

Follow the Leader:
Symbolic obeisance and Middle East conflicts

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In March 2015, Saudi Arabia intervened in an ongoing civil war in Yemen, between the central government and Houthi rebels. Saudi motivations included fears of Iranian influence in its southern neighbor, and instability in Yemen affecting Saudi security. But many other states also participated in the intervention. Some may have shared Saudi Arabia's worries—like the United Arab Emirates, which had a history of tensions with Iran—while others, like Egypt and Morocco, had fewer ties to by the conflict. What led these states to join in a costly and controversial conflict they were not directly connected to?

This parallels another major conflict in the Middle East that happened nearly 40 years earlier. In 1967, Egypt and Israel took reciprocally aggressive steps that intensified the tensions in the region, to the point that Israel launched a surprise attack against Egyptian forces in June 1967. This war—known as the Six Day War or June War—resulted in Israel gaining the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.¹ But it also highlighted the complicated nature of Middle Eastern politics, as other states—particularly Syria and Jordan—were pulled into the war despite some misgivings.

¹ While there are various names for this conflict, I refer to it as the Six Day War as this is how it is most commonly referred to by many readers.

I argue that the Six Day War, and possibly other Middle Eastern conflicts, are examples of “follow the leader” dynamics, an indicator of international hierarchy. As Lake argued in his work on international hierarchy, in situations of international hierarchy, subordinate states may follow the dominant state into a conflict as “symbolic obeisance.”² In the case of the Six Day War, Egypt—under its charismatic leader, Gamel abd’al-Nasser—was the informal leader of Arab states connected in a dense web of diplomatic interactions, cultural commonplaces, and military tensions. When Egypt entered into hostilities with Israel, other Arab states joined in for out of deference to Egypt’s position.

If the Six Day War involved symbolic obeisance—rather than conventional balancing dynamics—this lends further support to the growing research program on international hierarchy. Yet, it also raises a few theoretical puzzles. While Egypt had some elements of formal control over other Arab states, it was hardly the sort of contractual hierarchy Lake discussed. Additionally, Egypt’s leadership was in dispute, as Syria and others challenged Nasser’s commitment to Arab causes. Can theories of international hierarchy incorporate informal hierarchies that produces distinct behaviors, and status competition in the midst of hierarchical relations?

I answer these questions by drawing on relational approaches to hierarchy and recent work in status competition. Egypt’s dominance was not through formal legal arrangements but its centrality in what MacDonald calls the “network of exchange” among states, and its possession of significant symbolic capital relating to Arab causes.³ Yet, this dominance was under threat because of several setbacks in its regional efforts. As a result, in line with Renshon’s

² David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

³ Paul K. MacDonald, "Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics," *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming); Daniel H. Nexon and Iver B. Neumann, "Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account," *European Journal of International Relations* (2017).

work on status competition, Egypt saw a potential conflict with Israel as an opportunity to demonstrate its leadership and increase its status.⁴ As tensions intensified and the war began, other regional states joined because of Egypt's position in the informal relational hierarchy.

This paper can expand our understanding of both international hierarchy and Middle Eastern conflict. By identifying a case in which international hierarchy played a role, it demonstrates the importance of incorporating hierarchical ties into the study of international relations. At the same time, it suggests additional areas this research program could explore. Finally, it provides an alternate explanation for the prevalence of conflict in the Middle East, namely the frequent competitions over position in its informal hierarchy.

The article proceeds in five parts. I first discuss the debate over international hierarchy in international relations, before presenting my argument that combines status competition and relational hierarchy. I then discuss the single-case research design and empirical expectations for both my explanation and alternatives. Following that, I discuss the Six Day War, and highlight the role of international hierarchy in the conflict. I conclude with thoughts on the broader implications of my argument.

Debates on International Hierarchy

Even as grand theoretical debates have faded from the study of international relations, debates about the nature of the international system—primarily whether hierarchy exists in its seeming anarchy—have persisted and intensified. Numerous studies have conceptualized hierarchy and analyzed its impact on various aspects of world politics. Despite this a few areas for further work remain, including how best to define hierarchy, how to demonstrate the value of this approach, and how to extend it to areas like the Middle East.

⁴ Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).

Prominent scholars have discussed hierarchy in the international system for decades. John Ruggie highlighted differences between the “medieval and modern international system” and the possibility for functionally differentiated units giving rise to a sort of hierarchy.⁵ Lake pointed to the difference between US and Soviet influence over post-World War II Europe to highlight the variety of hierarchical forms in the international system.⁶ Donnelly discussed the spectrum of forms of “sovereign inequality” in international systems that give rise to international hierarchy.⁷ Kang discussed the prevalence of hierarchy in East Asian politics.⁸ Additionally, Weber highlighted how self-interested calculations can create hierarchy in the international system.⁹

This interest in international hierarchy has accelerated in recent years. Lake’s book-length study of this topic discussed how hierarchy “creates functional differentiation and mutual dependence between states,” while also providing specific indicators of contractual hierarchical relations.¹⁰ Cooley followed Lake’s general definition of hierarchy to analyze the various forms hierarchy using insights from organizational studies.¹¹ He later expanded this in work with Spruyt on how “incomplete contracting” influences hierarchical relations.”¹² And Cooley and Nexon discussed hierarchical implications of the US overseas military bases.¹³

⁵ J. G. Ruggie, "Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis," in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983): 141.

⁶ David A. Lake, "Anarchy, Hierarchy and the Variety of International Relations," *International Organization* 50, no. 1 (1996).

⁷ Jack Donnelly, "Sovereign Inequalities and Hierarchy in Anarchy: American Power and International Security," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 2 (2006).

⁸ David C. Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations," *International Security* 28, no. 3 (2003).

⁹ Katja Weber, "Hierarchy Amidst Anarchy: A Transaction Costs Approach to International Security Cooperation," *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1997).

¹⁰ Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.

¹¹ Alexander Cooley, *Logics of Hierarchy: The Organization of Empires, States and Military Occupations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).

¹² Alexander Cooley and Hendrik Spruyt, *Contracting States: Sovereign Transfers in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹³ Alexander Cooley and Daniel H. Nexon, "“The Empire Will Compensate You”: The Structural Dynamics of the U.S. Overseas Basing Network," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (2013).

Others adopted an explicitly relational approach to international hierarchy. MacDonald called for a focus on “subtle forms of manipulation and the development of informal practices” rather than “written laws or formal procedures.”¹⁴ He contrasted this explicitly with Lake’s approach to hierarchy.¹⁵ Nexon also discussed a relational approach to international hierarchy in his study of the Protestant Reformation and the formation of the modern state system, as well as an article with Wright on the debate over America’s “informal empire.”¹⁶ Similarly, Duque has used social network analysis to highlight status hierarchies in the international system, which emerge from states’ interactions.¹⁷

Still others drew on field-theoretic approaches to international hierarchy. This relates to relational analyses, but focuses more explicitly on informal practices and symbolic power in international relations. Pouliot applied his work on international practices to multilateral diplomacy, uncovering informal “pecking orders” that produced hierarchical relations among states.¹⁸ Similarly, Nexon and Neumann used field theory to present an alternate version of hegemonic stability theory, suggesting international hierarchy arises from states possessing “a plurality of meta-capital in world politics.”¹⁹

Several of these studies applied these debates over the nature of hierarchy to specific empirical areas. Keene studied how international hierarchy affects the form of intervention in

¹⁴ MacDonald, "Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics."

¹⁵ Paul K. MacDonald and David A. Lake, "The Role of Hierarchy in International Politics," *International Security* 32, no. 4 (2008).

¹⁶ Daniel H. Nexon and Wright, "What's at Stake in the American Empire Debate?," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (2007); Daniel H. Nexon, *The Struggle for Power in Early Modern Europe: Religious Conflict, Dynastic Empires and International Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁷ Marina G. Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Vincent Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice: Multilateral Diplomacy and the Governence of International Security," *European Journal of International Security* 1, no. 1 (2016).

¹⁹ Nexon and Neumann, "Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account."

other states' politics.²⁰ Lake analyzed how hierarchy affects regional international orders.²¹ Prys, in turn, discussed the importance of treating "regional power as a variable," and provided a typology of these forms.²² And Coggins discussed how state power determines which states become recognized as members of the international system.²³ Additionally, both Adler-Nissen and Zarakol discuss how socialization processes can produce hierarchical relations.²⁴ Barder discussed how international hierarchy can influence domestic practices, and a book by Bukovansky and others discussed the idea of "special responsibilities" and how it accompanies international hierarchy.²⁵

Bially Mattern and Zarakol recently attempted to organize this growing research into international hierarchy.²⁶ They identify three "logics" of hierarchy in the international system. The first is the logic of trade-offs, in which hierarchy is a "functional bargain" between states. The second is a logic of positionality, with hierarchy as "differentiated social and political roles." And the third is the logic of productivity, which approaches hierarchy as "a productive political space or structure." Bially Mattern and Zarakol also suggested a research program for future work on international hierarchy. This included attention to how these logics interact, how the logic of trade offs is independent from underlying material capabilities, how positional hierarchy can vary, and what role there is for agency in hierarchical relations.

²⁰ Edward Keene, "International Hierarchy and the Origins of the Modern Practice of Intervention," *Review of International Studies* 39 (2013).

²¹ David A. Lake, "Regional Hierarchy: Authority and Local International Order," *ibid.* 35 (2009).

²² Miriam Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood," *International Studies Review* 12 (2010).

²³ Bridget Coggins, *Power Politics and State Formation in the Twentieth Century: The Dynamics of Recognition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

²⁴ Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Rebecca Adler-Nissen, *Opting out of the European Union: Diplomacy, Sovereignty and European Integration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁵ Alexander Barder, *Empire Within: International Hierarchy and Its Imperial Laboratories of Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Mlada Bukovansky et al., *Special Responsibilities: Global Problems and American Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

²⁶ Janice Bially Mattern and Ayse Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics," *International Organization* 70 (2016).

Continuing Debates about international hierarchy

Despite this growing area of research, there are a few areas of uncertainty in the study of international hierarchy. One involves how important hierarchy really is in international relations. While studies have demonstrated the plausibility of hierarchy, more work is needed to highlight the insufficiency of ignoring hierarchical relations when studying world politics. Further studies not just conceptualizing hierarchy, but identifying cases in which hierarchy is the superior explanation would be useful.

Another area involves the relevance of theories on international hierarchy to the Middle East. Many current studies of hierarchy focus on the United States and Western Europe, while many analyzing non-Western states focus on colonial dynamics. This is understandable, as many examples of hierarchy in modern international relations relate to the dominant states in the international system. Detailed regional studies of hierarchy, in turn, have tended to focus on East Asia. The Middle East has mostly gone unanalyzed.

Studies arising from the English School have helpfully provided some insight into the unique nature of Middle East international relations that would seem to make it a valuable case of international hierarchy. Buzan and Waever discussed the Middle East as a distinct “conflict formation,” while Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez edited a volume on the importance of the Middle East to English School analyses.²⁷ In that volume, Halliday discussed the Middle East as a “relatively distinct subsystem” with a low salience for sovereignty.”²⁸ Similarly, in that volume,

²⁷ Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, eds., *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²⁸ Fred Halliday, “The Middle East and Conceptions of International Society,” in *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*, ed. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

Gonzalez-Pelaez points to the distinct form of sovereignty in the Middle East.²⁹ This work could be expanded, and integrated into research on hierarchy.

There are also debates within the study of hierarchy. One is whether it is better to approach hierarchy in a broad or narrow sense. As Bially Mattern and Zarakol note, international relations approaches hierarchy as both a narrow “relationship of legitimate authority” and a broader “intersubjective manifestation of organized inequality.” Some concerns remain about this approach, however. MacDonald pointed on ambiguities in a broadened approach to international hierarchy, arguing that using hierarchy to “refer to all forms of stratification” overlooks the absence of “political authority” in anarchy.³⁰ That is, analyzing inequalities in international relations is important, but this sidesteps the claim that hierarchy produces distinctive patterns of behavior in the international system. As a result, he argues for a “narrow conception of hierarchy as type of authority relationship.”³¹

Another—which Bially Mattern and Zarakol raised—is how the dynamics from different logics of hierarchy interact. Different types of hierarchical may lead to distinct forms of behavior. At the same time, it is possible that informal hierarchical relationships could lead to the same sort of dynamics as structured pseudo-imperial systems. For example, Lake points to specific indicators of contractual hierarchy, as well as specific behaviors we should find in the presence of hierarchy.³² Are these behaviors unique to this form of hierarchy, or could we see similar patterns from more informal hierarchical relations?

²⁹ Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez, "The Primary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society," *ibid.* (Palgrave MacMillan).

³⁰ MacDonald, "Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics.": 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 9.

³² Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.

Finally, more attention is needed to the unique nature of regional hierarchical relationships. As I noted above, much attention has been devoted to global hierarchies, or the impact of great powers on regional systems. Regional hierarchies themselves require explicit study. Some have done this, such as the studies by Lake and Prys I noted above.³³ And Kang has produced numerous useful studies on the unique nature of East Asian hierarchies.³⁴ Further work in this area can expand our understanding of hierarchy. Scholars in the English School—which I will discuss more below—have noted the importance of regional systems. Buzan and Waever's work on regional systems, and Buzan's separate discussions of the English School, both highlighted the importance of analyzing distinct regional politics.³⁵

Symbolic Obeisance and Status Competition

In this paper, I draw on and extend existing work on international hierarchy in two ways. First, I argue that we can combine insights from the logics of trade-off and positionality by incorporating relational approaches to hierarchy. Second, I argue that we can apply these theories on international hierarchy to the Middle East, whose politics provide useful avenues to clarify many of the abstract elements of these theories. We can then identify how status competition in the Middle East can give rise to symbolic obeisance, or episodes in which subordinate states follow the dominant state into a conflict.

Combining the Logics of Trade-offs and Positionality

³³ "Regional Hierarchy: Authority and Local International Order."; Prys, "Hegemony, Domination, Detachment: Differences in Regional Powerhood."

³⁴ Kang, "Hierarchy, Balancing and Empirical Puzzles in Asian International Relations."

³⁵ Barry Buzan, "Rethinking Hedley Bull on the Institutions of International Society," in *The Anarchical Society in a Globalized World*, ed. Richard Little and John Williams (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006); *From International to World Society? : English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*, vol. Cambridge University Press (New York, 2004); Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*.

Generally, I argue that we can combine insights from two of Bially Mattern and Zarakol's "logics" of international hierarchy, the logic of trade-offs and the logic of positionality. As they note, the logic of trade-offs argues that "hierarchies affect outcomes through the particular way they structure choices that lead to action."³⁶ That is, we can observe discrete changes in behavior as a result of state's decisions relating to hierarchical ties. Lake's points to specific economic and security indicators of hierarchy, and argue they lead to distinct patterns of behavior. These include dominant state military interventions to preserve order, low defense spending and economic openness by subordinate states, and subordinate states' tendency to "follow the leader" into conflict.³⁷

The logic of positionality, by contrast, focuses more on the nature and patterns of inequality among states. Bially Mattern and Zarakol argue this approach to hierarchy argues it matters "by constituting or making salient to actors their position-contingent roles."³⁸ Rather than the distribution of power or conscious decisions by states to enter into hierarchical relationships, this approach to international hierarchy points to shared beliefs about vertical differentiation in world politics and the different roles states occupy. This logic of positionality argues hierarchies affect states "because they socialize actors to respond to positionally appropriate incentives."³⁹ This suggests a broader, more diffuse role for hierarchy than that of Lake's work.

I argue, however, that combining the two can expand the insights of both "logics." The logic of trade-offs is useful as it points to specific changes in behavior that we can identify. It is

³⁶ Bially Mattern and Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics.": 634.

³⁷ Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*.

³⁸ Bially Mattern and Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics."

³⁹ *Ibid.*: 640.

limited, however, by looking for concrete indicators of hierarchy.⁴⁰ The logic of positionality, by contrast, points to broader dynamics but eschews these concrete indicators. I argue that hierarchy based on the logic of positionality can still lead to some of the distinct behaviors in the logic of trade-offs.

I do this by drawing on the relational approach to hierarchy. MacDonald argues that existing approaches to hierarchy are often “overly broad.”⁴¹ Instead hierarchy emerges and affects international relations because “dominant states tend to reside in central positions in networks of exchange,” which grants them resources to “enlist capable intermediaries.”⁴² Similarly, Neumann and Nexon use field theory as an alternative approach to international hegemony. They argue that a state’s place in a “field,” or a “delimited sphere of social action”—in this case the international system—affects its and others’ behavior.⁴³ They specify how position matters, however; “position within a field depends on the accumulation of field-relevant capital,” which includes economic, social and cultural resources.⁴⁴ Additionally, Pouliot also characterizes hierarchy as “vertical differentiation and a set of organizing principles of differentiation.”⁴⁵ But he specifies that this differentiation emerges from—in the case of his study—a “struggle for diplomatic competence,” which produces informal “pecking orders.”⁴⁶

These relational approaches to hierarchy highlight the specific behaviors that accompany hierarchy. MacDonald specifies that it is not just a state’s position, but its place in networks that grants it either dominate or subordinate status. Neumann and Nexon points to a state’s

⁴⁰ MacDonald and Lake, "The Role of Hierarchy in International Politics."

⁴¹ MacDonald, "Embedded Authority: A Relational Network Approach to Hierarchy in World Politics.": 3.

⁴² Ibid.: 4.

⁴³ Nexon and Neumann, "Hegemonic-Order Theory: A Field-Theoretic Account.": 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Pouliot, "Hierarchy in Practice: Multilateral Diplomacy and the Governence of International Security.": 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

accumulation of economic, social and cultural capital. And Pouliot highlights how states' engaging in commonly-accepted practices can lead to vertical differentiation. These can provide a connection between the logic of positionality and the specific behaviors predicted by the logic of trade-offs, which I will discuss below.

Hierarchy and Middle East politics

I also specifically focus on Middle Eastern politics, in which hierarchy plays a major role. Middle Eastern politics has been tense, but the struggle has not been just over geostrategic dominance but leadership in the region. Moreover, states' status in the region are not due to a strong collective identity; instead, states gain their status through adhering to commonly-accepted practices of leadership behavior. Additionally, hierarchy in the Middle East is not fixed or stable, but the result of constant churn as states compete for positions. These aspects of the Middle East—documented in numerous studies of the region—usefully link up with the aforementioned works on international hierarchy.

Several scholars have noted the importance of a weak common identity among Middle Eastern Arab states, which characterized post-World War II Middle East politics. Barnett, for example, argued that Middle Eastern international relations are characterized not by balancing or arms races but “symbolic politics” drawing on this common identity.⁴⁷ Likewise, Ayoubi discussed how Arab leaders often drew on “a pan-Arabist vocabulary” to manipulate popular opinion, even though he found the strength of pan-Arabism to be weak.⁴⁸ International relations

⁴⁷ Michael N. Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998): 1-2.

⁴⁸ Nazih N. Ayoubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Taurus, 1995): 147.

theorists have also noted this; Buzan pointed to the importance of a common identity arising from Arabism and Islam that provided some structure to Arab politics.⁴⁹

These symbolic politics emerged through states' adhering to and deploying commonly-accepted practices of Arab leadership. Arab states were expected to adhere to stances on high profile issues such as Israel, pan-Arabism and Islam, and interactions with Western states. For example, Ayubi argued that Islam "forms" part of a dominant "mode of persuasion" in Arab politics based on "ideology/culture."⁵⁰ Similarly, Barnett argued Arab states "engaged in a never-ending process of negotiating the norms that are to govern their relations."⁵¹ States "manipulated and deployed symbols that derived from their shared cultural foundations" to gain influence over others in the region.⁵² For example, Quandt argued that "Arab nationalism and the demand for the restoration of Palestinian rights were Nasser's most potent weapons as he sought to unify the ranks of the Arab world."⁵³ Similarly, Hudson claimed "the Arab leader or politician desiring to win and hold power by maximizing his legitimacy" will emphasize their adherence to key issues such as "the liberation of Palestine," the formation of "inter-Arab solidarity," and "nonalignment with...the Great Powers."⁵⁴

English School scholars have also noted some of these common practices in the Middle East. For example, both Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez argue war is a "primary institution" in the Middle East.⁵⁵ To English School scholars, primary institutions are "durable and recognized

⁴⁹ Buzan, *From International to World Society? : English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*, Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁰ Ayubi, *Over-Stating the Arab State: Politics and Society in the Middle East*.: 38.

⁵¹ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order*.: 6.

⁵² Ibid.: 10.

⁵³William Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press): 2-3.

⁵⁴ Michael C. Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977): 54.

⁵⁵ Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez, *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*; Gonzalez-Pelaez, "The Primary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society."; Buzan, *From*

patterns of shared practices rooted in values held commonly by the members of interstate societies;” these primary institutions constitute actors and provide rules for their behavior.⁵⁶ As Gonzalez-Pelaez argues, there are more legitimate reasons to go to war in the Middle East than in other regions, as it is connected to acceptable practices for Arab states.⁵⁷ Likewise, Halliday argued there is a “low salience” for sovereignty in the Middle East, making intervention in other states’ domestic politics more legitimate.⁵⁸

During the time period this paper deals with, the significance of commonly-accepted practices among Arab states is apparent in Egypt and its popular President Gamal abd-el Nasser. Quandt argued, “Arab nationalism and the demand for the restoration of Palestinian rights were Nasser’s most potent weapons as he sought to unify the ranks of the Arab world.”⁵⁹ Similarly, Dawisha claimed that in the “Arab nationalist tide” following the 1956 Suez Crisis, Nasser “appeared to be the sole custodian of the Arab nationalist mantle.”⁶⁰ And Brynen pointed to Egypt as the traditional pan-Arab leader in the Middle East.⁶¹ This came partly from Egypt’s material power, but also from Nasser’s dedication to Arab causes. As Hudson argued, “by committing himself in the most dramatic way to the Arab nationalist and Palestinian causes, Nasir achieved a degree of greatness.”⁶²

Yet, this common identity—and the symbolic politics that were deployed through it—did not provide a set of fixed norms for states to follow via a constructivist logic of appropriateness.

International to World Society? : English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation, Cambridge University Press.

⁵⁶ *From International to World Society? : English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation*, Cambridge University Press.: 181.

⁵⁷ Gonzalez-Pelaez, "The Primary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society."

⁵⁸ Fred Halliday, "The Middle East and Conceptions of International Society," *ibid.* (Palgrave Macmillan): 15.

⁵⁹ Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*: 2-3.

⁶⁰ 187

⁶¹ Rex Brynen, "New Horizons in Arab Politics," in *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World*, ed. Rex Brynen, et al. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner Publishers, 2012).

⁶² Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*: 240.

For example, Halliday argued “Islam provides a medium and a set of symbols, as well as some retrospective historical legitimation” for Arab states, but does not constitute a coherent “value system.”⁶³ Miller argued that the “outstanding feature of the recent history of inter-Arab relations is the struggle for leadership in the name of Arab unity.”⁶⁴ Others have noted the persistence of the Arab state system despite the distinct common identity.⁶⁵

Instead, the identity was the venue for constant contestation over status and position. Barnett noted this with what he called the “negotiations” over Arab identity.⁶⁶ Many of these tensions involved attacks on Nasser’s leadership of the Arab world. Hudson pointed to the “cynically taunted by both Jordan and Syria for abandoning his pan-Arab militance.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Dawisha discussed the Syrian and Iraqi criticisms of Nasser; “the Iraqi and Syrian Ba’thists sought Nasir’s prestige, but disdained his political control.”⁶⁸ Other intra-Arab disputes occurred between the more revolutionary regimes—like Egypt’s—and conservative states like Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹

These aspects of Middle Eastern politics can allow us to elaborate on theoretical works in international hierarchy. States in the Middle East can accumulate social capital through adherence to and leadership on Arab causes, which grants them influence over other states’

⁶³ Halliday, “The Middle East and Conceptions of International Society.”: 11.

⁶⁴ Benjamin Miller, “The International System and Regional Balance in the Middle East,” in *Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century*, ed. TV Paul, James J Wirtz, and Michael Fortmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004): 246.

⁶⁵ Buzan and Gonzalez-Pelaez, *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*; Simon W. Murden, “The Secondary Institutions of the Middle Eastern Regional Interstate Society,” in *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*, ed. Barry Buzan and Ana Gonzalez-Pelaez (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009):.

⁶⁶ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order*.

⁶⁷ Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*: 245.

⁶⁸ Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016): 238.

⁶⁹ Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).

actions, as seen in Egypt's Nasser. There are accepted practices that define adherence to Arab causes, including continued tensions with Israel, support for pan-Arab initiatives, and resistance to Western states' influence over the region. States drawing on these cultural resources are able to use them to develop intermediaries to influence Arab societies. Yet, the hierarchy that emerges from this arrangement is not fixed and stable, but is actually the result of constant jockeying for position among Middle Eastern states.

Follow the Supposed Leader

Thus, the Middle East is arguably characterized by a hierarchy that generally follows the logic of positionality, albeit with the specifications of relational approaches to hierarchy. How does this situation affect international relations in the region? I argue that two dynamics, the importance of conflict as a "status-altering event" and symbolic obeisance by subordinate states in conflict. This situation is possible due to the unique nature of status competition in the Middle East. As states compete for their positions in the status hierarchy, those concerned about their position may initiate conflicts to increase their hierarchical position. When the initiating state has a relatively dominant position in the hierarchy, this conflict may draw in subordinate states.

I first must describe these two concepts. As David Lake discusses, one indicator of international hierarchy is "follow the leader conflicts." He describes this as "symbolic obeisance," one of the indicators of international hierarchy. Subordinate states undertake "costly acts that do not involve direct compliance with demands but are nonetheless public...displays of submission that acknowledge and affirm the authority of the ruler."⁷⁰ He argues this is seen "most clearly in the strong tendency of subordinates to follow dominant states into war."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*: 165.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*: 166.

The second concept is work on status and war.⁷² Renshon argues that status is an important element of international relations, based on states position among other states and states' perception of the state's importance. When states are dissatisfied with their status, they need to change other states' perceptions on this issue. One useful way to do this is through war. This is a dramatic "status-altering" event that can increase a state's position in international status hierarchies. Additionally, Musgrave and Nexon highlighted how states "concerns about legitimacy" can result in attempts to "secure dominance in arenas of high symbolic values" through costly "performances."⁷³ This can overlap with Renshon's argument to suggest how status concerns in hierarchy can lead to dramatic events such as war.

These two dynamics combine in a unique manner in the Middle East. The starting point is the informal and unstable hierarchical order in the Middle East I discussed above. While few Middle Eastern states wield formal hierarchical influence over others—in Lake's conception—an informal hierarchy does exist based on states' adherence to common Arab causes. The common identity of Arab states, and shared concerns increased the salience of status in their relations. States like Egypt gain hierarchical authority over others not through legal frameworks, but by their place in the Middle Eastern "networks of exchange;" Nasser's Egypt organized Arab responses to issues through periodic summits, while other states looked to Nasser to represent Arab interests in dealing with Israel and outside states. Egypt gained this dominance partly through its material power, but also through its significant amount of *social capital* it gained through supporting these Arab causes.

⁷² Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*.

⁷³ Paul Musgrave and Daniel H. Nexon, "Defending Hierarchy from the Moon to the Indian Ocean: Symbolic Capital and Political Dominance in Early Modern China and the Cold War," *International Organization* (forthcoming).

The above, of course, are all debatable claims. My argument, though, is that we can observe specific patterns of behavior that would *only make sense* if these hierarchical dynamics were in place. First, Middle Eastern states attempt to maintain or improve their position in this hierarchical order through upholding commonly-accepted Arab causes. States hoping to gain prestige will initiate crises or start conflicts intended to advance Arab causes. If these are successful, they then may increase in status among Arab states. At the same time, states will criticize others who are not advancing Arab causes actively enough via these international crises.

Second, when a state that is already dominant enters a crisis, other states will join the conflict as a form of symbolic obeisance. Just as states can use crises to change their status—and face criticism for not doing so—states that fail to participate in a crisis intended to advance an Arab cause can face criticism for being insufficiently devoted to the common identity. This potential is greatest when a state with already high status initiates the conflict, as it will have significant social capital available to undermine the status of states that sit out. As a result, states will engage in acts of symbolic obeisance to the dominant state by following it into conflict.

Thus, a focus on the international relations of the Middle East can both validate existing works on international hierarchy and expand them. The behaviors we see in the Middle East surrounding international crises only make sense if international hierarchy and status concerns drive Arab states' actions. This can increase the credibility of claims for international hierarchy's importance in international relations. At the same time, the Middle East requires some alterations to existing works. As I have noted, Lake argues that symbolic obeisance occurs through formal hierarchical ties; I will suggest these behaviors are possible through the logics of positionality as well in certain cases. Additionally, Renshon argued international status does not translate into

authority, although in the case of the Middle East, states in dominant status positions do gain some relational authority.⁷⁴

Alternative Explanations

There are several alternative explanations for the above dynamics. I discuss them briefly here, but expand on the empirical indicators that would suggest they are accurate in the research design section. Some would look to conventional international relations theories. One could argue that apparent examples of “follow the leader” conflicts are actually either balancing or bandwagoning. This alternative explanation would also reject the importance or presence of an informal positional hierarchy in the Middle East, and argue Middle Eastern politics are driven by geopolitical concerns. Other alternative explanations may draw from constructivist approaches to international relations. One could argue “follow the leader” conflicts are not due to the dynamics of hierarchy. Instead, it would be an example of states adhering to agreed-upon norms of behavior, and other states join in as they accept its legitimacy.

Finally, alternative explanations could be drawn from other works on hierarchy. One would be that “follow the leader” conflicts in the Middle East do indeed reflect the logic of trade-offs arising from concrete economic and security aspects of hierarchy. Alternately, the logic of positionality may be able to explain these conflicts alone, without needing to draw on Lake’s arguments. Finally, the dense network ties among Arab states may even have inhibited conflict.⁷⁵

Research Design

⁷⁴Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics*: 40.

⁷⁵Zeev Maoz, "Network Polarization, Network Interdependence, and International Conflict, 1816-2002," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 4 (2006); Zeev Maoz et al., "Structural Equivalence and International Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5 (2006).

I test this argument with a qualitative case study of the Six Day War/June War, the 1967 conflict between Israel and Arab states. Using the qualitative method of triangulation, I draw on existing historical research on this conflict. I then use process-tracing to assess the validity of my explanation, and alternatives. I argue that this case is a “most-likely” one for both my theory and the alternative theories.⁷⁶ The Middle East in the mid-1960s experienced recurring tensions with shifting alliances, and thus is a good candidate for balance of power theory; indeed, Walt uses the Middle East to develop his balance of threat theory.⁷⁷ The Middle East also has overlapping shared identities and norms of behavior, which would be in line with a constructivist logic of appropriateness. And, as I discussed, it has many hallmarks of informal hierarchy, so if hierarchical relations have no effect this would be damning for the importance of international hierarchy. As George and Bennett argue, however, a more compelling case would be one that is least-likely for my theory and most-likely for all others, so there are some caveats about the strength of the research design (as I discuss below).⁷⁸

There are some concerns about the use of a single case study, but this research design can be very useful for this analysis. George and Bennett argue that single case studies are useful for theory building and theory testing purposes in certain situations.⁷⁹ Rueschemeyer similarly pointed to the value of single case studies, particularly their ability to “develop new theoretical ideas...put them to the test and use the results in the explanation of outcomes.”⁸⁰ He pointed to their usefulness in “falsifying” hypotheses, but also argued they can be valuable for other

⁷⁶ Alexander George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005): 121.

⁷⁷ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁷⁸ George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*: 120-122.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*: 32, 80.

⁸⁰ Dietrich Reuschemeyer, "Can One or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains," in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Reuschemeyer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003): 307.

purposes, including “the identification of universal or quite general problems” and the development of “highly focused theoretical frameworks.”⁸¹

Works in qualitative methodology provide a few guidelines for effective use of single studies. George and Bennett argued single case studies require particularly close attention to the quality of within case methods. They also argue researchers must carefully explain the details of alternative explanations.⁸² Additionally, Brady, Collier and Seawright argued for the importance of “causal-process observations,” rather than “data-set observations;” the former provide information on “context, process or mechanism” in political events, their strength lying not in “breadth of coverage” but “depth of insight.”⁸³

That being said, there are some limits to single case studies, which I must acknowledge. There is a risk of selection bias, as there is no variation in any of the variables in the study. Additionally, any generalization from a single case study must be tenuous. I do not think these seriously undermine the value of my study, however. I am attempting to highlight a process emerging from hierarchical relations in the international system, rather than testing which variables produce this outcome. Additionally, I will focus on multiple pieces of evidence for or against my theory in the case study, minimizing some of the concern about selection bias. Finally, I am not presenting this case as representing general trends in international relations, but rather an example of the specific dynamics of the Middle East.

I also use best practices in qualitative methods to draw properly on existing historical research. Lustick argued that use qualitative researchers can inadvertently introduce selection

⁸¹ Ibid.: 311, 328.

⁸² George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*: 80.

⁸³ David Collier, Henry Brady, and Jason Seawright, "Refocusing the Discussion of Methodology," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry Brady and David Collier (Lanham, MD: Rowman Littlefield, 2010): 24.

bias into their analyses if they are not careful about which secondary historical sources they use. He then suggests a variety of techniques to avoid this, including being clear about historiographical debates and triangulating among disparate sources to identify well-supported pieces of evidence.⁸⁴ Thies expanded on Lustick's warning and guidelines.⁸⁵ I adhere to this standard. I follow Barnett's approach to Middle East politics and attempt to gain new information from existing research, instead of attempting to uncover new facts.⁸⁶ As a result, I draw on secondary sources in my analysis. In order to avoid bias, I attempt to find pieces of evidence from multiple sources for each point I make.

As I said, I am not engaging in historiographical debates about the Six Day War, but it is useful to highlight the nature of the existing literature. One major debate has to do with responsibility for the war. Michael Oren has argued neither side intended to go to war, and Israel's pre-emptive strike was meant to stop a seemingly imminent Egyptian invasion.⁸⁷ Others disagree, and argue Israel's strike was not legitimate.⁸⁸ Still others point to Arab hostility towards Israeli water projects and Palestinian raids.⁸⁹ Additional scholars have debated the nature of the war, including the breakdown of deterrence, misperceptions, and the role of the contemporary war in Yemen.⁹⁰ I believe my explanation does not necessarily support one side or

⁸⁴ Ian S. Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias," *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 3 (1996).

⁸⁵ Cameron Thies, "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 3 (2002).

⁸⁶ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order*: xi.

⁸⁷ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Presidio Press, 2003).

⁸⁸ Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War," *Middle East Journal* 60, no. 2 (2006); Ersun N. Kurtulus, "The Notion of a "Pre-Emptive War:" The Six Day War Revisited," *ibid.* 61 (2007).

⁸⁹ Moshe Gat, "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East: A Prelude to the Six Day War," *Middle Eastern Studies* 41, no. 6 (2005); Moshe Shemesh, "The Fida'iyyun Organization's Contribution to the Descent to the Six-Day War," *Israel Studies* 11, no. 1 (2006).

⁹⁰ John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993); Jesse Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

the other, as I will discuss in the caveats section. But I attempt to include insights from multiple sides in this debate to avoid any bias.

I also draw on a within-case qualitative methods, particularly process-tracing. Bennett and Checkel define process tracing as “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences and conjunctures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypotheses about causal mechanisms.”⁹¹ That is, process-tracing involves analyzing the entire sequence of events leading to an outcome to determine how that outcome emerged. This is particularly useful for my analysis as I am hoping to demonstrate not only that a “follow the leader” dynamic occurred in the Six Day War, but also that it arose through the dynamics of the Middle East’s relational hierarchy.

Bennett and others have provided some standards for conducting process-tracing. Bennett and Checkel’s checklist for “best practices” includes honestly looking for alternative evidence, considering the potential bias of sources, determining whether the case is most or least likely, and gathering diverse evidence.⁹² Bennett has also presented a few empirical tests. In this paper I draw specifically on two. “Hoop tests” uncover evidence that eliminates alternative explanations, but by themselves do not validate the explanation. The other are “smoking gun” tests, which confirm a hypothesis if passed but do not necessarily invalidate alternative explanations.⁹³ A “doubly decisive” test would be ideal, but such evidence is difficult to find. I therefore attempt to find pieces of evidence that suggest *my explanation could be correct*, while also finding other

⁹¹ Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel, "Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Best Practices," in *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*, ed. Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*: 7.

⁹² Bennett and Checkel, "Process Tracing: From Philosophical Roots to Best Practices.": 89.

⁹³ Andrew Bennett, "Process Tracing and Causal Inference," in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, ed. Henry Brady and David Collier (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010): 210-211.

pieces of evidence that *alternative explanations cannot be accurate*, as well as evidence that *my explanation must be correct*.

Finally, in line with George and Bennett's standards, I present clear empirical expectations for both my theory and alternatives. If my "follow the supposed leader" theory is correct, we should see three things. First, there should be minimal formal hierarchy, and any hierarchical ties are relational in nature. Second, the dominant state—Egypt—will initiate a conflict in order to sustain its status in the regional system. Finally, other states that join the war do so as they feel compelled to follow Egypt for fear of losing their status. Examples of "smoking gun" evidence for my argument would be Nasser expressing concern about losing status or authority as a result of the crisis with Israel, and Syrian and Jordan leaders joining the war because of the power of Nasser's position.

Other explanations would approach the international hierarchy dynamics differently. If a stricter approach to Lake is correct, we should find two sets of evidence. Either "follow the leader" did occur, but it occurred due to formal hierarchical ties. Or "follow the leader" dynamics were absent due to the lack of formal hierarchy. If a "logic of appropriateness" approach is accurate, we should observe Egypt and other Arab states starting the Six Day War through reflection on the right thing to do based on their identity. "Hoop test" evidence that could reject the former explanation would include the absence of formal contractual ties between Egypt and other states, or their lack of influence over states' policies. For the latter, it would be evidence that Arab leaders sincerely believed the war was the right thing to do based on their identity, as opposed to being motivated by concerns for power or status.

Other alternatives from conventional realist arguments would expect different pieces of evidence. As Walt specifies, balancing is "alignment against the threatening power to deter it

from attacking,” while bandwagoning is “alignment with the dominant power, either to appease it or to profit from its victory.”⁹⁴ If the Six Day War was a case of balancing, then Egypt should have started the war because it was threatened by Israel’s power or intentions. Likewise, other Arab states would join Egypt because they were similarly threatened. And if bandwagoning occurred, Arab states would join Egypt because they were either threatened by Egypt’s power or hoped to gain from Israel’s defeat. “Hoop test” evidence against balancing would be Nasser and other leaders not showing concern over Israel’s power, or emphasizing status concerns over this threat. “Hoop tests” invalidating bandwagoning would be evidence Arab states did not want to gain land from Israel or were not afraid of Egypt’s power.

The Six Day War and Middle Eastern hierarchy

The Six Day War occurred as a result of a crisis between Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Israel. This situation emerged, however, partly from Egypt’s concerns about maintaining its status in the Middle Eastern hierarchy. In the face of criticism from Syria and others for not being sufficiently confrontational with Israel, Egypt’s leader—Nasser—attempted to demonstrate his devotion to Arab causes by adopting a harsh stance towards Israel in the crisis. Once the war began—with fighting between Israel and Egypt—Jordan and Syria joined Egypt’s side as a show of deference to the significant social capital Egypt wielded in Arab politics. In this section, I will briefly provide an overview of the Six Day War, before presenting evidence on each of these points and demonstrating why alternative explanations are invalid.

⁹⁴ Stephen M. Walt, "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia," *International Organization* 42, no. 2 (1988): 278. See also Anders Wivel, "Balancing against Threats or Bandwagoning with Power? Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship after the Cold War," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2008); Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994).

The Six Day War

The Six Day War emerged out of unresolved tensions between Israel and Arab states stretching back to Israel's founding in 1948. Beyond Israel's existence, this included Egyptian unease with Israel's access to the Straits of Tiran and disputes between Israel, Syria and Jordan over the Jordan River. These tensions intensified in a series of events starting in November 1966. In response to a Palestinian attack on Israeli soldier, Israel raided the village of As'Samu—in Jordan-held West Bank—and fought with the Jordanian military. And in April 1967, Israeli aircraft attacked Syria after clashes along the border.

Tension intensified over the next few months before exploding in full-scale war. The Soviet Union provided inaccurate intelligence to Egypt suggesting Israel was preparing to attack Syria. In response, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran and massed its troops in the Sinai Peninsula. Israel responded by preparing its own military, and attempting to gain US assurances of defense, to no avail. The series of escalating incidents led to war on June 5th, when Israel launched a surprise attack against Egyptian forces.

The conflict expanded over the next few days. Israel had devastated Egyptian air forces, and a ground offensive soon caused the Egyptian army to retreat from the Sinai. Jordan and Syria both launched offensives against Israeli positions. After some intense fighting in the West Bank, however, Israel drove both states back. The war ended a few days later, with Israeli victory and the seizure of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights.

Status concerns and informal hierarchy in the run-up to the war

Numerous debates revolve around the Six Day War. Scholars debate about who was responsible for the war, and whether Israel's surprise attack was justified. Others debate how Israel was able to gain such a quick victory. But despite these disagreements, there is significant

evidence in existing historical research to indicate relational hierarchy and status concerns played a major part in both the Egyptian moves during the crisis and other Arab states' decisions to join Egypt.

First, as I noted above, Egypt was the dominant state in the Middle East's informal hierarchy. In the case of the Six Day War, Egypt's dominance in the Arab hierarchy can be seen most directly in the fact that its lack of leadership inhibited earlier hostilities between Arab states and Israel.⁹⁵ As Parker notes, part of the reason the early 1960s water tensions did not develop into a larger conflict was because Egypt was not pressing for action.⁹⁶ As Israel progressed on its National Water Carrier project in the early 1960s, Syria "demanded that the Arab states put an immediate end to the Israeli diversion."⁹⁷ Egypt, however, was not interested in conflict, and successfully convinced other states to establish the United Arab Command to respond to the potential threat.⁹⁸

At the same time, Egypt's position was under serious threat, partially over its unwillingness to be more confrontational with Israel. As Shlaim notes, Nasser's "leadership of the Arab world was being challenged" by other states, especially after he had counseled patience on Israel in response to Syrian desires for aggression.⁹⁹ Other complications in regional politics threatened Egypt's dominance, including the breakup of the UAR and the war in Yemen.¹⁰⁰ Arab states took advantage of these tensions to try and undermine Egypt's position. Jordan and Syria

⁹⁵ Moshe Shemesh, "Prelude to the Six-Day War: The Arab-Israeli Struggle over Water Resources," *Israel Studies* 9, no. 3 (2004); Moshe Gat, "On the Use of Air Power and Its Effect on the Outbreak of the Six Day War," *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 4 (2004); Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*: 12-13.

⁹⁶ Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East*: 38.

⁹⁷ Gat, "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East: A Prelude to the Six Day War.": 620.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001): 250.

¹⁰⁰ Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*: 245.

both “cynically taunted” Nasser “for abandoning his pan-Arab militance.”¹⁰¹ For example, Syria’s support for Palestinian raids into Israel—and Egypt’s lack of participation—“embarrassed Nasser, upstaging his leadership on Palestine.”¹⁰² They also criticized Nasser for not responding to the April 1967 skirmish between Israel and Syria.¹⁰³

Arab states were not simply jockeying for position, however; they were engaging in the sort of symbolic politics Barnett noted. Arab states appealed to, and felt compelled to defer to, commonly-accepted practices in Arab politics. Arab critiques of Nasser were often framed in terms of the “Arab cause.”¹⁰⁴ For example, when Hussein worried about other Arab states’ willingness to defend Jordan, he wrote to Nasser of the need for Arab unity in order to prevent the “1948 disaster” from repeating.¹⁰⁵ And after Israeli airstrikes on Syrian targets in 1964, Arab states “pronounced the attack on Syria tantamount to an assault against the entire Arab nation.”¹⁰⁶ Additionally, when Syria criticized Egypt for its inaction over Israel, it appealed not to its own security but to broader Arab interests.¹⁰⁷

There are indications that Arab states felt compelled to respond to these appeals to Arab causes. Barnett argues that the Arab states were “highly vulnerable to symbolic sanctioning and sensitive to the charge that they were not doing enough for the cause of Palestine.”¹⁰⁸ Additionally, as Syria and Egypt began “a dangerous game of symbolic competition” to demonstrate their loyalty to the Arab cause, Jordan was “forced to keep pace or suffer a loss of prestige.”¹⁰⁹ The impact of these issues on Arab leaders can be seen in a quote by an advisor to

¹⁰¹ Ibid.: 245.

¹⁰² Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 24.

¹⁰³ Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East.*: 41.

¹⁰⁴ Shemesh, "Prelude to the Six-Day War: The Arab-Israeli Struggle over Water Resources.": 14.

¹⁰⁵ Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*

¹⁰⁶ Gat, "On the Use of Air Power and Its Effect on the Outbreak of the Six Day War.": 1199.

¹⁰⁷ "The Great Powers and the Water Dispute in the Middle East: A Prelude to the Six Day War.": 920.

¹⁰⁸ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order.*: 153.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.: 156.

King Hussein; “it would have been impossible for us to justify our remaining aloof from so momentous a matter which engaged the entire Arab world.”¹¹⁰

Thus, in the run-up to the crisis, status concerns weighed heavily on Nasser. As Khalidi argues, Arab leaders used “Arab popular sympathy to exploit the Palestinian issue” in the run-up to the war, and this “contributed significantly to the outbreak.”¹¹¹ This can be seen in Nasser’s decision to move troops into the Sinai and close the Straits of Tiran, which were “intended to impress Arab public opinion.”¹¹² And Nasser reportedly responded to the Soviet warning by deciding Egypt needed to deter any Israeli moves against Syria and to restore its own somewhat tarnished image in the Arab world;” US policymakers shared this assessment of Nasser’s actions.¹¹³ One telling example comes from a discussion of Egypt’s military plans, in which Nasser emphasized the “the key questions for him” was “whether his rule could survive another failure to come to Syria’s defense.”¹¹⁴

These same concerns are apparent in other states’ reactions to the crisis. When Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran, it sent telegrams to Arab states “requesting their help” in cutting Israel off; in response to the “elation” that followed, many states’ militaries were mobilized, including Saudi Arabia, which was hardly close with Nasser.¹¹⁵ As Dawisha argues, the “pressure on other Arab leaders to fall in line was immense,” contributing to their preparation for war.¹¹⁶ This is apparent in Jordan’s reactions. Jordan was particularly concerned about appearing to support Arab nationalism, given earlier critiques of its ruling family by nationalists.¹¹⁷ Thus,

¹¹⁰ Ibid.: 158.

¹¹¹ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 192.

¹¹² Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*: 253.

¹¹³ Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*: 24-25.

¹¹⁴ Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.: 84.

¹¹⁶ Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*: 250.

¹¹⁷ Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy*: 214.

even though Jordan was not enthusiastic about the conflict, it faced immense pressure to back Nasser as the crisis progressed.¹¹⁸

Informal hierarchy and Arab states' participation in the war

While the Six Day War began with an Israeli surprise attack on Egypt, Nasser's hostile actions in the weeks before this act contributed to the outbreak of war. These actions were driven by Egypt's worries about maintaining its status in the informal hierarchy.¹¹⁹ By 1967, Egypt's position in the Arab hierarchy depended on its stance towards Israel. As Kerr noted, Nasser was in a difficult situation in 1967; "if he tried to deter Israel he risked war, if he left the Syrians unprotected he revealed himself to the Arabs as untrustworthy, irresolute."¹²⁰ This can be seen in a few episodes from the run-up to the war. In a conversation with UN Secretary General U Thant in May 1967, Nasser emphasized "the great importance and need for the restoration of Arab dignity and honour [sic]."¹²¹ And in December 1966, Amer discussed a military plan that he argued would involve a "battle that would last three to five days" before a cease-fire, with Egypt emerging as "the Arabs' savior."¹²² Similarly, Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol argued there would be no war as "it was prestige Nasser wanted, not war."¹²³

Once war began, Syria and Jordan joined with Egypt in acts of symbolic obeisance. Jordan hesitated to participate once the war began, arguing its air forces were not ready in

¹¹⁸ Thomas Reifer, "Review: The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences, and the Six-Day War and Israelie Self-Defense Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventive War," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 42, no. 4 (2013); Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*.

¹¹⁹ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power*; Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East*; Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order*.: 268, 76, 3.

¹²⁰ Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*.: 127. See also Robert McNamara, "Britain, Nasser and the Outbreak of the Six Day War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 35, no. 4 (2000).: 622.

¹²¹ Raymond Cohen, "Intercultural Communication between Israel and Egypt: Deterrence Failure before the Six-Day War," *Review of International Studies* 14, no. 1 (1988).: 8.

¹²² Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*.: 39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*: 77.

response to Egyptian requests to begin bombing of Israeli targets.¹²⁴ Yet, Hussein was “carried along by the powerful current of Arab nationalism,” unable to stay out once the war intensified.¹²⁵ While the Egyptian general Riad ordered initial Jordanian hostilities against Israel, Hussein decided to launch a broader offensive after encouragement from Nasser and hearing false news that the Iraqi air force had entered the conflict. As Oren argues, Hussein had “no choice but to comply with [Riad’s] decisions,” if he wanted to “survive politically” and “physically.”¹²⁶ When Israel gained the upper hand, Hussein was wary of either accepting a ceasefire or retreating for fear of withdrawing from the war “while Egypt was still fighting.”¹²⁷ It was not until June 6th, when Nasser admitted his army was retreating that he could withdraw “without fear of repercussions from Egypt or other radical regimes.”¹²⁸

Similar dynamics are apparent in Syria’s actions during the war. Syria dragged its feet once Egypt requested it participate in attacks on Israel.¹²⁹ But its leaders felt compelled to launch air strikes after Jordan’s offensive began.¹³⁰ Syria expanded its actions after it believed Egypt was on the offensive against Israeli forces, with one general arguing, “now was no time to hang fire.”¹³¹ And even though Syria had gained some confidence on June 6th in respond to muted Israeli responses to Syrian attacks, they waited until Egypt called on an offensive to begin an invasion of Israel.¹³²

¹²⁴ Ibid.: 177.

¹²⁵ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World.*: 260. See also Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 338-339.

¹²⁶ *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 185-186.

¹²⁷ Ibid.: 224.

¹²⁸ Ibid.: 238.

¹²⁹ Ibid.: 177.

¹³⁰ Ibid.: 186.

¹³¹ Ibid.: 195.

¹³² Ibid.: 230.

Thus, the informal relational hierarchy of the Middle East contributed to the outbreak and expansion of the Six Day War. As I showed above, there is ample “smoking gun” evidence in the historical record to indicate the role hierarchy and status competition played in the Six Day War. This test requires evidence that my explanation is accurate, even if it does not by itself invalidate other explanations. Numerous sources indicate Egypt’s primary concern was maintaining its position in the informal Middle Eastern hierarchy as the conflict intensified. These concerns made Egypt less willing to promote restraint towards Israel—as it had in the past—and contributed to the run-up to the war. At the same time, several sources suggest other Arab states—particularly Jordan and Syria—felt compelled to join Egypt in both the crisis escalation and the war itself due to Egypt’s still dominant place in the hierarchy. These pieces of evidence thus constitute the “smoking gun” suggesting my theory is accurate. They do not necessarily invalidate alternatives, however, but other pieces of evidence—which I discuss below—allow us to reject them.

Alternative Explanations and Caveats

This explanation for the Six Day War is superior to alternatives. One could point to formal hierarchical ties. Egypt initiated the United Arab Command (UAC), a body of the Arab League that would coordinate Arab states’ military actions. Additionally, an Egyptian commanded Jordan’s army. This general gave the order for Jordan to attack Israel. This is not as widespread a security hierarchy as Lake discusses, however. For example, Egypt argued the UAC did not need to respond to “local issues” like the 1966 As-Samu raid, suggesting it did not institute contractual obligations between states.¹³³ And there are indications that the UAC was weakened by the time of the Six Day War.¹³⁴ Additionally, Jordan did not grant Egypt control of

¹³³ Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East*.: 40-41.

¹³⁴ Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958-1970*.: 125-126.

its military to gain contractual benefits, but rather to get out of the dilemma Hussein faced over involvement in the coming war.¹³⁵ Thus, the logic of trade-offs explanation fails these hoop tests.

There is also little evidence for bandwagoning. Arab states were wary of Nasser's influence, but did not fear military action against themselves. They thus would not have joined the conflict in order to protect themselves against Egypt. Similarly, in 1966—in the context of disputes between Fatah and King Hussein—the King argued against immediate action to ensure “the return of the stolen homeland,” indicating Jordan was not driven by territorial gains.¹³⁶ There is evidence Syria “lured Egypt into a trap in which war...was inevitable.”¹³⁷ But this is less bandwagoning and more an attempt to supplant Nasser's leadership. This explanation thus fails the “hoop test” as well.

There is more evidence for balancing, but this is still insufficient. The “hoop test” for this explanation would be Egypt initiating hostilities out of fear of Israeli power, and other states joining out of a similar fear. Israel did threaten Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Additionally, some have argued Egypt moved troops to the Israeli border to deter an Israeli attack on Syria.¹³⁸ Yet, there is evidence that Egypt thought it would easily win a war against Israel; Sadat reportedly said, “well, they'll be taught a lesson they soon won't forget.”¹³⁹ Additionally, Nasser seemed to downplay the threat from Israel. For example, after Syria wrote to Nasser with its concerns about Israel in September 1966, Nasser took a month to respond.¹⁴⁰ Finally, his moves to deter an Israeli attack on Syria were related to status concerns. Nasser argued to U Thant that its military

¹³⁵ Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 338.

¹³⁶ Shemesh, "The Fida'iyyun Organization's Contribution to the Descent to the Six-Day War.": 24.

¹³⁷ Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 38.

¹³⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967.*: 24. See also Parker, *The Politics of Misperceptions in the Middle East.*: 59-60.

¹³⁹ Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence.*: 155.

¹⁴⁰ Ferris, *Nasser's Gamble: How Intervention in Yemen Caused the Six-Day War and the Decline of Egyptian Power.*: 273.

buildup in the Sinai was due to “Israel’s designs on Syria,” as well as the “requisites of Arab dignity and honor.”¹⁴¹ Finally, if this was a balancing dynamic, Jordan and Syria would have been prepared to immediately attack Israel, rather than the drawn out process I discussed above. Balancing thus also fails the “hoop test.”

Another reason to reject the balancing and bandwagoning explanations is the hesitation of Egypt and Jordan to enter into conflict with Israel before 1967. If Arab states were driven by the threat from Israel or a desire to gain from its defeat, they would have been more willing to engage in conflict during early 1960s tensions over the control of the Jordan River. Yet, Egypt and Jordan did not seem interested in war.¹⁴² They realized the threat Israeli diversion of the Jordan may have posed; in 1964, the Arab League stated, “the existence of Israel is a danger that threatens the Arab nation, the diversion of the Jordan waters by it multiplies the dangers to Arab existence.”¹⁴³ But they attempted to minimize tensions. In 1965, a meeting nearly occurred between Egypt’s Amer and the head of Mossad.¹⁴⁴ There were similar meetings between Israel and Jordan on intelligence cooperation relating to threats against King Hussein.¹⁴⁵

We can also reject other explanations from the hierarchy literature. While the logic of positionality mattered here, it did so through the specific mechanism of symbolic obeisance. Inequality among states itself would be insufficient to explain this conflict. Additionally, the hierarchical network ties among states actually contributed to war, as it made status competition

¹⁴¹ Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*: 85. See also Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967.*: 24.

¹⁴² McNamara, "Britain, Nasser and the Outbreak of the Six Day War."; Cohen, "Intercultural Communication between Israel and Egypt: Deterrence Failure before the Six-Day War."; Shemesh, "Prelude to the Six-Day War: The Arab-Israeli Struggle over Water Resources."; "The Fida'iyyun Organization's Contribution to the Descent to the Six-Day War."; Kurtulus, "The Notion of a "Pre-Emptive War:" The Six Day War Revisited."; Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidely into the Six-Day War," *ibid.*60 (2006).

¹⁴³ Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World.*: 244-245.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*:240.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*: 242.

more intense. This does not directly invalidate arguments by Maoz and others, as the lack of ties between Arab states and Israel likely enabled conflict. It does suggest an interesting dynamic in network relations, however. There were less distinct “hoop tests” for these explanations, as I do not think they were necessarily in conflict with mine.

Finally, this was not a case of Arab states acting based on their shared identity. Much of the Arab states’ reactions had to do with fears of facing criticism or losing their position in the hierarchy. There is little evidence that states acted based on principled decisions on what is right or wrong according to their identity. Even the most constructivist of accounts of this conflict, by Barnett, admits this point. He does argue that Nasser was “captured by the normative expectations” of his role as Arab leader.¹⁴⁶ Yet, Barnett also points out that Nasser “knowingly risked an unwanted war with Israel to preserve his image as the leader of Arab nationalism,” rather than to uphold norms of behavior.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, Barnett’s entire study was intended to highlight how states engage in negotiations over the nature of identity, as opposed to being driven by it. “Hoop tests” are unclear for this explanation, as it points to similar dynamics as mine and was ultimately underdeveloped. One could argue that constructivist logics could be expanded to include these dynamics, but this risks a post-hoc regressive development in this theory.

Thus, we can reject alternative explanations. But there are a few caveats to my analysis. One has to do with the debate over the Six Day War. As I discussed above, I am not advancing a new argument on the Six Day War; instead, I am attempting to triangulate different perspectives to understand the role international hierarchy played. That being said, some may object to my

Glenn H. Snyder, "Review: Alliances, Balance and Stability," *International Organization* 45, no. 1 (1991); Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In."; Wivel, "Balancing against Threats or Bandwagoning with Power? Europe and the Transatlantic Relationship after the Cold War."¹⁴⁶ 122

¹⁴⁷ Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in International Order.*: 3.

work, especially as I rely so heavily on Oren's account. I believe that including a variety of sources protects from any such issues, but my insights hold up no matter one's views on who started the Six Day War. Arguing that Egypt precipitated the crisis out of status concerns does not place sole blame on Egypt, or absolve Israel of responsibility. Even if Egypt did add to tensions, I do discuss how it was responding to Israeli hostile acts. Additionally, I am not claiming that Egypt cynically manipulated tensions to increase its prestige; Nasser's actions were due to sincere concerns about maintaining Arab unity.

Another caveat deals with the single case design. It is possible the Six Day War was unique, and these dynamics did not drive conflicts in other cases. That being said, war is rare—even in the conflictual Middle East—and the Six Day War had a major impact on the region. Even if this article can best explain just one conflict in the Middle East, understanding how international hierarchy affected this war is of immense value.

Conclusions

The Six Day War transformed the Middle East, but it also revealed the hierarchical relations that suffused its politics. Egypt—under Nasser—had been a dominant state, although this position was deteriorating in the face of radical criticisms. Nasser hoped to restore his position in the Arab hierarchy by demonstrating his adherence to Arab causes and pushing back on perceived Israeli aggression. Once the war began with an Israeli surprise attack, other regional states were drawn in to the conflict out of deference to Nasser's position. In this way, the informal hierarchical status of various Middle Eastern states contributed to both the onset and expansion of the war.

This highlights the significance of international hierarchy in the Middle East. While there are numerous alternative explanations for states' behavior in this war they cannot satisfactorily

explain what happened. Only by identifying hierarchical ties among Arab states can we understand why Arab states moved towards war, and why Jordan and Syria joined Egypt once the war began. The details of this case particularly highlight the power of hierarchy, as even informal hierarchical ties can lead to distinct behaviors.

This paper can also speak to ongoing debates within the study of hierarchy. The logic of trade-offs presented by scholars such as Lake may be too narrow to capture informal positional hierarchies such as those in the Middle East. At the same time, a broader take on hierarchy as inequality through the logic of positionality may not be able to produce the testable hypotheses needed to demonstrate hierarchy's influence over the international system. Hierarchy is a distinct form of arrangement among states that leads to specific patterns of behavior. The best way to study it may be through the relational approach to hierarchy. While this paper focused primarily on evidence of hierarchy's effects, rather than the nature of relational ties among Arab states, I believe this explanation is most able to capture the dynamics I observed.

The paper also has broader significance for the prevalence of conflict in the Middle East. Some scholars have argued the nature of Arab culture, obsession with a glorious past, or the importance of Islam explain the conflictual nature of the Middle East. Others take a more nuanced approach, arguing the combination of geography and the significance of Islam explains why the regional is so turbulent.¹⁴⁸ Others argue it has to do with "domestic models of political survival."¹⁴⁹ This paper presents an alternate view; the prevalence of a relational hierarchy, and the constant jockeying for position, may be the cause of the region's instability. Conflicts do not

¹⁴⁸ Monica Duffy Toft, "Getting Religion?: The Puzzling Case of Islam and Civil War," *International Security* 31, no. 4 (2007).

¹⁴⁹ Etel Solingen, "Pax Asiatica Versus Bella Levantina: The Foundations of War and Peace in East Asia and the Middle East," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007).

arise directly from states trying to dominate the region, however. Rather, states' desire to demonstrate their adherence to Arab intensifies crises.

It can also contribute to our understanding of contemporary Middle Eastern conflicts. The tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia—including the Yemen intervention I mentioned in the introduction—may be related to their competition over positions in the regional hierarchy. Over-emphasis on their sectarian differences may thus lead to greater instability, as it would harden divisions in the Middle East and increase the stakes of regional dominance. Likewise, continued US support for Saudi Arabia's actions in Yemen will only make the conflict worse, as it will heighten Iran's status concerns.

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