



## The Middle East, Africa, Feminism, and BRICS

As usual, this issue of *Air and Space Power Journal–Africa and Francophonie* addresses diverse topics relevant to our time and its readers in 185 countries. In “The Benefit Principle As Applied to Middle East Oil: Implications for US Energy Policy,” professors Mohammed Akacem, John Faulkner, and Dennis Miller base their policy prescription on the following benefit principle of taxation: those who benefit more from the provision of a public good should pay more of the tax. National defense is a commonly recognized public good. Large consumers of petroleum and petroleum products benefit most from the US military’s defense and projection of power in the Middle East to secure access to petroleum. However, all US taxpayers bear the monetary burden that supports such defense. To correct this inequity, the authors suggest a tax on petroleum at the retail level that better reflects the military costs associated with providing oil from the Middle East. A direct benefit of such a tax will be to diminish US dependence on Middle East oil by allowing the price at the pump to reflect all costs.

Turkey is a “model” for Muslim democracies to follow in the post–“Arab Spring” Middle East, according to Prof. Hayat Alvi’s article “The Postsecular Republic: Turkey’s Experiments with Islamism.” She believes that Turkish secularists are becoming increasingly anxious, fearing that the country is heading towards harder-line Islamism. Similar fear permeated postrevolution Tunisia and Egypt, whose Islamists have been removed from power. However, Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan have persisted despite serious challenges. Professor Alvi examines Turkey’s experiments with Islamism and its drive to transform into a postsecular republic. Her field research and interviews have led to findings in this study that highlight the Erdoğan government’s unwavering determination to relegate the republic’s fierce embrace of secularism to the rearview mirror while playing a greater role in regional politics for what it sees as geopolitically strategic objectives.

Prof. Jack Kalpakian argues in “Ethiopia and the Blue Nile: Development Plans and Their Implications Downstream” that disputes over the Ethiopian Blue Nile dams are a result of identity construction and nationalism in the Nile basin, especially in Egypt. Normally, pressures produced by droughts and climate change would lead to cooperative behavior because upstream dams represent a premium for everyone. Egypt, however, has consistently rejected win-win approaches to integrated water management in the basin because it views itself as the owner of the Nile, a perspective rejected by nearly all other riparians, including Sudan. At present, the shifting of the balance of power in the Nile basin away from Egypt and towards Ethiopia has

led to a change in Sudanese policy out of sheer necessity. Professor Kalpakian concludes with a discussion and reflections about risks facing citizens in the region, particularly the religious minorities in Egypt and Ethiopia.

In “Feminism and the Politics of Empowerment in International Development,” professors Carole Biewener and Marie-Hélène Bacqué address the turn to empowerment within the international development arena. They do so by contrasting the left feminist approach to empowerment that developed out of community-based activism in South Asia in the mid-1970s with neoliberal and liberal discourses about empowerment that emerged within the World Bank in the mid-1990s. The authors discuss the alternative politics at play in these three approaches to empowerment by highlighting their different conceptualizations of agency, subjectivity, and power. They conclude by considering some of the key issues facing a left feminist empowerment project today, arguing that—given the current context in which powerful mainstream liberal conceptualizations of empowerment have taken center stage—it is especially important for feminists to pursue a “postcapitalist politics” that connects empowerment to alternative, noncapitalist visions of the economy.

Prof. Mikhail Troitskiy’s article “BRICS Approaches to Security Multilateralism” informs us that over the past two decades, China, Russia, and India have hammered out four types of reactions to problems posed by developed nations of the West in the fields of technology, international doctrine, and security strategy. Some of those reactions—such as undertaking asymmetrical measures, imposing international legal or ethical constraints on Western initiatives, and mirroring Western innovation—were confrontational. Yet, oftentimes a conciliatory or even cooperative approach prevailed so that conflict among the “aspiring powers” and the West was avoided. Beijing, Moscow, and New Delhi usually sought to strike a balance between confrontation and cooperation with the challengers. However, the Ukraine crisis of 2014 heralded Russia’s move towards a showdown with the United States and its allies. While Moscow has been trying to change the status quo forcefully by precipitating an anti-Western coalition, Beijing and New Delhi have refrained from endorsing a direct assault against the interests of the United States and its allies, deflecting Moscow’s demands for a collective counterbalancing strategy.

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