In analysing this event, several authors privilege economic and diplomatic considerations, and sidestep the nationalist frameworks that underpinned Nasser's foreign policy.⁹

Liberal institutionalists are similarly constrained in their ability to account for policy choices in Turkey and Egypt. They explain Turkey's pro-Western position and its drive for accession to NATO and later the European Union with reference to norms of interstate cooperation and political culture.¹⁰ This neglects the fact

⁹ See Malcolm Kerr, 'Egyptian Foreign Policy and the Revolution', in Panayotis Vatikiotis, *Egypt since the Revolution*, New York: Praeger, 1968, p. 128; Aaded Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy*, London: Macmillan, 1976; Avraham Sela, 'Nasser's Regional Politics: A Reassessment', in Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler eds., *Rethinking Nasserism: Revolution and Historical Memory in Egypt*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004; Elie Podeh, *The Quest for Hegemony in the Arab World: The Struggle over the Baghdad Pact*, Leiden: Brill, 1995; Kirk Beattie, *Egypt during the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics and Civil Society*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994. See also Laurie Brand, 'Middle Eastern Alliances: From Neorealism to Political Economy' in Mark Tessler, Jodi Nachtwey and Anne Banda eds., *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Middle Eastern Politics*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999, p. 135: 'it was less a theory of international politics than an intellectual framework that was an adjunct to maintaining US political domination'.

¹⁰ See Ioannis Grigoriadis, *Trials of Europeanization: Turkish Political Culture and the European Union*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009; Ziya Öniş, 'Domestic Politics, International Norms and Challenges to the State: Turkey-EU Relations in the post-Helsinki Era', *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2003, pp. 9–34; Mark D., Aspinwall and Gerald Schneider, 'Same Menu, Separate Tables: the Institutional Turn in Political Science and the Study of European Integration', *European Journal of Political Research*, No. 38, 2000, pp. 1–36;

that the national project required foreign aid and recognition, and that the ruling Democrat Party continued to lobby the United States for both well after Turkish accession. Meanwhile they do not explain why Nasser refused the terms of the 1955 Baghdad Pact, a regional security alliance that purported to defuse the threat of violence amongst regional rivals. In his view, its sponsorship by Britain made it a neocolonial creation, and accession was therefore at odds with national belonging and a sovereign national future. In both cases, the institutionalist approach is undermined by its flattening of international hierarchies, and its overlooking of imperial pasts.

By contrast, an approach addressing the nationalist political formation of leaders is attentive to their historical experience and the imperial legacies that informed each. Part of the reason that realist and liberal analyses fail to explain Middle East political dynamics is their uncritical use of categories drawn from European experience. References to ‘incomplete state formation’,¹¹ or ‘quasi-states’,¹² for example, suggest a linear path towards modernisation, with non-Western states lagging behind. Similarly, theories of ‘subaltern realism’ and ‘peripheral realism’ aim to take into account interactions between developing states’ domestic politics and patterns of international conflict.¹³ Yet as Braveboy-Wagner points out, ‘the question remains as to whether any realist model can really accommodate the activity of global south states in arenas far removed from military security’.¹⁴

Frank Schimmelfennig, *The EU, NATO and the Integration of Europe: Rules and Rhetoric*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

¹¹ Mohammed Ayoob, *The Third World Security Predicament: State Making, Regional Conflict, and the International System*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1995.

¹² Robert Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World*, Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹³ See, respectively, Ayoob, ‘Subaltern Realism: International Relations Theory Meets the Third World’ in S. Neuman ed., *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998, pp. 31–54; Carlos Escudé, ‘An Introduction to Peripheral Realism and its Implications for the Interstate System: Argentina and the Cóndor Missile Project’ in Neuman ed., *International Relations Theory and the Third World*, pp. 55–76.

¹⁴ Jacqueline Braveboy-Wagner, ‘The Foreign Policies of the Global South: an Introduction’, in Braveboy-Wagner ed., *The Foreign Policies of the Global South: Rethinking Conceptual Approaches*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003, p. 15.

Deconstructing Realism, Decolonising Constructivism

In recent years, scholars of the constructivist turn have critiqued conventional realist theories for their neglect of questions of identity and ideas.¹⁵ Their work has highlighted the ways in which choices made to define certain threats are at once constitutive of certain identities.¹⁶ For them, states do not have a fixed set of national interests: ‘instead they define their interests in the process of defining situations’.¹⁷ Wendt proposes a distinction between the one ‘corporate’ and multiple ‘social’ identities of states: the former comprises intrinsic characteristics that distinguish an actor, from which flows the process of interest formation. The latter are ‘a set of meanings that an actor attributes to itself as a social object while taking the perspective of others, that is, as a social object’.¹⁸ Wendt emphasises the latter over the former, as corporate identity is usually rooted in domestic politics, which does not play a part in his theory of identity formation through systemic interaction.¹⁹ Thus while this brand of constructivism problematises the unit, limiting state identities to their origin in interstate interaction leaves the predispositions of policymakers unexplored.²⁰

¹⁵ Naeem Inayatullah and David L. Blaney, ‘Neo-Modernization? IR and the Inner Life of Modernization Theory’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2002, p. 104. James Mayall’s *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge University Press, 1993) comes from the International Society school, which imagines the international order as rooted in the ‘moral constraints’ and ‘shared values’ of ‘European sovereigns’ from the seventeenth century onwards (p. 1).

¹⁶ Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996; J. Weldes, M. Laffey, H. Gusterson and R. Duvall eds., *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999; David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Manchester University Press, 1998, p. 61.

¹⁷ Alexander Wendt, ‘Anarchy is What States Make of It: the Social Construction of Power Politics’, *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, p. 396.

¹⁸ Wendt, ‘Collective Identity Formation and the International State’, *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1994, p. 385.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

²⁰ ‘Wendt’s belief in actors as cultural “blank slates” prior to contact, or as presocially acquisitive, suggests the influence of “state of nature” thinking in his work’: N. Inayatullah and D. Blaney, ‘Knowing Encounters: Beyond Parochialism in International Relations Theory’, in Yosef Lapid and Friedrich Kratochwil eds., *The Return of Culture and Identity in IR Theory*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996, p. 73.

Poststructuralist and critical constructivist²¹ scholarship offers the important corrective that the collective meanings on which state behaviour is based are necessarily those meanings to which ‘those individuals who act in the name of the state’ relate. These are ‘collective meanings already produced ... in domestic political and cultural contexts’.²² However, on the question of agency, poststructuralists explain that policymakers are ‘already subject to the repertoire of meanings offered by the security imaginary that produces them’.²³ Subjects and signifiers are articulated in one particular way ‘through social relations that embody an unequal distribution of power’,²⁴ such that one discourse becomes hegemonic. However, poststructuralists do not often clearly theorise the seat of this power, making it at times difficult to pinpoint agency in turn.

Such critical international relations theory is arguably at its most compelling when used to produce genealogies of US foreign policy, demonstrating its authors’ ‘commitment to the marginal’ by deconstructing the discourses of the ‘core’.²⁵ However, this deconstruction of totalising narratives in the North does not travel as smoothly to the theatres of resistance to, or negotiation of, superpower pressures in the South, no matter what the emerging alignments.²⁶ Turkey and Egypt were often on the *receiving* end of the realist ‘theory as practice’ of great

²¹ Ted Hopf distinguishes between ‘conventional’ and ‘critical’ constructivism, describing ‘theoretical and epistemological distance’ between the two. See Hopf, ‘The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory’, *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1998, pp. 181–3.

²² Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall, ‘Introduction: Constructing Insecurity’, in Weldes et al., *Cultures of Insecurity*, p. 9.

²³ Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 12.

²⁴ Campbell, *Writing Security*, p. 7.

²⁵ Philip Darby, ‘Postcolonialism’, in Darby ed., *At the Edge of International Relations: Postcolonialism, Gender, and Dependency*, London: Pinter, 1997, p. 14. Jim George argues that realist and modernisation theory-based analyses, presented as ‘foreign policy “theory”’, are ‘better understood as power politics “practice”’. George, *Discourses of Global Politics: a Critical (Re)introduction to International Relations*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994, p. 207.

²⁶ Randolph Persaud, having argued against the transposing of Western models to global South contexts, describes the transposing of Campbell’s argument as ‘very, if not more, appropriate for global south states’. See Persaud, ‘Reconceptualizing the Global South’s Perspective: the End of the Bandung Spirit’, in Braveboy-Wagner, *The Foreign Policies of the Global South*, p. 52. I argue that this overlooks the implications of the very different positionality of global South states. For a different use of critical genealogies that engages with