

The Politics of Change in the Middle East

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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In the contemporary Middle East, threats of political instability are both real and imagined, and differentiating between the two is no easy task. Myths, such as the region's near-congenital predisposition for instability, abound, but when rapid change (e.g., Iraq's invasion of Kuwait) does occur, Western governments are often caught off-guard and unprepared. From an historical viewpoint, Washington does not have a stellar record of recognizing, let alone managing, change. The failure to differentiate between the U.S. national interest in the Iraq of 1980-1988 and the Iraq of 1988-1990 and to adjust policy accordingly is only the most recent of a number of analytical errors that have occurred over the past twenty years.

The essays in this book examine the politics of change, transition, and continuity in eight key regional actors and explore the real prospects for short-term and medium-term stability inside those regimes. They include Arab monarchies (Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and Arab republics (Egypt, Syria, Iraq); two non-Arab states, one Jewish (Israel) and one evangelistically Islamic (Iran); and one non-state actor that nevertheless plays a critical role in the region's politics (the Palestine Liberation Organization). The goal throughout is to use the events of recent years as a preamble to prepare policymakers for the task of understanding and, perhaps, managing change in a region that is, as Muhammad Heikal has noted, famed for "cutting the lion's tail."

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