I. Introduction: Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of the Greater Middle East

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This volume brings together studies of the “Greater Middle East” (GME) in the colonial and post-colonial eras. This part of the world comprises (1) the countries of North Africa; (2) the countries of the Arab Middle East (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the Persian Gulf states); (3) the non-Arab Middle Eastern countries of Iran, Turkey, and Israel; (4) the countries Afghanistan and Pakistan; and (5) the Central Eurasian countries (i.e., the five Central Asian republics and the three new states in the south Caucasus). The volume also contains two studies—conceptual and empirical—of the GME in global politics. As defined above, the GME is not based on religion. We define the region’s borders from an outside, not inside, perspective, and we define its states and societies as units of analysis in international relations.

Most of these countries were parts of the last three great Islamic civilizations: the Ottoman, Persian, and Mughal-Indian Empires. The legacy of these empires is integral to the political tradition of the Muslim countries of the GME. In the case of the Ottoman Empire, Albert Hourani (1981) states, “many of the things Middle East countries have in common can be explained by their having been ruled for so long by the Ottomans; many of the things which differentiate them can be explained by the different ways in which they emerged from the Ottoman empire.” At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the region comprises nearly 600 million people, divided into thirty-one states. The majority of these countries are Arab, while thirteen others, including Israel, are non-Arab. The GME’s borders stretch from Morocco on the Atlantic coast via the seaboard countries of the Mediterranean to the periphery of the Caucasus Mountains and shores of the Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea. To the northeast, the region borders the Russian Federation; to the east and south, rapidly industrializing China and India; and all three of these states, together with the European Union, are drawn toward the resource-rich sites of the GME.
The region’s current state system is the result of three historical processes. The first is the long-term historical evolution of the region’s politics and cultures. The second is colonial and post-colonial developments, in particular the disintegration of the Islamic empires as a result of both exogenous intervention and indigenous pressures in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which were also instrumental in the making of the region’s independent nation-states. The final process was the end of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of the newly independent states of former Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus, or Central Eurasia (CEA).

This part of the world is a power vacuum, fossil fuel-rich but lagging behind other major world regions in industrial development. As a trade link and area of transit, the region connects European centers with the resource-rich countries of the Middle East and Caspian Sea, leads to the large markets of the highly populated states in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific area, and connects North Eastern and Central Europe with countries on the Mediterranean rim. These links could lead to the formation of a mutual zone of economic and political interests for Europe and Asia.

In terms of culture, natural ecology, systems of survival, and even family structures, the area under study is very diverse. The agro-aristocratic Islamic empires—as well as the contemporary states that replaced them—ruled over diverse religious, linguistic, and ethnic groupings. Being “Muslim” is not a strict regional feature either, as most Muslims live outside of the region and millions of Christians and Jews have lived inside the region for centuries (see Karpat 1988: 39–45). Internal regional differences are definitely important for understanding the diversity of ways in which peoples respond to invading Western powers.

On the one hand, this anthology is a historical-comparative study of state and society complexes in selected Greater Middle Eastern countries from Napoleon’s invasion of Ottoman Egypt in 1798 until today. This was the era of sequential industrialization. We pay specific attention to development and change in politics and societies resulting from the complex interaction between external developments, in particular the rise and expansion of European industrialized powers and their impact on the region, and

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1 Development is understood as sustainable economic growth. As such, it is more than just economic growth; it is continued economic growth. Despite the implied simple long-term/short-term difference between the two concepts, development usually involves a structural transition from one stage of development to another in which new institutional arrangements are formed that reestablish economic growth on a new basis. Only when this is successful will a country be able to compete internationally and maintain or expand its wealth. In this sense short-term interruptions in economic growth, whether owing to fluctuations in world markets or political turmoil, do not necessarily mean that development is stopped.