

**Chapter 9: Chapter exercises**

**Joint cooperation: the Syria crisis**

Unlike other regions, the Middle East has rarely partaken in a coherent and unified set of actions against what it sees as unjustified global occurrences which run counter to its inherent values. However, given the relative power of the largely Middle Eastern membership of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the region's organizational contingent was able to exert considerable pressure on largely western consumers of oil following the events of the Yom Kippur war of 1973. This was a key example of regional cooperation within the Middle East.

But what about the Middle East today? The situation in Syria has sparked a global and regional crisis—from the refugee situation to a major security crisis. Any such crisis (another example might be the Arab–Israeli conflict) can only be solved through regional cooperation and engagement. Despite moments of affinity, the Arab world today appears more divided than ever in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and the rise of inter-Arab sectarianism, as seen with the expansion of so-called Islamic State.

Unification has not been seen as a solution in the face of a regionalization crisis in the Middle East since the beginning of the twenty-first century, although there have been examples of regional cooperation. The League of Arab States, founded in 1945, demonstrated an example of regional cooperation against Iraqi aggression during the first Gulf War. The UAE and GCC are important examples of groupings in which members believe their security, interests, and freedom can be sustained through unity—this was especially the case during the Cold War and in the face of the Soviet threat. However in the aftermath of the Cold War, regional cooperation seemed to become much less relevant. In the aftermath of 9/11, things changed even more: individual countries in the region had to opt for either alignment with US foreign policy or fragmentation with neighbours.

With the failure of American ambitions in the 2003 Iraq war, the Arab Spring, and its aftermath, the regional environment has become even more complex. International players such as the US have shown considerable restraint and increased reluctance to intervene. The limitations of external agency in addressing regional issues were brought sharply into focus by the unanticipated events of the Arab Spring, which accelerated changes in the regional balance of power and revealed the extent to which western powers and policies had failed in their stated goals.

Reactions to the uprisings in the Arab states were mixed. There have been instances of support for international initiatives to protect civilians and to promote peaceful regime change. However, despite calls to get further Arab regional participation in promoting such change, this has yet to be seen.

There are many historical examples of the limitations of regional cooperation. However, there have been instances of the states of the Middle East coming together in order to protect their security, or more frequently, to respond to a common threat, as they did in the first Gulf War and the Arab–Israeli conflicts. Following the Arab Spring, individual countries in the region have been more self-serving rather than interested in cooperating with each other. This is true particularly of Arab

monarchies which have been more careful about their own positions, and, following the recent Syrian refugee crisis, countries are less likely to accept refugees in order to protect their own internal security. Barriers to cooperation, at least through traditional regional organizations such as the GCC or LAS, seem to have only further intensified in recent years, as the Qatar crisis of 2017 demonstrated.

***Do you feel that the absence of western presence in the region would result in further cooperation?***

***Could regional cooperation solve the Syria crisis? Why?***

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