



Book Review/ Kitap Tanıtımı

Security in the Persian Gulf

Fatemeh Shayan, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2017.

Reviewed by Hazal Muslu El Berni *

Gulf as a sub-region has historically encountered political, military, economic and societal threats which were internally and externally redefined according to the changing security dynamics of the broader Middle East. In her book, Fatemeh Shayan, a scholar of Persian Gulf security studies, attempts to explore the multiple as well as intertwined threats in the Gulf through analyzing the changing security dynamics in post-2003 Iraq War. The bottom line of Shayan's book is the concept of societal threats and collective identity have not been theoretically applied to the security studies of the Gulf which tend to examine the material aspects of security such as energy, military, and economy. Shayan's book is divided into three chapters; the first chapter introduces the theoretical perspective of the book, the second chapter analyses the regional anti-American sentiments in the periods of 1980s, 1990s, and post-2003, and the last chapter is the evaluation of her hypotheses examined throughout the book.

To examine the gradual construction of societal threats in the Gulf, Shayan aims at answering the following questions: what kind of changes occurred in the security dynamics of the Gulf after the 2003 Iraq War, how those

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changes paved the way for the rise of anti-Americanism as well as the regional rise of Al Qaeda, and how theories of security and identity can be employed for a nuanced understanding of the security dynamics of the Gulf since the Iraq War. Shayan examines two hypotheses to describe the causal process involved in the emergence of the Al Qaeda and the rising sense of anti-Americanism in the Gulf; her first hypothesis is that societal threat perceptions of the Gulf have been shaped by the US's direct interference and penetration of transnational actors into the region, and secondly Shayan attempts to explore if these two factors modified the dynamics of the Gulf security complex since the Iraq war.

What makes Shayan's book distinct is the application of regional security complex theory (RSCT), which was coined by Barry Buzan, to the societal security dynamics of the Gulf. In the first chapter, Shayan stresses that one international relations theory alone cannot help us to comprehend the security dynamics of the Gulf as its security interdependence is highly divided into regionally based problems in the Gulf. Therefore, she emphasizes that the combination of different concepts from various disciplines is extremely needed for a deeper understanding of the current regional security dynamics of the Gulf. Throughout her book, Shayan employs the concepts of the RSCT like "penetration", "amity", "enmity", "securitization", "societal security", "ontological security" and "collective identity", then portrays the Gulf as a security complex that is defined by the regional powers within it rather than controlled by external actors. At this juncture, Shayan's book can be considered as a modest effort to analyze the Gulf security politics, which is often analyzed through the lenses of an ideological, strategic, geopolitical or economic aspect of threat perception.

Throughout her book, Shayan argues that security is indissoluble from the perception of collective identity in the current regional security complex of the Gulf. In the second chapter, she builds her arguments upon the concepts developed by Buzan, Waeber and de Wilde to comprehend the nature and dynamics of Islamic extremism and sectarian groups which are identified as threatening and are threatened by other regional entities. At that point, Shayan portrays the Al Qaeda as a regional actor motivated by a radical ideology which threatens the societal security of the Gulf in post-2003 war. Analyzing the changing security dynamics through drawing the structural differences between the 1980s, 1990s and post-2003 period enables

the reader to comprehend the gradual changes in the collective identity formation, security and societal threat perception in the Gulf. Shayan argues that, in the 1980s, the US was perceived as a societal threat to the Sunni and Shia religious actors as well as to Islamic identity of the regional states while the period of 1990-2003 experienced anti-Americanism and anti-globalization discourses functioning as the societal threats against the region. Shayan identifies the rise of the societal and political threats in the Gulf as a result of the US's expanding military asset in the Gulf after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990-1991, the growing influence of Shia in the Iraqi government, and their contribution to the rise of regional sectarian conflict discourse in post-2003. Unfortunately, this does not suggest a new aspect to the changing security dynamics of the Gulf, rather it appears to be a kind of endorsement of the popular arguments built on the rise of the US and Shia in Iraq.

In the last section, Shayan refers to her hypotheses specified in the first chapter and argues that it is inevitable to underestimate the penetration of the growing influence of the transnational actors into the Gulf, which in turn strengthened the regional states' concerns on societal threat and changed the regional dynamics of the Gulf security complex. To illustrate, she emphasizes the decision of the Bush administration to notify a global war against Al Qaeda in 2006, and its intensification during the Obama administration. Hence, Al Qaeda was securitized during both administrations as an existential threat to the Gulf since the Iraq War which was a process that prepared a fertile ground for increasingly threatening activities of Al Qaeda in the region. Yet, Shayan argues that the US kept its position as the key influential actor in the region so far despite it has lost much of its reliability since the war, which paved the way for a salient rise of anti-Americanism among the societies of regional states. These statements are well-known and previously analyzed causes of the rise of Al Qaeda, and ISIS today, as well as the rise of anti-Americanism among the Gulf people. Nevertheless, it is insightful that Shayan brings a theoretical analysis of the societal security dynamics of the Gulf which has long been absent in the Gulf studies so far, as well as the reconstruction of the Gulf security from the societal security aspect of the RSCT in post-2003.

International relations literature will hopefully begin to interpret the regional security politics of the Gulf states beyond the oil prices, natural

resources, economic crisis, weapons, military agreements and bilateral relations with the US, and include the societal sector of security to their analysis in understanding the regional security perceptions of the Gulf states. Since Shayan's book focuses on the period from the 1980s to the post 2003, her book might be considered as timely or inadequate for the scholars who want to explore more on the recent events such as the Yemen war, the Syria war, post-ISIS period in Iraq, or the impact of Saudi-Iran standoff on the regional security dynamics. Nevertheless, since the Gulf security literature tends to analyze the regional security through the lenses of neoliberalism and neorealism, Shayan's study is a constructivist contribution to the literature of the post-2003 Iraq War.