

Middle East, old and new

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This article is the text of an address given by Ghassan Salame at the 'Oil and Money' Conference convened in London, UK, on 21 October 2009. In it, the author deals with what the ambiguous, amorphous, elastic and politically expedient term 'Middle East' has connoted historically and what it may or may not denote in political formulations of a given moment. In particular, American, European, Turkish, Iranian, Israeli and Arab views - and the serious implications of these - are examined with superb economy of style. Whether as part of the US-delimited region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) or whether as affiliated to the European Union via a Mediterranean Union based on trade relations, the exclusion or inclusion in the Middle East is not a simple matter where regional players such as Iran and Turkey have historical extraterritorial ambitions which would, yet again, appear to be coming to the fore - even when such may threaten internal balances. The author argues that Israel's position is increasingly problematic due not only to Palestinian demographics, but also to its recent experience against Hezbollah which has mastered asymmetrical warfare at a time when the ability of the United States to defend its primary ally in the region has been cast into doubt. The states of the Arab World have proved ineffectual and certain of them are looking to 'escape' from the Middle East into Africa (Libya) or looking to formulate a new regional constellation in which Turkey and Iran will play leading roles (Syria). [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]

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