

Robert Looney. *Handbook of US-Middle East Relations*. London: Routledge, 2009. 544 S. ISBN 978-0-203-85937-7.

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Three dozen academics, mostly from America, examined the US-Middle East relations. Thirty-five essays cover it in this handbook from a variety of disciplines and views: The first section provides a broad overview of many of the key issues and policies that have helped, either directly or indirectly, to shape US relationships with the region as a whole, including economics, oil, war, globalization and Islamic groups. The second section examines perceptions of US-Middle East relationships from various perspectives, both within and outside the region. The third section focuses on the unique aspects of the US relationship with each of the region's countries.

Edited in March 2009, that is at the start of Barack H. Obama's presidency, the publisher opined that one of the main tasks facing his term was that of improving America's image in the Middle East. During the years of George W. Bush, one opinion held that the US relations with most countries in the region declined to an all-time low. There was, among the general publics of many countries considered central to the US efforts to combat terrorism, a deep distrust of America. Even in lands such as Kuwait, that have long been seen relatively pro-American, the support for the US had declined dramatically.

Central to improved US-Middle East relations was a better understanding of the critical factors shaping views and perspectives throughout the Middle East. Indeed, the essays in this volume

cover a large spectrum of US-Middle East relations. The authors hoped that they would enlighten us on this vital, yet still often misunderstood, region of the world. And they did not represent one particular political or ideological position. The authors sought objectively to seek a deeper understanding of the region's complexity and subtlety.

This handbook was published at the end of 2009. Three years later and eleven years after 9/11, president Obama's Middle Eastern policy totally crushed in the region: diplomats and troops were killed, embassies were burning and protesters in more than three dozen lands were infuriated. Much of the discussion went on about the reasons for this outburst. Whatever the answer might be, something went profoundly wrong in the politics of this administration and in the perception of a region which the Islamists dominate since 2012. It has to do with Islamism. A new regional order takes shape, unfriendly to democracies.

To check it out country by country or case by case, the reader is well advised in using this handbook which became as well a unique reflection of academic thinking coinciding with president Obama's outreach in the Middle East. This book also points at sources in some regional languages. There is no other handbook like it. This edition refines Michael B. Oren's book "Power, Faith, and Fantasy. America in the Middle East: 1776 to the

Present" especially after 1945. Thus, we have a diversification by Robert E. Looney's handbook. In light of the current all-time low in US–Middle East relations, there remains a lot to fill in and to revise. The series "Foreign Relations of the United States" is now available on the web until 1976, providing another source for the big question of 2012: what went wrong? We hope that there will be soon a new edition of this handbook.

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