

## **The Middle East Crisis Factory: Tyranny, Resilience and Resistance**

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Received: 20.03.2025  
Accepted: 29.05.2025  
Available Online: 30.06.2025

### **Book Information**

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**Publisher:** Hurst Publishers

**Year of Publication:** 2021

**Number of Pages:** 216

*The Middle East Crisis Factory*, written by Iyad El-Baghdadi and Ahmed Gatnash, is a book that criticizes the political dynamics that have shaped the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the modern period and offers solutions to the ongoing problems of authoritarianism, terrorism, and foreign intervention. As an insider, el-Baghdadi, born in Kuwait and forced to leave the country by Emirati authorities, and Ahmed Gatnash, who is of Libyan origin, bring a unique perspective to the academic literature by addressing issues that Western scholars usually discuss. The authors believe that tyranny, terrorism, foreign intervention, and the resulting political, social, and economic consequences have turned the Middle East into a crisis factory. They argue that the region constantly produces crises and that these three factors (tyranny, terrorism, and foreign intervention) continue to fuel the situation. They also state that the production of these crises is not random but is produced by foreign interventions.

Although the book focuses on events in the MENA region from the post-colonial period to the Arab Spring, its main focus is on Arabic-speaking countries and the

**Cite As (APA 7):** Külünk A.N., (2025). Iyad El-Baghdadi, Ahmed Gatnash, *The Middle East Crisis Factory: Tyranny, Resilience and Resistance*, Hurst Publishers, 2021, 190. *Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 12(1), 221-224. <https://doi.org/10.26513/tocd.1661994>

crises they experience. It examines what dictatorship, terrorism, and foreign interventions cause in these countries, what the Arab Spring represents for the region, and the new crises that follow.

El-Baghdadi also mentions that the Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia and later affected the entire Arab world, was hopeful, but later the dictators in the region suppressed the uprisings, and the situation got worse. He also links the 2018 Sudanese uprisings to the murder of his friend Jamal Khashoggi, indicating how much the personal and political tragedies experienced are deeply linked to the region's ongoing struggles.

The authors highlight the orientalist discourse in the introductory section and criticize the Western view of the MENA countries and their politics. The book consists of two main parts, "History" and "Horizons", each consisting of four chapters, along with an introduction and foreword. In these two sections, the authors explore the historical context of the region and make suggestions for the future of the region. In the first part, they discuss the impact of post-colonial nation-state building on the MENA region and the limitations of regimes for society. The subheadings of the first section explain how oppressive regimes, terrorist organizations, and foreign interventions support each other and depend on each other to survive. The authors give examples from countries such as Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Egypt. They also highlight why the Arab Spring started and what united the uprisings. In the second part of the book and its subheadings, vital information for the region before and after the Arab Spring and how society should be strengthened is discussed. The authors also explain how to deal with dictators through the examples of Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia, and finally, they mention that there is hope for the region in the future.

One of the strengths of the book is that since the authors are from the MENA region, the criticisms are made by insiders, which makes the book unique. Even though the authors are academics and have a wide range of knowledge about the region, they express complex and difficult-to-understand political events in a language that can be understood by all readers. In addition, the authors try to explain the problems in the MENA region by connecting the events between the past and the present, and they achieve this with examples. Finally, when talking about conflicts in the region, they address the conflicts from a more human-centered perspective by referring to the lives of people individually affected by these conflicts.

The authors state the region mentioned in the book is the MENA region, but they primarily focus on Arabic-speaking countries. While this focus is generally maintained, examples from Türkiye, Iran and Israel are also included in certain

sections. This is important because Türkiye, like Iran, is one of the countries that are trying to assume leadership in the region, and Israel has posed a significant threat to other countries since its establishment, especially after the Al-Aqsa Flood on October 7, 2023. Excluding these important non-Arab states from the study risks an incomplete understanding of regional crises, especially in terms of the role of Western countries in shaping them.

Another point emphasized by the authors in the first part of the book is that the leaders who came to power between 1970 and 1990 were in a period in which societies were socially and economically advanced, but the generations following those who lived during this period no longer found the services of the state, such as increasing employment and literacy rates, sufficient, and they no longer trusted the leaders, whom they saw as dictators because they wanted a more dignified life. The authors explain this by stating that when economic developments are good, social mobilization increases, and when demands increase but there is no system to meet them, the order is disrupted. In addition, we can give the leadership periods of Gamal Abdel Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Gaddafi as examples of Weber's charismatic authority concept. All these leaders emerged in a chaotic environment, as both Weber and Huntington stated, and used their charismatic authority to produce solutions to the problems of that period. The difference between Huntington's phenomenon and Weber's charismatic leader concept is that these leaders turned their leadership into an authoritarian state and, over time, experienced the temporary nature of authority Weber mentioned, that is, the weakening of the leader's charisma.

When it comes to Israel versus Palestine, the authors state the violent attacks that the Palestinians call resistance will never benefit the Palestinians and that these attacks will be used by Israel. However, the authors do not offer any solution to this problem. The peaceful protests that Palestinians have organized so far have always resulted in the deaths and injuries of Palestinians. Although the subject is countries in the Middle East, each country should be examined within its own context.

The book also presents Syria as an example of a crisis factory system in which dictatorship, terrorism, and foreign interventions constantly reinforce each other. The Assad regime has used the fight against terrorism to legitimize its authoritarian rule and has reinforced this dynamic through its pragmatic relations with external actors. However, as of November 20, 2024, the Syrian rebel group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) seized key positions across the country, leading to the overthrow of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024. Today, Ahmed al-Shaara, the former leader of HTS, has become the new president of Syria. Although it seems that the cycle of

crises in the Middle East is breaking as HTS, having announced its dissolution after seizing control, has effectively handed leadership to its former leader, now the president of Syria, the long-standing designation of HTS as a terrorist organization and the controversial background of its leadership raise doubts about whether this change can truly break the triangle of dictatorship, terrorism, and foreign intervention. As emphasized in the book, leadership changes will not bring lasting stability unless there is a structural change. Therefore, while these developments point to a possible evolution in Syria's crisis cycle, they also confirm the authors' central argument that without systemic change, the crisis cycle is likely to continue.

The book written by El-Baghdadi and Gatnash on the MENA region offers an interesting and unique perspective. The impact of dictators, terrorism, and foreign interventions on the MENA region is examined comprehensively and presented to the readers more understandably through examples. The simplification of their solutions to some issues, their pessimistic thoughts about the region, and the lack of a real solution can be seen as shortcomings of the study. In addition, the authors add variety to the book by using more than one type of source. Given the recent developments in the region, this book stands out as an essential and insightful contribution. Its depth of analysis and clarity of perspective make it a valuable resource for anyone seeking to engage with these critical issues in the future.

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