1   Introduction

"**Y**A AKHI [MY BROTHER], YOU KNOW, THE SHI'A ARE really just interested in dominating the whole Middle East. Their religion is a deviation from Islam." This was the response I got from a retired Egyptian military officer in 2005 when I asked if Iran's nuclear program presented a threat to Egyptian national security. This former career soldier continued: "After 30 years, Iran still wants to export the revolution." Later that week, I asked another official what he thought was Egypt's greatest national security threat. He responded, "Iran. They spread extremism and violence wherever they go."[1] At the time of these comments, Iran's brazen noncompliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency's requests was well underway.

The broader regional context is important here. In the run-up to Iraq's first democratic elections, Jordan's King Abdullah warned that a "Shi'a crescent" would emerge if Shi'a pro-Iranian parties came to dominate Iraq's new government. King Abdullah's warning went beyond Iran's influence in Iraq's domestic politics and even a purely sectarian religious issue. He claimed that the emergence of a Shi'a crescent could "alter the traditional balance of power between the two main Islamic sects and pose new challenges to US interests and allies."[2] At the core of this statement was a fear that Iran's regional ambitions sought to marshal an arc of ideological allies aimed at destabilizing Arab Sunni regimes. Over the next few years, a number of other Sunni Arab leaders followed suit and warned of Iranian "meddling" in domestic politics in even harsher terms.

Regional responses since the Arab uprisings raise similar questions about the role of ideas, threats, and power in international politics. Populations overthrew highly entrenched authoritarian regimes backed by powerful coercive apparatuses, supported by the most powerful military on the planet, the United States. A generation frustrated by the lack of economic or political opportunity and human dignity used new and old media technologies to mobilize and protest en masse against their authoritarian rulers. Beginning with the self-immolation of a Tunisian fruit seller in December 2010, "the Arab uprising unfolded as a single unified Arab narrative of protest with shared heroes and villains, common stakes, and a deeply felt sense of shared destiny."[3]

In response, conservative monarchies in the Gulf dedicated vast resources—economic, ideational and military—to preventing revolutionary contagion and the spread of ideas that pushed for political reform. Then, after Islamists came to power in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) mobilized ideational resources at home and abroad to balance against the Muslim Brotherhood's influence. These massive information and disinformation campaigns were accompanied by repressive measures against supporters of the Brotherhood in their own countries. Riyadh and Abu Dhabi quickly welcomed the Egyptian military's overthrow of the Islamist-led Morsi regime in July 2013, pledging billions in aid. The Morsi regime was overthrown in 2013 but it is too early to dismiss the importance of Islamist ideologies, or other political ideologies, for the international politics of the region.

These events should give international relations scholars pause when thinking about what role military power and ideas will play in the future Middle East and how the rise of Islamist regimes may affect regional relations. Thus, understanding the implications of these events for regional peace and security can be encompassed in a few key questions that lie at the heart of international relations theory: Can ideas threaten? If so, how and why? How have states responded to these threats? The story of how Islamist regimes have affected international relations provides the necessary insight.

The Islamist regimes that seized power in Iran (1979) and Sudan (1989) were regarded by neighboring states, including Muslim-majority countries, as national security threats even though these "Islamic states" did not have significant military capabilities when they came to power and in some cases never acquired them.[4] For example, Iran's military capabilities actually decreased immediately after the revolution that brought Islamists to power,

yet many of Iran's former Arab allies, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia, came to consider the Islamic Republic one of their most serious national security threats for the next three decades. The resulting hostility led to hard balancing, including allying with Iraq against Iran during the Iran-Iraq War; opposing regionally popular Iranian proxies; engaging in arms racing; and soft balancing, including political opposition and domestic policies.

A similar pattern of events occurred after Islamists seized power in Sudan in 1989. Militarily weak and wartorn Sudan became a national security threat to its former allies Egypt and Saudi Arabia. But after hostilities peaked in the mid-1990s, including armed border clashes, Egypt and Saudi Arabia's relations with the first Sunni Islamic state normalized. Not only are we left with the puzzle of why Egypt and Saudi Arabia feared this militarily weak state, we must also ask why the threat subsided.

These cases raise a number of intriguing questions and provocative puzzles with direct relevance for understanding the future of the Middle East. Why did these Arab Muslim-majority states fear the rise of Islamist regimes, and how did these states respond? If military power was not the primary determinant of threat perception, can ideas threaten a state? If so, how and why?

Recent changes in the political and social landscape of the region as a result of the Arab uprisings, as well as the transformation in communication technologies, make answers to these questions even timelier and more relevant for policymakers. Domestic politics may once again become a fierce battleground for states to compete by projecting transnational political ideology as they did in the 1950s and 1960s when Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser's speeches were a greater security threat than his state's military power. During the height of Nasser's regional influence, his most effective power projection capability was his ability to mobilize foreign domestic audiences as a threat to regime security against other states.[5]

Wars of words and ideas have been destabilizing in the past, contributing to regime change or even war. Nasser is credited or blamed for his role in overthrowing the Iraqi monarchy in 1958. It was the fierce symbolic competition between Arab states over their commitment to Arabism that compelled Arab leaders to make decisions that contributed to Israel's decision to attack preemptively on June 5, 1967. These decisions may have turned out to be unwise strategically, but they were necessary politically at the time.[6]

Scholars have written extensively about the role of military power and ideational variables in international relations theory. Yet the history of Islamic

states in the modern Middle East demonstrates that conventional approaches do not necessarily explain threat perception and state policy, and few scholars have addressed this subject of regional and global importance. This book seeks to fill these empirical and theoretical gaps. First, it analyzes the threat perception and policy responses of Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Then it moves on to discuss the rise and activities of two "Islamic states," Iran and Sudan, as a way to contribute to our understanding of international relations and at the same time use international relations to better understand important dynamics in Middle East politics.

The Argument

This book is an analysis of how and why ideas, or political ideology, can threaten states and also how and why states respond to nonmilitary, ideational threats. More specifically, it examines the threat perception and policy responses of Egypt and Saudi Arabia to the rise and activities of two "Islamic states," Iran and Sudan. Four dyads that examine changes in threat perception before and after Islamists come to power form the empirical body of this work. The findings will help us make sense of the regional system that may emerge in the future.

The major theme running through the book—that transnational ideologies may present a greater and more immediate national security threat than shifts in the military balance of power—has two main components.[7] First, ideology, or ideational power, triggers threat perception and affects state policy because it can undermine domestic political stability and regime survival in another state. The sociopolitical logic of this external political threat is that the projection of domestic ideology through culturally resonant symbols could alter commonly held beliefs about the targeted regime's legitimacy and facilitate social unrest. Second, states engage in *ideational balancing* in response to an ideological threat. This nonmilitary response aims to mitigate an ideational threat's political-symbolic power through resource mobilization and counterframing. Consisting of domestic and foreign policies, this state behavior aims to bolster commonly held beliefs about its own legitimacy and seeks to undermine the credibility of the source of the ideational threat.

How and when a state utilizes an ideology affects threat perception and the type of policy response. An ideology must be *projected* for it to be considered a national security threat. The extent of this threat, as well as the response,

is conditioned by the political environment. Islamist regimes became threats when they projected their ideologies *directly* through statements, including aggressive rhetoric, or *indirectly* through alliances, financial and military aid, and international institutions. This projection of power is not subject to a loss of strength gradient.[8] Periods of societal crisis in which state-society relations were strained made the regime particularly vulnerable to external threats. These conditions explain why Egypt and Saudi Arabia did not immediately consider the rise of these Islamist regimes as threats, why there is variation in a targeted state's policy response, and why other Arab states in similar situations did not consider Islamist regimes as threats. Turkey, although successfully ruled since 2003 by what has been called a liberal Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), has not been considered a threat in the same manner because it has not projected its ideology.

In other words, this book is not saying that a change in ideological nature, however inimical to another state, immediately leads to change in threat perception or policy. Threat perception does not increase when the ideological distance of the elites increases.[9] Instead, this book argues that the ideas and symbols that express the projected ideological threat must resonate with a foreign domestic audience. Targeted regimes fear this foreign ideational projection more during periods of societal unrest. The potential for the resonance of symbols and ideas is heightened during periods of societal crisis in which the legitimacy of the ruling order is under strain and scrutiny.

The analytical framework for understanding strategic interaction in this realm of international politics is called an "ideational security dilemma." The logic of this framework is similar to the traditional security dilemma: one state's move in pursuit of security generates insecurity in another state. The uncertainty about intentions drives states to balance or bandwagon to achieve security, thus increasing the potential for conflict. Indeed, this concept has been used to understand ethnic conflict, interstate relations, and energy politics. Following this tradition, the currency of the threat is nonmilitary and ideological, and regime survival, not state survival, is what needs to be secured. Lastly, since transnational identity linkages in the Middle East play a role in connecting national security with international security concerns, this focus on regime security and transnational ideology recognizes the overlap between domestic and foreign policies.[10]

To be sure, the purpose behind this framework is not to argue that military power or the state is unimportant. Rather, this framework aims to

capture dynamics at play that may be overlooked using more conventional approaches. Most observe and assess threat by examining alliance formation. But these indicators of threat are only part of the picture to get a sense of what really threatens a state. Domestic as well as foreign policies may be indicators and responses to an ideational threat that aims to undermine regime legitimacy and domestic stability. In addition, alliance formation may be motivated by, or even take on, a political value as a way to bolster a state's domestic legitimacy.

The ideational security dilemma can also be destabilizing, resulting in outbidding wars, misperception of intentions, and military confrontation. The escalation of rhetoric between the leaders of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt over who really represented Arab interests contributed to Israel's decision to launch a preemptive strike that launched the Six Day War (also known as the June War). The ideational security dilemma represents a dynamic that captures the ideational game, which can be destabilizing itself because regime survival is at stake in these strategic interactions. The approach in this book focuses on how ideas are national security threats outside of military conflict. Thus, this framework helps us understand how and why ideas threaten as well as why states engage in ideational balancing. It focuses on the notion that security should be conceived more broadly: states may balance for reasons other than increasing their military power and military power is not the only form of threat.

Through this framework we are also able to identify the mechanism by which ideas threaten. This is done largely through looking at the role of symbols as both a vehicle of ideational power and a heuristic to understand this type of nonconventional power and threat. A symbol is a powerful and efficient way to communicate information in a language that is easily understood by a particular audience within a particular cultural environment.[11] This information package, however, has the capacity to do more than just transmit information; political actors use symbols as a shorthand to communicate information about themselves, their opponents, and strategic settings in an effort to guide social action. When linked to a shared transnational identity, culturally resonant symbols can be used as effective tools to project an ideology and mobilize supporters abroad. But just as a shared identity across one identity category may be an asset for one actor, it can also be a liability. For example, during periods in which Iran's regional influence has grown, Sunni Arab leaders have pursued policies that promoted their sectarian and ethnic identities in an effort to undermine Iran's ideological, pan-Islamic appeals to

Arab publics. The domestic political environment affects the ways in which these threats are understood and the means to combat them.

In sum, ideas threaten when they are projected during periods of domestic crisis. Ideational factors, such as political ideologies, constitute a form of power and a means to threaten a regime's survival. States respond to this threat through ideational balancing. The ideational security dilemma helps us understand this phenomenon. The book's findings suggest that domestic and foreign policies, including but not limited to alliance formation, are crucial for understanding the nature and mechanism of an ideational threat.

Limitations of Previous Approaches

Why do states regard an ideologically oriented regime with limited power projection capability as a security threat? Why do Arab Muslim-majority states in the Middle East fear the rise of an Islamist regime? How do these incumbent Arab regimes manage transnational ideational threats posed by Islamist regimes? How and why do ideas threaten states? These questions cut across a broad range of literatures in both comparative politics and international relations, but at their core they are about how states assess threat.

Threat perception is important for understanding domestic and international politics: decision makers must be able to assess threats accurately to formulate policies that ensure their survival.[12] Threat perception is defined as expectations about the future behavior of another actor based on some combination of perceived intentions and capabilities.[13] The arguments about how states assess threats and how observers can measure them are subject to debate. Indeed, the idea that threat perception is based on some combination of capability and intent highlights the lack of consensus among international relations scholars about the relative weight that decision makers give a particular element in assessing threats. Whereas realism posits that capability is the most reliable indicator of threat, others, including some constructivists and those who favor political psychology approaches, emphasize the importance of intent. Other questions emerge: What types of threat are important? Who perceives and assesses the threat? Does threat perception necessarily translate to certain types of foreign policy outcomes, such as alliance formation? Lastly, how do factors such as regime type, state identity, and domestic politics affect how states assess threat?

The realist tradition, the paradigmatic approach to threat perception, provides an important starting point for this discussion. It posits that systemic

factors, such as shifts in the relative balance of power, cause security concerns, and states are expected to respond to external military threats by balancing through alliance formation. In neorealist formulations, asymmetries of power alone (military and economic) can create perceptions of threat and interstate conflict.[14] This view dismisses altogether the role of intentions for assessing threat because intentions are too difficult to discern and states must assume the worst case scenario.[15] Domestic politics, ideology, regime type, and identity are unimportant and considered "reductionist."

The security dilemma exemplifies the structural approach to international politics. One state's moves to ensure its security in an anarchic system in which intentions are unknown cause insecurity for another state. The uncertainty about intentions and each state's quest for security drives arms racing and alliance formation, and through a spiral model this uncertainty can lead to conflict even if neither side intended it. Security is defined as the survival of the nation-state.

By way of stark contrast, the constructivist approach sees this dilemma and threat perception very differently. To begin, threats are not objective, materially based facts; threats are social constructions. This difference stems from an approach that emphasizes the role of ideas in creating social facts, such as identities and interests. Identity and the social actions of states play a central role in international politics for constructivists. Identity is a source of state interest, and this interest is a product of state interaction. These interests and social processes have been used to explain international conflict as well as cooperation.[16]

State identity is also considered a motive for security-seeking behavior. Challenging the assumption held by realists and mainstream constructivists that nation-states pursue survival and physical security, proponents of ontological security argue that states pursue other forms of security, such as self-identity, even when they compromise physical security.[17] Meanwhile, the literature on the "securitization" of nonmilitary threats suggests that issues related to identity may become security issues.[18]

These approaches to international politics differ over what factors determine foreign policy and, more broadly, war and peace. Stephen M. Walt's *The Origins of Alliances* represents a foundational work for a limited literature that engages these broader international relations questions by focusing on the Middle East. Walt marshals evidence from the Middle East to argue that neither ideological explanations nor balance of power theories alone explain

alliance choice. Instead, Walt asserts that his balance of threat theory is the best explanation.[19] As a refinement of neorealism's heavy reliance on relative capability as the determinant of threat perception, this theory argues that states assess threats according to three additional factors: geographic proximity, the offense/defense balance, and aggressive intent.

Scholars have challenged this theory from a number of different angles revolving around the source of the threat and the type of threat that leads to foreign policy outcomes. Steven David's argument that states, particularly in the third world, "omnibalance" against systemic and domestic threats underscores the role of domestic politics in alliance formation. In particular, David suggests Egypt's realignment from the Soviet Union to the United States was driven by domestic threats to President Sadat's political survival.[20] Malik Mufti also highlights the role of domestic politics and regime security, not ideological commitment or balance of power/threat, as the crucial determinant of alliance behavior in his examination of pan-Arab unification efforts by Syria and Iraq in the 1950s and 1960s.[21] Michael Barnett and Marc Lynch's constructivist works on the Middle East focus on the importance of the domestic level in which state identity is central.[22] While Lynch emphasizes the role of the international public space, Barnett shows how nonmaterial interests, such as identity, have affected interstate cooperation and conflict. In his constructivist critique of Walt's neorealist characterization of Middle East politics, Barnett asserts it was the Arab states' competition over the shared identity and norm of Arabism that precipitated conflict.[23] Arab politics was essentially symbolic politics over who could define the regional order, and these debates were connected to the regime's legitimacy.

Other scholars have suggested that ideology does play an important role in threat perception and alliance choice. While Mark Haas's *Ideological Origins of Alliances* uses a broad set of cases to show that ideology, as an independent variable, affects alliance formation,[24] F. Gregory Gause III offers an important corrective of both realist and constructivist approaches. Using cases from the Middle East, Gause shows that alliance choice was driven by a state's decision to balance against the greatest ideological threat.[25] Taken together, these works, without dismissing the importance of material power, suggest that military capabilities are not always the primary determinants of state behavior and that domestic perceptual variables can affect foreign policy.

Foreign policies are affected by domestic politics and transnational ideologies, and states may not balance against the greatest external military threat.

These ideas highlight the salience of regime security over state security as a unit of analysis. As Curtis Ryan observes in his study of Jordanian foreign policy, "the preoccupation with system-level and structural explanations for alliances have too often led scholars to overlook the critical variables found within the domestic political realm."[26] In this way, regime security is both an assumption about decision makers' interests and an approach to foreign-policy analysis that examines opportunities and constraints imposed by the international and domestic spheres.[27]

This approach underscores the notion that security has been broadened in two directions: what threatens security and who is threatened. The point here is that a nontraditional force, ideational power, threatens domestic political stability and regime survival. National security is thus connected to the international system through transnational identities that have played an important role in Middle East politics. These ideational factors have been the source of threat and caused state balancing against the most threatening political challenge to regime survival.[28]

Ideology, Regime Security, and Domestic Symbolic Threats

The recent scholarship on regime security has incorporated domestic as well as systemic variables, including internal and external threats as well as nonmilitary threats. Whereas Gause highlights ideational political threats to regime security to explain foreign policy, particularly alliance formation, Ryan emphasizes economic and normative factors.[29] Ryan in particular argues that domestic regime security is the key explanatory factor in Jordanian foreign policy in which states face multiple security dilemmas. Barnett, coming from a constructivist perspective, also emphasizes the salience of regime security and survival as what motivates the "game of Arab politics."[30]

I extend these crucial insights about threat perception, regime security, and security dilemmas. Like Barnett, my argument suggests these symbolic political struggles are about regime legitimacy. The battlefield is the domestic public sphere embedded in the international public sphere of an Arab state system.[31] But the argument goes beyond these constructivist approaches as well as Gause's and Ryan's regime security approaches to illustrate the mechanism and sociopolitical logic by which these types of ideas and symbols in international politics become a perceived threat at the domestic level.

Moreover, my argument also explicitly identifies that project, in the presence of relevant domestic conditions, trigger the threat.

These crucial insights from threat perception and regime security lead to a new conceptualization of identity and security found in the ideational security dilemma and articulated by ideational balancing. The cases show that state-society relations affect a regime's perception of its security and this dynamic is influenced by international, particularly regional, politics.[32] This means that perception is not just a discrete event but a process of interactions among states, between state and society, and between the perceived connection between a foreign state and a local state's society. Ideological factors and domestic politics play an important role in understanding threat perception and its link to foreign policy.

This study differs from the way the previous literature, including regime security, has characterized threat perception and the way ideological threats have been examined. The heavy focus on alliance behavior by international relations scholars across the epistemological divide overlooks other types of state responses at domestic and international levels that identify the type and source of threat. Using alliance formation as an indicator of threat perception treats it as a dichotomous variable and cannot capture the intensity or change in intensity of a threat, especially if an alliance is already in place. This focus also obscures other types of foreign policies, including soft balancing, as well as domestic policies that are responses to external threats. Thus, as a departure from much of the traditional literature, I examine domestic and other types of foreign policy behaviors that have communicative-political value. This state behavior, ideational balancing, consists of resource mobilization and counterframing efforts at domestic and international levels.

Why study ideas and ideologies in the Middle East?

There is no better region than the Middle East to understand how ideas can threaten. The Middle East can be considered a subsystem and regional security complex that contains other overlapping systems in which global systemic pressures may affect, but not determine, regional politics.[33] Broadly speaking, the region is connected by geography, the intensity of security interactions, and transnational identities. The military weakness of states in this region, the existence of overlapping and competing transnational identities incongruous with political boundaries, and the establishment of ruling regimes with limited local support have elevated the salience of other forms of power and

made regime survival, not just state survival, the primary national security concern. Thus, the regime, which determines domestic and foreign policies in these authoritarian settings, and political and transnational political ideology, is the focus of my analysis.

Nonetheless, there are many challenges in emphasizing the importance of ideational factors when studying this region. Stephen Walt, in fact, justified his case selection to develop his "Balance of Threat" because the Middle East was "dripping" with identity politics. These debates have only intensified since the events of 9/11, the Iraq War, Iran's pursuit of nuclear capability, and the Arab uprisings. While some downplay the significance of these factors, others overemphasize them by describing regional conflicts as "ancient hatreds" between Islam and the West, Sunnis and Shi'a, Arabs and Jews, Persians and Arabs, and Kurds and Arabs.

On the other hand, the complexities of this region provide tremendous analytical opportunities. This domain offers necessary nuance and vital clarity about policy debates and problems in international relations. By focusing on four dyads of interstate relations within one geopolitical domain, there is both similarity and difference across identity categories, such as ethnicity and religion, as well as variation in military capability. The threat perceptions and policies of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the two most important Arab states in the region, are crucial windows for understanding broader trends and regional dynamics.

While all of the cases deal with the intersection of religion and politics, this book is not just about religion or Islam. Islamism, the most important force in Arab political discourse during the periods examined, is treated as a subset of other political ideologies. As such, readers should be struck by the similarities to other political ideologies, such as pan-Arabism in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s and Marxism during the Cold War.

The Islamist regimes established in Iran and Sudan should also be considered within a broader context of "ideological states." This type of state defines security as an expansion of its domestic system, which may come at the expense of traditional forms of security.[34] This security motive—to project its political ideology—means that these states, under certain conditions, could also be categorized as revolutionary and revisionist. But what distinguishes ideological states is that their ultimate goal is not necessarily to increase their relative power in the international system or to acquire territory; rather, they seek to transform the members of the system.[35]

While Islamism shares many similarities with other political ideologies, it is also somewhat unique because its basis is religion.[36] Religion is broadly defined as a belief in a supernatural being and its associated practices. It is often an "imagined community" that transcends political boundaries and contains divinely mandated norms that can justify self-sacrifice.[37] This means that the boundaries of a potential political community are not limited by territory and may increase through conversion. As a set of beliefs about a shared history and destiny, religion can serve as the source of a rich set of "cultural tools" for collective political behavior by connecting believers' ancient past with the present and future. Thus, these factors, particularly the potential to communicate and mobilize across borders, make religion a powerful social force and basis for a political ideology.

Because our interest is in understanding how perceptions affect strategic interaction, perhaps the most striking feature of religion is its association with "irrational" political behavior and violence. Religious norms can justify and reward violence and also demand self-sacrifice, such as martyrdom, in pursuit of a particular goal. In some cases, religious violence may even be the goal and not just the means to an end. Religion can act as a "force-multiplier" to strengthen assumptions about ideological actors' inflexibility, pursuit of values over strategic interests, risk acceptance, and aggressiveness.

Past and present trends in the Middle East make a compelling case for the importance of religion in contemporary politics. The Iranian revolution, the pinnacle of the Islamic resurgence, inspired many Islamic movements across the region that formed the backbone of violent and nonviolent opposition to authoritarian rule for the last three decades. The increased religiosity of society associated with the Islamic resurgence has enhanced the meaning, relevance, and political utility of religious symbols and ideology. During the 1990s, there was a growing challenge to authoritarian regimes from moderate and violent Islamic opposition movements. Islamist movements benefited from authoritarian regimes' experimentations with political liberalism and still continued to grow after incumbent authoritarian regimes tightened the political space. Radical Islamic groups targeted the "near enemy," their local, "un-Islamic" repressive regimes, until their defeat in the late 1990s led many of them to join al-Qaeda in its fight against the "far enemy."[38] This violence from "Islam's bloody borders" prompted broader debates about the clash of civilizations in which religion was the defining characteristic of a civilization or group.[39]

In the last decade, religion has mattered for threat perception in new ways. It has not simply been about clashes between Islam and the West or religious versus secular states; rather, sectarianism has played a major role as prism through which to view regional politics. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-minority regime had implications not just for the sectarian balance of power in Iraq but also for other parts of the region.[40] The Shi'a revival and the rise of Iran have meant that Arab leaders of countries with little or no Shi'a populations have framed threats that emanate from Iran in sectarian and even ethnic terms—at times intentionally blurring the distinction. King Abdullah of Jordan's warning of the "Shi'a crescent" became a coordinating symbol for Sunni cooperation and a justification for domestic and international policies. These changes have caused states such as Saudi Arabia to view Iran increasingly through a sectarian prism, including conflicts in Yemen, Lebanon, Palestine, and Bahrain.[41] Thus, the role of sectarianism in regional politics is important for how we think about threat perception, religion, and ideology. While Samuel Huntington's famous thesis on the clash of civilizations may have oversimplified the cohesiveness of Islam found within its "bloody borders," he correctly identified religion as the basis of a political ideological threat.[42]

Research Design

This book is organized around a series of bilateral relationships between a state in which an Islamist regime comes to power and a former ally (such as Iran/Egypt and Iran/Saudi Arabia or Sudan/Egypt and Sudan/Saudi Arabia). These dyads represents a subset of a larger set of cases, Islamist regimes and their relationship to other Arab states or, at an even broader level, ideologically orientated regimes and their neighbors. This research design allows us to pick the most appropriate cases for an in-depth analysis.[43] The point is to examine a state's threat perception and its policy toward another state in which an Islamist regime comes to power as a sound basis for evaluating the role of power and ideology in determining how states react to perceived threats. Therefore, these relationships are analyzed both before and after Islamists come to power marking "breakpoints" or "critical junctures." This provides the basis for a before-and-after design of process tracing so the fewest number of variables will change.[44] The case studies, which contain geographic, ethnic, and religious variation, help identify the extent to which certain variables matter.

These dyads as a whole exhibit both within-case and cross-case variation to test alternative hypotheses and explore interesting theoretical and empirical puzzles.[45] The within-case studies focus on the changes in threat perception (intervening variable) and state policy (dependent variable) before and after an Islamist regime comes to power. The within-case variation of an Islamist regime (Iran or Sudan) and another state (Egypt or Saudi Arabia) is examined alongside the within-case variation of the same Islamist regime's relationship to a second state. Policies and statements as indicators of threat should therefore be consistent with a change in threat perception.

Change in threat perception and state policy is assessed using a variety of methods. The empirical evidence for this book is drawn largely from extensive fieldwork in the Middle East (Egypt, UAE, Yemen, Jordan, Israel, and Qatar) over a six-year period (2004–2010). The sources of the data are interviews with current and former government officials, academics, and other local analysts as well as reports in the local Arabic press and media. A good example of a valuable source I obtained from my fieldwork was a parliamentary report written on Egyptian-Sudanese relations.

Case selection

As a matter of both case selection and definitional clarity, it is necessary to begin by discussing the terms "Islamic state," "Islamist regime," and "Islamic republic." The term "Islamic state" in its contemporary political usage is an elusive and contested term that is often used loosely for political purposes both outside and within the Muslim world. What a true "Islamic state" is and which countries fall under that category will not be answered here. However, since the purpose of this work is to analyze how other states respond to the emergence of this type of state as an embodiment of a set of political-religious ideas, the term "Islamic state" is used in an effort to capture the notion that the state and political order is defined in Islamic terms. At a very basic level, it is understood as a type of government whose source is shari'a (Islamic law).

Nonetheless, the term "Islamic state" is used interchangeably throughout this text with the terms "Islamic republic" and "Islamist regime." Sudan and Iran are officially "Islamic republics" even though they or others also use the term "Islamic state."[46] This book uses the term "Islamist regime" to refer to the interaction of an Islamic state that uses ideational power.

Some might ask about other states that refer to themselves as Islamic republics (i.e., the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) or those that are often

categorized as Islamic states, such as Saudi Arabia, which claims that shari'a is the source of its legislation. Since there is no way for this author or anyone else to determine what constitutes a true Islamic state, the present study focuses on a specific domain of cases within the Arab Muslim world in which Islamists come to power. For many Islamists, who believe it is a religious obligation to become politically active, the goal of this activism is to create an Islamic state and society.

More broadly, why are the Islamist regimes of Iran and Sudan the focus of this study and not the liberal Islamist regime of Turkey, for example? It would seem plausible that a democratically elected liberal Islamist regime in a well-functioning political system and strong economy should constitute more of a threat. The reason is that under Prime Minister Erdogan, Turkey, during the period covered in this book, did not try to aggressively project their ideology as a threat to other regimes in the region. However, toward the end of the 2000s, there were growing signs that some states interpreted Turkey's turn toward the Middle East as a soft projection of its ideational power.

The examination of Egypt's and Saudi Arabia's threat perceptions of Iran and Sudan is both policy-relevant and offers an extremely useful opportunity for theory building. Other differences include regime type. During the period of inquiry, the regime in Egypt represents a republican form of government whose legitimacy is not based on religion, whereas Saudi Arabia is a monarchy whose legitimacy is intimately tied to religion. Not only are Egypt and Saudi Arabia both Arab Sunni states, they are arguably the two most influential actors in the "Arab system."[47] They have different forms of both hard (material) and soft power. Egypt's material power is military and Saudi Arabia's is economic. Egypt's soft power has been based on its Arab leadership, and Saudi Arabia's soft power is linked to its Islamic heritage. These nonmaterial capabilities form the basis of their claims to regional leadership.

When paired with the states in which Islamist regimes have come to power, Iran and Sudan, the case studies contain similarity and difference along constants such as sectarian and ethnic identity, geography, and variation in domestic ideology and military capability (see table 1.1). There is considerable variance in the relative balance of power when Iran is part of the dyad and little variation or even military power in the cases involving Sudan. Ethnic and sectarian differences do not vary over time but they do vary across dyads. From this design, it is possible to generate hypotheses about the outcomes of ideological appeals and, in some cases, to show how the

TABLE 1.1 Characteristics of Cases

Dyad	Ethnicity	Sect	Geographic Proximity
Egypt-Iran	Arab-Persian	Sunni-Shi'a	Far
Egypt-Sudan	Arab-Arab	Sunni-Sunni	Near
Saudi Arabia-Iran	Arab-Persian	Sunni-Shi'a	Near
Saudi Arabia-Sudan	Arab-Arab	Sunni-Sunni	Far

outcomes are somewhat counterintuitive at the theoretical level. For example, why would Saudi Arabia, a majority of whose inhabitants adhere to a form of Islamic practice that is socially and politically conservative and staunchly anti-Shi'a, fear religious appeals from a regime that is not only non-Arab but also founded on a revolutionary Shi'a ideology? One would expect the vast differences between the Islamic Republic of Iran's Shi'a revolutionary ideology and the (conservative) Saudi regime's staunchly anti-Shi'a Wahhabi foundations to mitigate the mobilizing potential of religious symbols and messages coming from Shi'a Iran.

Although all the cases share the same dynamic where allies became enemies some time after Islamists came to power, the variations within the cases overcome the perceived selection bias. After all, the purpose is not to make a universal argument that Islamist regimes or ideology is threatening in all cases. Rather, the purpose is to use and test theories to explore an unexplained phenomenon. The idea is to show how ideas can threaten, focusing on a specific set of cases and a select domain to advance our understanding of this phenomenon.

Lastly, the cases themselves have "intrinsic importance."[48] Saudi Arabia's and Egypt's relations with Iran have been incredibly important for regional peace and security. These relationships during periods of cooperation and hostility have had a tremendous impact on regional politics and will do so for years to come.

Contributions

This book makes important theoretical and empirical contributions to the study of Middle East politics, international relations of the Middle East, and international relations theory. Leveraging regional expertise to make a broader academic and policy contribution, this book is the first of its kind in international relations to focus on how Islamic states affect the threat perception of Arab states. Within the small body of work on international relations

of the Middle East, there is even less written about Islam and international politics that engages international relations theory. Most of the works that do focus on Islam, ideology, and international politics do so from a comparative politics, diplomatic history, or terrorism studies perspective.

This book has important implications for international relations theory. The main contribution is the introduction of the analytical framework of the ideational security dilemma and the concept of ideational balancing. These contributions capture a different way to think about the indicators, sources, and mechanisms of threat perception. While the existing literature devotes an overwhelming amount of attention to alliance formation as an indicator of threat, this approach only captures part of the picture. Domestic policies and foreign policies outside the realm of alliances in response to systemic ideological threats may fall under the radar. As a result, previous approaches fail to recognize that the most serious national security threat at a particular time concerns domestic political stability. This is why domestic politics and domestic policy responses must be taken into account.

Second, the book speaks to the question of how threats are defined and assessed by states. Paralleling the debates about ideas versus interests, most of the literature either over- or understates the importance of ideology. This book is an attempt to take ideology seriously and yet remain within a realist framework that accepts the centrality of states and their pursuit of security in an anarchic system. In doing so, the emphasis on cultural, perceptual variables at the domestic level engages the growing literature on neoclassical realism. On a broader level, it refocuses attention on the importance of ideas in international politics that does not focus on norms. It shows that ideas matter in how they threaten and can be a source of conflict.

Third, the engagement of religious symbols as a component of ideology will contribute to the study of religion and international relations. Although the burgeoning literature in this new field includes both interpretivist and rationalist accounts, this book bridges the gap by illustrating mechanisms for how, why, and when symbols and religious ideas connect domestic and international politics. The importance of sectarianism as a way to counterframe ideational threats and as a fear of ideational projection introduces something unique from religion to international affairs. It follows that states may also assess threats according to sectarian affinity as a category of identity.

Beyond international relations, the quest to answer why and how an incumbent regime perceives religious symbols and transnational ideology

(Islamism) as a threat to its political stability engages important debates in comparative politics about authoritarianism and Islamic activism. While most of this literature has focused on bottom-up (societal) pressures and top-down state policies, this work shows how external ideational pressures affect state-society relations. Indeed, the main contribution of this literature is that international forces affect Arab authoritarian regimes' perception of their vulnerability to Islamic political activism.

Road Map

Each chapter makes a unique contribution to my argument. Chapter 2 presents the argument and describes the mechanism for understanding why states fear transnational ideological threats by looking at the logic of states' responses. In particular, the chapter discusses the ideational security dilemma, what ideational power is, and how it threatens by examining the role of symbols in ideational threats. It also elaborates on types of ideational-balancing activities as a state's response to nonmilitary threats.

The rest of the book proceeds chronologically by examining relationships between Arab Muslim-majority states (Egypt and Saudi Arabia) and states in which an Islamist regime comes to power (Iran and Sudan). Chapter 3, "Ideational Projection and the Iranian Revolution," examines how Saudi Arabia and Egypt responded to the Iranian revolution. This chapter clearly shows how changes in Iranian military capabilities had little effect on Saudi Arabia's and Egypt's threat perception. Iran's military capabilities dramatically increased in the 1970s as relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia strengthened. After the revolution, as Iran's military capabilities declined, it became a greater threat. Egypt and Saudi Arabia responded to Iran's ideational power projection through ideational balancing to mitigate the nonmilitary, national security threat.

Chapter 4, "The Power of a Weak State: Sudan's Relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt," examines the threat perception of Sudan before and after Islamists came to power. This chapter makes the strongest case for threat perception changing in the absence of a military threat and illustrates how the actual *projection* of the ideology correlates with the intensity of the perceived threat. The dyad is significant because Egypt and Sudan share borders, as well as sectarian and ethnic identities, and their relative balance of power remained asymmetric in Egypt's favor. Comparing the other dyad, Saudi Arabia considered Islamist Sudan a threat not because it harbored bin Laden, supported

terrorism, and allied with Iraq; rather, Sudan claimed a mantle of leadership that challenged Saudi legitimacy and could mobilize domestic opposition around important symbols. Sudan challenged Saudi Arabia through activities of the Popular Arab Islamic Conference (PAIC), which Khartoum created as a counterweight to the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC). This case also reveals how important context is: the shared sectarian identity, Sunni Islam, seems to have played a role in exacerbating tensions because the ideas could resonate instead of being a basis for cooperation.

Chapter 5, "Indirect Power Projection and Ideational Balancing after Khomeini," examines Saudi and Egyptian relations with Iran. It highlights how these Arab states feared Iran's indirect ideational power projection and how they responded in slightly different ways. Although they chose slightly different types of ideational balancing in the 1990s, during the 2000s, both states' ideational balancing took the form of "securitizing sectarianism" as a means to mitigate the ideational threat. Cairo's and Riyadh's promotion of sectarianism as a response to Iran's ideational power projection also served domestic and foreign policy interests. This dynamic is vital for a more nuanced understanding of Egypt's, and especially Saudi Arabia's, fear of Iran's growing regional role, spurred by its nuclear program. Overall, this chapter is a clear illustration of how the interplay of domestic and regional politics affects threat perception and state policy.

Chapter 6, "Balancing the Brotherhood," concludes the book by summarizing the findings within and across cases and by illustrating how these findings contribute to the study of international relations and Middle East politics. It examines the post–Arab Spring environment until the fall of the Morsi regime in Egypt in 2013 and also discusses why Turkey's liberal, Islamist-led government has not been a threat so far. In this new environment, there are signs that more unified Arab publics may play a greater role in conditioning the stability of states as they did in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, the book and this chapter conclude by discussing how conservative Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia and the UAE have employed ideational balancing strategies.